

**Mark 4:35-41**  
March 7, 2021

Hope Mennonite Church  
Lent 3, Year B

### The Questioning and Questioned Community

Our Scripture text today poses **three questions**. And these **three questions** invite us to explore the **beauty** and the **challenge** of following Jesus.

**Question #One** occurs in **verse 38**. The disciples ask Jesus, “Teacher, don’t you care?” One year for Pastor Appreciation, I got this pillow with fish on it. The gift card said, “Jesus took naps. You can too!” Our passage confirms that: Jesus is napping ... ***in a boat*** ... ***during a storm!*** That shows a **lot** of **trust** in God. But the disciples draw another conclusion: Jesus is being recklessly and **uncaringly indifferent** to their crisis! That’s why they ask their ***pointed*** question.

For the disciples, Jesus’ apparent **indifference** might have called to mind the story of **Jonah**. **Jonah** had a legendary **nap** ... ***in a boat*** ... ***during a storm***. The captain woke him up and said, “What are you doing? Get up! Call on your god! Perhaps the god will spare us.” Just like that captain of old, the disciples wake up Jesus and ask him, “Teacher, don’t you care?”

And at some point in life, disciples like you and me will probably ask the same question: “Lord, don’t you care?” Have you ever thought that or said that? It tends to happen when the Lord doesn’t respond to our need ***in the way*** or ***in the timing*** we expect. We feel disappointment ... frustration ... that something’s wrong: “Lord, don’t you care that if I lose my job, I can’t support my family. Lord, don’t you care that this false rumor is turning my friends against me? Lord, don’t you care that ... How would you fill in the rest?”

“Lord, don’t you care?” is a question we might **self-suppress**. Inside, we might ***shush ourselves*** for asking it: “Don’t say that! Where’s your faith?” ... which is another question in our passage, isn’t it? We’re quite a piece of work, aren’t we? In our hearts we have **questions** and sometimes **rebuttals** to our own questions! We might be playing two roles at the same time: Crying out in need and chiding ourselves for crying out in need! In the end, “Lord, don’t you care?” is a question that is thoroughly **honest** ... like ... “Lord, why does life have to have **storms?**” ... or ...

“Lord, why don’t things in my world or in **THE WORLD** get better more quickly?” ... or ... “Lord, I love you, but today can I just not be brave?” What about you? In your life right now, where are the waves? What size are they? Where do you need to know that the Lord truly cares? “Teacher, don’t you care?” That’s **question number one** in our text.

**Question #Two** occurs in **verse 40**. It’s really a double question. Jesus asks his disciples: “Why are you afraid? Do you not yet have faith?” For people in the ancient world, the sea was a fearful place ... a place of the unknown, disaster, monsters, and demonic powers. Not only that: The Sea of Galilee, in particular, was notorious for storms arising quickly and unpredictably. The sea was a fearful place. That’s why in **Revelation 21**, the vision of the new heavens and new earth, there is no more sea!

Jesus asks, “Why are you afraid?” and it’s not just rhetorical. What fears are you managing? Fear of change, fear of stagnation, fear of closure ... or lack of closure ... fear of speaking up ... or not speaking up ... of not being included ... or of being included ... fear of illness or disability ... fear of work stress, family stress, peer stress, digital stress from devices that always demand attention ... fear of terrorism ... nuclear war ... asteroids ... solar flares ... mass shootings ... earthquakes ... the next pandemic? Or ... are you managing a kind of general unease, with no clearly identifiable cause?

How about Hope Mennonite Church? Are there fears right now that are **holding us back**? Are there ways Jesus is calling us to transcend our fears for greater faithfulness?

Jesus asks, “Why are you afraid?” and it’s not just rhetorical ... because ... Jesus knows that no matter the source, our fears control us ... big time! Fear can shackle our trust in God, our ability to think clearly, our ability to take positive action, and especially, fear robs us ... of joy. Too much fear is simply disempowering.

Jesus’ question, “Why are you afraid?” may feel **uncomfortable** ... or even **critical**. Yet, it’s important to notice something, namely, when Jesus asks this question. Jesus only asks about fear

and the deficiency in his disciples' faith **after** he calms the storm. Did you notice that? Jesus challenges them ... **once they're safe**. **Crisis** is **not** a teachable moment. People having a major coronary episode are remarkably uninterested in heart-healthy recipes. **But** ... if people get some **relief** from the **crisis**, **then** they can reflect and learn and make helpful changes. Jesus knows.

