

Jesus Has This!

Contributed by Denn Guptill on Mar 21, 2020

Scripture: Luke 8:22-25

Denomination: Wesleyan

Summary: This is my first response message to COVID-19. Jesus calming the storm
Everything was fine, and then it wasn't.

That is the reality in our world today. Everything was fine, and then it wasn't.

Do you remember when you heard about the Coronavirus? Maybe it was the result of a funny meme on Facebook, or an obscure news story about a city in china that you had never heard about. But the thought of it affecting your everyday life never crossed your mind.

If someone had told you what March break 2020 would look like, you'd wonder what would possess them to even speak those words.

All the major sports leagues shut down, schools cancelled from anywhere from three weeks to five months, being unable to sit in a restaurant or a coffee shop with friends. Airplanes grounded and the entire cruise industry shut down.

I enjoy a good post-apocalyptic thriller as much as anyone, but I never really expected to be living it.

As I was writing this message I looked out my window, the sun was shining, the day looked normal, until you noticed the lack of traffic on the Hammonds Plains Road and the empty parking lot at the Tim Hortons across the street.

Our District Superintendent summed it up the other day when he said it was like living in a Science fiction movie. But it's no movie.

I am not a scientist, I am not an expert on what's happening.

I love the meme on Facebook that said "That's odd, All my Facebook friends who were constitutional scholars just a month ago are now infectious disease experts."

I'm not that guy, and so when people ask me: Are we overreacting? My response is: I have no idea. I do know this, when this is all over, if we feel that we overreacted, that means that it worked.

I don't think that anyone would have suspected that after fewer than a 1000 confirmed cases of a disease, across our country, and fewer than 10 confirmed deaths related to that disease, that Canada would be put into a state of emergency?

That isn't how it works in the books and movies. They wait until half that country has been infected and half of those have died. It's here we cue the Mad Max music, from the original of course

But what do we do when everything goes to pieces?

Let's take a look at an incident in the Jesus story that might give us some ideas. Our scripture reading this morning comes from the gospel of Luke although the same story is found in Matthew and Mark's accounts.

It was a dark and stormy night. I've always like starting a story like that.

The wind howled blowing the top off the breakers before they crashed back into the troughs below. The darkness was broken by momentary streaks of light as the clouds raced across the face of the full moon. Could it be?

Yes, it was hard to believe but there was a boat there. In the middle of this tremendous storm was a little open boat, barely afloat. Hard to believe but there it was. And if we were able to zoom in on that hardy little fishing boat we would discover that it was occupied by thirteen men.

Twelve fighting for their lives and one sound asleep. And you'd have to ask yourself, how in the world did experienced fishermen who had fished this area all their lives get themselves into this mess?

Well the story is found in Luke 8:22-25 One day Jesus said to his disciples, "Let's cross to the other side of the lake." So they got into a boat and started out. As they sailed across, Jesus settled down for a nap. But soon a fierce storm came down on the lake. The boat was filling with water, and they were in real danger.

The disciples went and woke him up, shouting, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!"

When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and the raging waves. Suddenly the storm stopped and all was calm. Then he asked them, "Where is your faith?"

The disciples were terrified and amazed. "Who is this man?" they asked each other. "When he gives a command, even the wind and waves obey him!"

Everything was fine, and then it wasn't.

By this point in the story, Christ had already preached the Sermon on the Mount, had cleansed a leper, and healed the centurion's servant.

Peter's mother in law had been healed and Jesus had touched and healed many others. The multitudes had gathered around and evening was coming so he decided it was time to have a break and so the thirteen of them got into a boat which was probably either Peter's or James' and headed across the sea of Galilee.

Sometimes I find myself identifying more and more with the apostles. I spent three years at sea and saw some dozy storms during that time. The smallest vessel I served on was a hundred- and twenty-foot tug and the largest was a six-hundred-and-thirty-foot oil tanker.

While I was at sea, there were two or three times that although I wouldn't say I was afraid I was a mite concerned.

Let's pick up the story in Luke 8:22-23 One day Jesus said to his disciples, "Let's cross to the other side of the lake." So they got into a boat and started out. As they sailed across, Jesus settled down for a nap. But soon a fierce storm came down on the lake. The boat was filling with water, and they were in real danger.

So, there they were, thirteen men in an open boat, twelve terrified and one is asleep. Now he's not just resting, not just dozing, not just taking a nap, this dude is sound asleep. Now if you've never tried to sleep on a boat in a storm you don't know what you're missing.

You can pick one of two positions to sleep in, either your bunk will be, fore and aft, that is your head will point toward the bow, that's the pointy end.

And if your bunk is like that your entire night is spent with your head pushed up against the wall and then your feet, you wake up six inches shorter than when you went to bed.

