



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for April 26, 2020
“Overcomers: Faith over Fear”
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: Matthew 8:23-27

Overcomers

We have a lot to overcome these days. While every story is different, they are all too similar as well.

We have severe challenges before us, challenges unlike any we have encountered. We are making it through and Christ is helping us do that. With Christ’s help we are overcoming.

That brings us to the theme of our time together over the next six weeks. We will be talking about what it means to overcome. In the end, I hope we claim that in Christ we are *Overcomers*.

Let’s turn to scripture and read the great story of Christ calming the stormy waters of the Sea of Galilee. It is a story not only about Christ’s power, but the importance of having faith in the midst of the storm, whatever that storm may be.

Let’s read then that account as recorded in Matthew 8:23-27.

Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him, saying, “Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!”

He replied, “You of little faith, why are you so afraid?” Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.

The men were amazed and asked, “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!”

More than a Little Afraid

It certainly is the season for a lot of beautiful days and nights. Spring can certainly be that way.

Some of our days recently have been downright spectacular. And if you have gotten out at night you’ve found they have been just as grand.

We have though had our share of rough weather. It has certainly rained a lot. We have even had a storm or two.

A couple of weeks ago, just about the time most of us were getting to bed, a severe storm rolled through. I had just turned in, but quickly got up to see what was going on.

We live on a ridge just above the Ohio River. The winds can be really fierce and the night when the storm rolled through was no exception.

The winds started blowing from the west and then immediately shifted from the north and I thought, *“Okay, this could be a big one.”*

As I stood looking out on all the mayhem from my front door I’ll have to admit I was more than a little afraid.

It’s easy to get that way when circumstances seem overwhelming and out of our control.

Making It through the Storm

Turning to our scripture for today, we pick up with the same sort of circumstance, a storm that was more than a little overwhelming and certainly well beyond the control of the disciples.

Jesus and his disciples had spent a robust day ministering to the multitudes and, as was Christ’s practice he and his disciples pulled away to re-charge.

As night fell Jesus and his disciples got into a boat and sailed for the other side of the Sea of Galilee. The small fishing boat was filled to capacity. Jesus was in the back asleep, leaving the disciples to tend to the boat.

As the scripture records a storm *“immediately”* blew up. It was a big deal and the disciples figured all was lost. Such storms were common occurrences along the Sea of Galilee. Even still, the disciples seemed to be caught unaware. They were more than a little afraid.

They are no different than we are. We know that things can happen, but surely not to us and certainly not now.

Let’s at least agree that we find ourselves in the midst of a storm right now. It’s a storm of a different kind, but a storm all the more.

This storm has brought all sorts of uncertainty and challenge to our lives. We all have to admit to being more than a little bit afraid. We’re making it through as best we can.

At times our present circumstance has gotten the best of us. Over time things have gotten to us. Things have a way of doing that if we let them. For some, fear has **really** taken hold.

It’s interesting, I think, that if you and I lived in fear of all that the things that could happen to us, the Covid-19 Pandemic notwithstanding, *“we would never leave the house.”*

And yet we want to get out and do and get back to some kind of normal. Day by day, week by week, one way or the other, we are making it through the storm.

Peace Instead of Panic

There was interesting contrast on that boat that was being tossed about on the Sea of Galilee. While Jesus slept, the disciples panicked. In fact, they were absolutely beside themselves.

Instead of taking Jesus' lead and doing as he did, they let their situation overwhelm them. That happens for us all the time.

While you and I might not be able to change our circumstance, we can choose to faithfully trust God in the middle of it.

Giving the disciples the benefit of the doubt at least they turned to Jesus for help. We'd do well to do the same when panic and desperation befall us.

"Lord, save us!" they screamed. *"We're going to drown!"*

To which Jesus responded, *"Oh ye of little faith."*

Upon hearing that, I remember my one word resolution from earlier in the year was *"faith."* We even had a whole sermon series on faith. Little did any of us know that our faith would soon be so challenged!

"Peace be still," was also a part of Christ's response.