Jesus shows similar **timing** in **Mark 10**. There he challenges a man regarding his attachment to material possessions. Jesus says, "Go, sell what you have, give to the poor, and follow me." That's quite a challenge! **But** ... **before** the challenge, Mark says, "Jesus looked at him and **loved** him." Jesus' **love** comes **first** ... **then** ... the **challenge**.

There's one final thing to note in the second part of Jesus' double question: *Do you **not yet** have faith?* Jesus **names** the disciples' deficiency. **But** ... with "**not yet**," he acknowledges that they are **a work in progress**. Jesus has **hope** for them. *Do you **not yet** have faith?* means Jesus believes his disciples **can grow**. And Jesus has that same **hope** for **us** too.

"Why are you afraid? Do you **not yet** have faith?" That's ***question number two*** in our text.

**Question #Three** occurs in **verse 41**. This time the question comes from the **disciples**. In fact, it's a question they are asking ***each other*** ... and it's a question **about Jesus**: *Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?*

The disciples have just seen Jesus not only **address** nature ... but ... **command** nature: *Silence! Be still!* Mark says Jesus **rebukes** the storm. That's a striking choice of word. In the Gospels, **rebuke** usually describes Jesus confronting evil powers or illness. To **rebuke** is an assertion of **authority**. In the Old Testament, **only God** has this kind of **authority** over nature. So, Jesus' **rebuking** the storm and bringing calm **already** implies the answer to the disciples' question, **Who then is this?** That's the ***third and final question*** in our Scripture.

Mark wants us to know this account of Jesus calming the storm **because** it teaches us about **faith**. Faith involves questioning God ... **and being questioned by God**. The text is clear that the **questioning** goes **both** ways.

As **we** follow Jesus, **we** will have questions for God. Some of them may be big ones, like, “Can anyone in a science-oriented world like ours believe in **miracles?**” ... **or** ... “If we live in the breadbasket of America, why do we have hungry people?” ... **or** ... just plain, “Lord, don’t you care?” And **all of us** will have to deal with the question, “Who, then, is this?”

Jesus accepts that we have questions, even big ones. That is a **legitimate** part of following him.

The Scripture also reminds us that, as we follow, **Jesus** will have some big questions **for us**, like, “Why are you afraid? Do you **not yet** have faith?”

We are the questioning and questioned community. And Jesus knows **we** are a work **in progress**. He knows **we** can grow. And **faith** is **not** the achievement of absolute certainty. **Faith** is about **entrusting** ourselves to God, both in what we know **and** in what we don’t. And in that **trust**, **we** will find **our great calm** ... even **in** the boat ... which remains **on the sea**.

### ***Elements of Worship***

\*\*\*2/7/18 Tale of two boats: 1) Monika \_\_\_\_\_ Japanese artist from 1950; 2) *Martyrs Mirror*, 739, Pieter Beckjen Teaching in the Ferry Boat. He was executed February 26, 1569 in Amsterdam.

Song: STS #45 “Calm me, Lord.” This could be done on solo violin while people come to several “circle stations” at various points in the sanctuary. There would be circles on the floor with ribbon or fabric. Individuals or families could take turns stepping into the middle to receive “Caim (encircling) prayers” (see *Celtic Daily Prayer*, 297). These could be spoken or unspoken.

See e.g. the Scriptures **Deuteronomy 32:9-12, Psalm 125:2, Psalm 139:5, Luke 13:34.**

As the pivot encircles the field...

As the swaddling blanket enfolds the baby...

### ***Scripture Reading Mark 4:35-41***

<sup>35</sup>On that day, when evening had come, Jesus said to his disciples, “Let us go across to the other side of the sea.” <sup>36</sup> So, after they had dismissed the crowd, they took him along, as he was already in the boat. Other boats were also with him.

<sup>37</sup>Then there came a great and gusty windstorm. The waves were pounding into the boat such that the boat was already being swamped.

<sup>38</sup>Meanwhile, Jesus was in the stern sleeping on the cushion. So, they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care that we are perishing?" <sup>39</sup>When he had woken up, he rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Silence! Be still!" Then the wind abated and there was a great calm.

<sup>40</sup>Jesus said to his disciples, "Why are you afraid? Do you not yet have faith?" <sup>41</sup>A deep sense of awe came over them and they began saying to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"