**Text**: **Mark 4: 35-41**

**The Bethel Pulpit**

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June 24, 2018 – 5th Sunday of Pentecost On the web at [www.bethel-madison.org](http://www.bethel-madison.org/)  
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Once upon a time, there was a country, far away from my own country, that was in the midst of a horrendous war. With all the devastation and destruction, parents had no way to believe that their child would ever have a chance at surviving the horrors, much less finding a way to live well, even if they reached adulthood.

Faced with such impending potentials, many parents chose to send their eldest son out of the country, in search of better options. One mom and dad paid a third party in pure gold to walk with their son to the border of the neighboring country. The boy was eleven years old. When they reached the border, the adult guide said to the boy: “See that big white building down the road, the one with that huge red cross on it? Go into that building and someone will give you food and a bed.” So the child walked on, alone.

That building was run by the French Red Cross and provided food and shelter for hundreds of similar little boys. Lutheran Social Service (out of Minnesota) worked with the French to bring these children to the United States. Once in the U.S., LSS brought them to the Midwest, found homes homes for them and made sure of their health and well-being.

This is a true story. I know, because that eleven year-old boy came to live with our family in New Ulm, MN. We did not adopt him and we were not a foster home. We simply said he could live with us until his parents found a way to reunite with him, sometime in the future. Seng, as surely as each of my own biological babies, is my son, in every sense of the word and he, now with his own family, continues as an integral part of our family.

How could parents take such a risk and expose their child to the dangers out there, all alone in the world? How could they bear to live with that decision, especially as they knew they may never again see their child? I was asking those questions, day after day.

Slowly, I began to realize that I had no idea how desperately stormy life in that country must have been. Our family of 4 boys lived in a place where we had no clue about such desperation. And I realized, over and over, that the only reason I did not have to face such decisions as a parent was because, by sheer circumstance of where I had been born, through no good planning on my part, our boys were much, much safer.

A wise theologian once said that any preacher worthy of his or her salt will prepare and preach every sermon, holding the Bible in one hand and the daily newspaper in the other. And that is what I have been doing all week: wondering how to talk about the storms of our lives that threaten to swamp our boat of life.

I can’t believe how many sermons I wrote….and then tore up during the week. First, I thought we should focus on the storms each of us faces in our personal life: cancer, divorce, losing one’s job. Those are all stormy times and we, like the disciples in Mark’s text, wonder if Jesus really cares about how desperate we feel.

Then, our congregation’s uncertainty, here at Bethel, came to mind and I thought that would be a good and important focus. Jesus, are you still sleeping on that cushion and don’t you know how hard this is for our people, more than a year and a half into this transition time between lead pastors? Now that Paul and Martha have moved on to other calls, and Jacqui has retired, and Elisabeth is taking the next step in her seminary education? We hear many voices asking many questions about how we will weather this stormy and uncertain time while we wait for God to send us a new lead pastor.

But always, in between those concerns, I would be reading the papers and hearing of the tragedies at our southern border…and finally, I knew that my prayers to Jesus, this week, are primarily about the pain and anguish of thousands of people involved in the dilemma of how and when to allow people who live in desperate circumstances to find refuge and hope for life in our own country.

We, as citizens of the United States are all intricately woven into this tragic dilemma. The first thing you need to know is that I have no idea what actions should be taken to get through this storm. I’ve never been the president. How could I know what a president should do?

I’ve never been a member of congress. I can point fingers at what I think they might do to work toward a solution to this immigration nightmare, but I’ve never sat in their seats.

And I’ve never been a border agent, doing my duty to carry out the laws of our country. Nor have I been those at the border who are assigned to provide food and shelter for all those refugees. Nor have I been a parent, born in Honduras, or El Salvador or Mexico where gang rule makes a safe life quite impossible.

What I do know is that we, as God’s beloved children, have a responsibility to sit and talk together in very honest conversation about how we might be an agent for good in these desperate times. We cannot avoid the issue. We cannot pretend it’s not about us. The church should be (must be) the most honest place in town and God calls us to set aside the blame game and focus on our responsibilities as members of God’s global community.

**Jesus ! are you in this boat with us? Jesus ! are you still sleeping? Jesus ! don’t you care that we are perishing?**

We are sending 39 young people and chaperones to Houston this week. You can be certain that this question will have a high priority in the discussions and Bible studies that these young people will attend.

You and I know and believe with all our heart that Jesus IS in the boat with us…and with every other person in this storm: our president, parents and children trying to find safety, our congress, the border agents and those desperately trying to provide food and shelter and some hope for those in need.

What shall we hope for? Our bulletin cover depicts a stormy sea, surrounded by storm clouds. The quote from Walter Brueggemann is appropriate:

Hope does not need to silence the rumblings of crisis to be hope.

We are a people of hope, based on God’s promise never to leave us or forsake us, never to give up on the world that God created.

As we leave our worship today, let us take this prayer with us…the one we prayed together earlier in our worship: O God of all creation, you preside over land and sea, over sunshine and storm. By your strength, pilot us; by your power, preserve us; by your wisdom, instruct us, and by your hand continue to protect all your people. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.