We have always read that as Christ's rebuke of the storm. Interestingly, it very well may have been a rebuke intended for his disciples.

"Ok guys let's simmer down, how about peace instead panic?"

As we know, the storm was calmed that night, much to the amazement of the disciples. Christ put his power over creation on full display and the disciples stood utterly amazed.

Why are we always so surprised when Christ acts in a powerful way? I think that says a lot about our faith or the lack thereof.

Just recently I received a card in the mail that has encouraged me to no end. It reads:

"Pray really big! Believe even bigger!"

Jesus delivered in a big way the night when the storm raged on the Sea of Galilee and he is delivering in a big way for you and me in the midst of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Let's remember that we are not the only ones in the boat when it comes to this uncertain and challenging time. Christ is right at our side.

Giving Up Control

Hopefully, we are not only learning about Christ's power and presence, but a little bit about ourselves as well.

It is so easy to let fear have its way when everything seems to be otherwise out of control. It is easy to be afraid when you can't control your future.

Let's face it, you and I spend so much time and energy trying to control things, even at the expense of our relationship with Christ.

And therein is the rub. In all this stuff associated with Covid-19, we are learning that some things, if not most things, are simply beyond our control.

We spend so much of our lives trying to build a degree of security around us when in reality that security is a fleeting thing.

I like what Bill Bouknight has to say about such things.

“Excessive fear is caused when our source of security is not strong enough to sustain us.” Bill Bouknight

For the disciples, the source of their security was the boat making its way across still waters. But when that was interrupted by the severity of the storm that blew through, fear and panic began to take over.

It was then that they turned to Jesus and found in him true security.

For most of us it is all about control and whether we are going to give it up.

For those of us who are planners, this season in which we find ourselves has been particularly tough. It's not easy to plan during such an uncertain time.

I've been going at things day by day, week by week. Every time I try and plan much beyond that I end up having to change my plans anyway.

All of us have had to give up a degree of control.

The Serenity Prayer by Richard Niebuhr hits it right well during times such as these.

“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.”

Serenity borne out of a deep faith in God's providence to see us through will sustain more than anything else.

That's all the more reason to put our trust in Christ first. Faith in Christ and his sovereignty will help us overcome fear every time.

And in putting our faith in Christ we will soon find that the storms we face are not nearly as powerful as the Savior who has command over them.

What Are You Afraid Of?

So then, what are you afraid of and why are you so afraid?

Jesus pretty much asked his disciples the very same questions. What are you afraid of? Why are you so afraid?

Go ahead and tell him. Name your fears and communicate the same with the Lord.

Some have even said that it is good to give those fears a name. It helps to objectify things, they say. Giving them a funny name can help them seem less serious.

Regardless, be honest with the Lord about the very things you're afraid of.

Christ will hear you every time and put you at a much better place to receive his power to overcome.

Seek the Lord Who Even the Wind and the Waves Obey

Some years ago, I took a group of kids to a weeklong youth event sponsored by Youth for Christ called DC/LA. The event was held every four years in both Washington, D.C. and Los Angeles.

The group I took attended the event in Washington, D.C. On Thursday night we were to gather on the Mall there in Washington, D.C. and share in an outdoor Christian concert. All the big names were there.

That afternoon we left the conference a little early to do some sightseeing. As night drew closer the skies looked more and more threatening. About an hour before the concert was to begin the skies opened up. There was a lot of wind and rain, not to mention quite a bit of lightning.

The wind was what kicked up first and it was pretty fierce. We sought shelter on the front porch of one of the museums which had just closed.

We were pretty exposed to the elements and as the storm ran through the kids became more and more afraid. There were even a few tears and even a little bit of panic.

We lived to tell about it though, but not before we had experienced an honest dose of fear.

The same sort of thing is going on today in the midst of the storm that is Covid-19. The times are not always so easy, are they?

It's not the storm that's so important, but having faith in the midst of it.

With faith then, let's seek the One who even *"the wind and the waves obey."*

Hear what the Prophet Isaiah writes about our Lord in Isaiah 41:10.

"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." Isaiah 41:10