The other way you can sleep is thwart ships that is sideways and if that is the way your bunk is situated then you spend the entire night trying not to roll out on the deck.

Whichever way you sleep you are like a coiled spring and you wake up in the morning, exhausted with sore elbows and knees from bracing yourself. And so that is the situation that Christ was sleeping in compounded by the fact that it was an open boat and so he must have been wet as well as uncomfortable.

So, what do we learn from this story?

In Luke's account we read that they were in real danger, Mark describes the danger they were in when he wrote this, Mark 4:37 But soon a fierce storm came up. High waves were breaking into the boat, and it began to fill with water.

Let's Not Minimize the Danger

I said earlier that I'm not an infectious disease specialist, but I know people who are. And they have some real concerns about COVID-19.

If you are on social media then you know that not everybody is convinced that this is a crisis. Their views range from it has been blown out of proportion, that there are more people who die of the flue than of COVID, to the more conspiracy-minded among us who see this as a test of how to control the population.

But you only have to look at countries like Italy which took precautions very late and have seen over 4000 thousand deaths. On Friday in Italy someone died every three minutes as a result of COVID-19. Then compare that to South Korea, which was very quick in their response to the virus, where they've seen just over 100 deaths.

And there would be those who have said that we have underestimated the danger, not from the virus but from how quickly everyone has been willing to surrender their civil liberties.

When we are confronted with life's difficulties it is very seldom helpful to minimize the danger.

When we say: "It's not that bad". Let's make sure it's not that bad. Regardless of whether we are talking viruses, personal health issues or relationships.

I've talked to people who were exhibiting dangerous symptoms and put off going to see a Doctor because they didn't think it was that serious or they were afraid to admit how serious it might be, only to pay the price later. Yeah, guys, I'm talking to you.

I've talked to couples who saw danger signs in their marriage. Things that should have been a warning, reduced intimacy, increased conflict, slowly drifting apart. And they ignored the signs or thought, it's not that bad and then it was.

People don't just stray from their marriage vows because of sexual temptation, although that is a biggy, but they also wander looking for affirmation and the connection that seems to be gone missing in their marriage. Pay attention to the warning signs.

So yes, there are dangers involved in the spread of COVID-19, don't minimize it. If you don't think it's dangerous for you at least acknowledge that it is dangerous for others and take the steps necessary to minimize that danger and to protect those who are most vulnerable.

And there are things we can do as individuals whether it's practising social distancing or just washing your hands more, take the time to minimize the danger.

Let's go back to the story: Luke 8:24 The disciples went and woke him up, shouting, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!"

Let's Not Overstate the Danger Through January and February our theme was Worst-Case Scenarios, and how often do we default to the very worst situation?

You get a cough and you immediately suspect COVID-19. You are diagnosed with the Coronavirus and you start picking out hymns for your funeral.

Were the apostles going to drown? Possibly, but it wasn't a given.

They had probably been in similar situations before and they had survived.

COVID-19 is nasty, and people will die, but this is not the disease that will end the world.

Because of my teaching in West Africa, I'm a little sensitive over what happens in there and the response, or lack of response from the rest of the world to what happens there.

In 2015 the Ebola outbreak in West Africa killed over 11,000 people, the majority of them in Sierra Leone. 11,000 and the World-wide response was minimal.

I may be a little cynical, but I would suspect if one person had of died in Canada from Ebola that our response would have changed very quickly

I would like to take the time to state that World Hope International is widely considered to being one of the primary reasons that the outbreak was stopped in Sierra Leone before killing even more people and spreading around the world.

If you contracted Ebola your chance of surviving was about 50 %. If you contract COVID-19 your chance of surviving is more than 98%. Just saying.

I wonder how our children are perceiving the danger of COVID-19? How much stress they've picked up from their parents? If you are wondering how to talk to your kids about what's happening in the world right now, Laura Connors from Cornerstone is a clinical psychologist at the IWK and she was on CTV on Thursday talking about that very issue and you can find that interview on our Facebook page.

This may feel like the end of the world, but it's not, any more than the Spanish Flu of 1918 was the end of the world, or the threat of nuclear war was the end of the world, although for many of those who lived through those events, it probably felt like the end of the world.

If you are my age or a little older you grew up with the spectre of the cold war looming over you.

Christian philosopher and author C.S. Lewis wrote these words in relation to the threat of nuclear annihilation: "It is perfectly ridiculous to go about whimpering and drawing long faces because the scientists have added one more chance of painful and premature death to a world which already bristled with such chances and in which death itself was not a chance at all, but a certainty."

A little negative, perhaps, but realistic.

Let's keep reading, Luke 8:24 The disciples went and woke him up, shouting, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!"

