

June 20, 2021 @ Trinity Bixby
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[Acts 16:16-34](#) (CEB) + [Mark 4:35-41](#) (NLT)

I love when cars talk to me on long trips. No, I don't mean actual conversation, but rather, the bumper stickers that show up along the way. Sometimes, they seem to be having conversations with each other: "Jesus is my co-pilot!" reads one enthusiastic Camry. "If Jesus is your co-pilot, switch seats!" rebukes a rather stern Lincoln. Anytime I see those particular messages, I start to chuckle, thinking specifically of our gospel lesson this morning. The disciples are in a boat with Jesus – and he's neither pilot, co-pilot, nor even the captain. Instead, he's sleeping so soundly in the hold that he doesn't wake up when a megastorm blows in over harp-shaped lake that we call the Sea of Galilee. We in Oklahoma are no strangers to megastorms – funnel clouds are an annual tradition, and I know I've heard people praising the weatherfolk as strongly as they praise their local sports teams. And, remember, many of Jesus' disciples grew up on the water, fishing the lake for most of their life. So, when these experienced disciples grow afraid of a megastorm, we know it's serious business.

The disciples are afraid – and so, they do what people do when they're afraid. They blame someone else. In this case, they wake up Jesus, dripping with both water and sarcasm: "Teacher – oh great instructor¹ – Don't you care that we're going to drown?" You see, Jesus was the one that asked them to get in the boat in the first place, even though it was night, the worst time for storms on the water. Obviously, it was his fault – and he should at least be awake to witness their final moments!

And Jesus wakes up. His first words, as far as Mark records them, are "Silence! Be still!" Now, Mark is careful to note that Jesus is rebuking the waves and the wind. But... is he? Might he be rebuking the disciples as well as the wind and waves?

¹ Mark has them speaking Greek, instead of using Rabbi, they say, didaskolos – "didactic one" or teacher

Or maybe he's not rebuking them – but telling them to find the quiet center the midst of the chaos around them. In an alternative translation, Jesus says, “Be as quiet as still water, and muzzle yourself.” Sometimes, the best thing to do in a chaotic situation is to stop shouting and find your quiet center.

In any case, the wind and waves stop – Mark tells us that the megastorm has become mega-calm. More than calm, it's the joy of being satisfied, that warm purr of a kitten by the fireplace after downing a delicious meal. As frightened as the disciples were in the midst – and mist – of the storm, they have now moved into a yet deeper fear. A fear of the calm, of the joy of satisfaction – how could Jesus have caused this to happen? Who is this Jesus guy, that even the wind and waves obey him?

We often find ourselves moving from one fear to another in this life. Our actions that are based in the fear of strangers, or our own safety, lead us to make choices that lead to fear of ourselves, or of where God may actually be calling us. Like a metronome with a faulty weight, we swing wildly back and forth between fears, and rarely find the quiet center, where we hear the soft voice of God, “tocking” to us. But Jesus reminds us, just as he did the disciples, that there are times we must be still, even in the midst of surrounding chaos. After all, in the beginning, God hovered above the chaos of the watery void, and only then brought forth order by separating the waters. Stillness in the face of chaos is a Godly, divine gift, and we ought to emulate it more often.

One person who really figured out how to emulate stillness in the midst of chaos, maintaining a quiet center no matter the circumstance, was the apostle Paul. He and Silas were walking through town, being pestered by a woman who, it turned out, was possessed by an evil spirit. Paul finally rebuked the spirit, and healed the woman – but it turned out that she was a slave, owned by men who took advantage of her illness to make money. Like many a greedy man, the people who believed themselves to have been “robbed” by the woman's healing turned to personal connections with the legal system, to get Paul and Silas arrested.

Now, Paul is a Roman citizen – something he tells us often – which, in this

day, gives him the right to be heard before a magistrate directly. Only non-citizens could be arrested without cause. Yet, his call of being a citizen is ignored, and both he and Silas are beaten and handed over to a jailer, who throws them into the deepest, most escape-proof cell in the local prison.

This is a chaotic situation for certain – a sequence of events that unfolded in what appears to be exactly the wrong way. Yet, Paul keeps his quiet center. He and Silas sing hymns and preach about Jesus to the other inmates, even as late as midnight. And then – an earthquake strikes. Another moment of chaos. But this earthquake shakes so hard that all the jail doors open up and the chains holding the prisoners break open – and yet, the prisoners are unharmed.

The jailer – the one charged with keeping the prisoners chained and behind locked doors – runs to the prison, fearing for his life. If the prisoners get out, they might kill him for locking them up – and even if they are captured again, the town council might kill the jailer for not keeping them secure. When the jailer makes it to the prison, sees the open doors, and realizes his worst nightmare may come true, he falls to the ground and pulls out a sword, preferring to take his own life rather than wait for someone else to kill him. But Paul cries out from the quiet center of the destroyed prison that all are still there. Paul has convinced everyone to stay put, so that the one charged with keeping them there will not be punished.

Now, completely overcome with gratitude and awe, the jailer escorts Paul and Silas out of the building, and asks them what HE can do to “be saved.” They preach to him and his family, and the Jailer and his whole family, from the eldest to the youngest, are baptized. Remember, this is at night – and baptism then meant full immersion in a river or spring. But, this is the power of the quiet center – when you feel the Spirit immersing you in God’s grace, you don’t hesitate to do what needs doing.

In our celebration of baptism today, we find ourselves with new family, immersed in the same Spirit that we are. Like Jesus, we find a quiet center in the midst of the chaos of life, under the waters of baptism that seal us in God’s love and grace. That grace is a promise to us, to which we can react with free will – but it is

not something we earn through action or belief. And so, I hope that in the weeks to come, you find yourself not with Jesus as your pilot or co-pilot – but that Jesus is at your quiet center, so comfortable as to sleep, filling you not with fear, but with the joy of satisfaction, the megacalm in the midst of the megastorm of life. Amen.