Let's Not Make Jesus our Last Option

Sometimes we treat Jesus like a Hail Mary. When all else fails, pray. But what if the guys had of given Jesus a nudge when things were just starting to get scary, instead of waiting until it looked like they were going to drown?

It was like, well, we've tried everything else, let's wake up Jesus. They weren't even asking for help, they were just whining.

And bizarrely in Mark's account, we read Mark 4:38 Jesus was sleeping at the back of the boat with his head on a cushion. The disciples woke him up, shouting, "Teacher, don't you care that we're going to drown?"

Don't you care? How often had Jesus showed them that he cared?

All the people he had healed, the thousands he had fed, the water he turned into wine so a wedding wasn't ruined, those things were all done because Jesus cared.

I would suspect there are all kinds of unfamiliar voices calling out to God right now, and many people who have never had time for God in the good times are now demanding of him, don't you care?

The word of God tells us in Philippians 4:6-7 Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

Our District Superintendent is asking people all over the Atlantic District to make tomorrow a day of fasting and prayer. And if you are wondering what to pray about in concerns to the COVID-19 crisis, we posted an article from Christianity Today on our Facebook page with suggestions.

Let's keep going with the story,

Luke 8:24 The disciples went and woke him up, shouting, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!"

When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and the raging waves. Suddenly the storm stopped and all was calm.

Jesus Has Got This

We are told that When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and the raging waves. Suddenly the storm stopped and all was calm.

Now some people would have adopted a prayer voice, that's an octave lower than a regular voice, and used all kinds of fancy and pious words, kind of sounding like "In the name and power of God the everlasting father, eternal creator, master of the universe I rebuke thee and charge thee to cease and detest your loud and boisterous blowing."

But the Bible tells us that Jesus just rebuked the winds and the waves. Mark record Jesus' words, he said "Silence, be still".

And it worked we are told that the storm stopped and all was calm.

The bible doesn't say that the wind died down gradually, or the storm slowly went away it says that the sea was completely calm. But under natural laws it doesn't work that way, because even if the wind stopped blowing it would take a while for the sea to calm down. Unless of course you are able to step outside of natural laws.

At this point the apostles obviously didn't have a complete grasp on who Jesus was. I mean healing the sick is one thing but this is a horse of a completely different colour, this is a whole new ball game. This guy can control nature, wow.

Now the story ends here but I think I know what happened, I think Jesus went back to bed and the fellas stayed up for the rest of the trip and talked about what they had seen happen. But listen up, Jesus is more than simply master of the wind, he isn't just master of the universe he can be master of your soul.

The disciples must have forgotten about Jesus, and when they remembered that he was there, they were afraid that he had forgotten about them.

I've heard people say, things will never be the same again. That's the reality of life, today is different than yesterday, tomorrow will be different than today.

There will be fall out that is to be expected.

There will be consequences. Economic consequences, health consequences, even consequences in the church.

Before this became a part of our reality we were already planning our next Sermon series which is entitled The Day that Changed Everything. Now it seems a little apropos with all that's going on in the world.

But there isn't the first time that humanity has faced such a crisis, the writer of Ecclesiastes reminds us in Ecclesiastes 1:9-11 History merely repeats itself. It has all been done before. Nothing under the sun is truly new. Sometimes people say, "Here is something new!" But actually it is old; nothing is ever truly new. We don't remember what happened in the past, and in future generations, no one will remember what we are doing now.

The thought that went through my mind as I was writing this message, were the words penned by songwriter Ira Stanphill when the cold war was just beginning, and they are

"Many things about tomorrow

I don't seem to understand

But I know who holds tomorrow

And I know who holds my hand”

This fits nicely with the promise in Romans 8:38–39 And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

If you are a Christ-follower his promise is not that hard times won’t come, but that he will always be with you. The promise was made to the people of Israel in Deuteronomy 31:6 So be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid and do not panic before them. For the LORD your God will personally go ahead of you. He will neither fail you nor abandon you.”

And reiterated for those who follow Christ in Hebrews 13:5 . . . For God has said, “I will never fail you. I will never abandon you.”

And after Jesus had been crucified, died and rose from the dead he made this promise to his followers. Matthew 28:20 Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

It seemed in the midst of the storm that the disciples were all alone, but they weren’t.

It was Franklin Graham who wrote: “No matter what storm you face, you need to know God loves you. He has not abandoned you.”

You may not “feel” his presence, but that doesn’t negate his promise that he will never leave you nor forsake you and he will be with you always even to the end of the age. In the sunny weather and in the storms.

Let’s close with this advice from Jesus’ brother James, when he wrote to the early church, James 4:8 Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands . . .

Let me pray for you and your families.