

“Living the Life: Grounded”
Mark 4:35-41

Today we focus on being grounded as part of our journey to explore what living the life God calls us to live means for each of us. Being firmly grounded in God’s love and presence is not always easy because there are many illusions that mislead us to ground ourselves in the securities of the world or of not doing anything risky so that we can stay safe. Today’s Bible story is about risk, pushing boundaries, and at the same time being grounded in God’s love. (Read Mark 4:35-41) It is important to understand the great symbolism of this story to fully appreciate its message. The sea in the old Jewish tradition was a place of danger. In Genesis and other near Eastern creation stories, the sea represented chaos. In Roman times the sea came to be viewed as the domain of Rome’s power. Rome’s ships ensured domination. The one who held power over the sea ruled the world. For the Galilean fishers who followed Jesus, the boat was their home and place of work. The boat in time came to be a symbol for Christian community. So with this story we see the early disciples’ struggle with the imperial power of Rome and their lives being dominated by that rule.

When thinking of Jesus and the disciples in the boat, what came to my mind was the story of Moana and the fear of the sea by her people. In this family-friendly animated adventure, Moana is the daughter of the chief of a beautiful Pacific island; she is being prepared to be his successor. But she feels called to a mission which he opposes — to lead her people into a seafaring life of moving from island to island. Moana’s free-spirited grandmother encourages her to listen to the voice inside her and to venture out into the mysterious waters beyond the shallow reef to find her destiny. Moana knew that she needed to help her people by going out to sea, but there was great resistance from her father and others because of their fear of the dangers of the sea. Her father wanted to make sure that his daughter is safe, and the sea represented danger. Let’s watch a clip about that:

<https://youtu.be/n6qCPu1qn98>

Her mother explained to her how her father lost one of his friends at sea. So safety meant limiting their experience to being on the island and not venturing out. Here is another clip.

<https://youtu.be/5GjUHryxHPY>

Of course, the irony of this kind of false safety is that these were island people and what defines island people is proximity to the waters and being able to venture out to explore the ocean and other islands. Fear can be a paralyzing factor in life. It could hinder us from living the life God calls us to live.

This was the challenge for the disciples. They were supposed to cross over the lake into Gentile territory. Just like Moana, this was not supposed to be something they did as good Jews. The term “Gentiles” is used in the Bible to describe those who were outside of the Jewish faith. Jews and Gentiles were separate from each other and that kept things safe and predictable. But Jesus had other plans. So the disciples take sail from their Israelite

territory, crossing the Sea of Galilee to a destination on the Gentile side of that lake. Jesus was headed there to help the Gentiles and launch his ministry of transformation. This was ground breaking and scary for the disciples. And then another scary thing happened. They faced a big storm and Jesus is asleep. They felt that they were going to perish. They stepped out of their comfort zone and their fears came crashing down on them. They woke Jesus up and wondered how he could be sleeping through such a scary storm. Then he orders the storm to be muzzled. The response of the disciples was greater fear. The phrase in verse 41 that is often translated from the original Greek as “they were filled great awe” is better translated as “they feared a great fear.” So the miracle of Jesus filled them even with greater fear than the storm. It is a curious response, don't you think?

In his commentary on this passage, David Lose writes, “Last week I shared a quotation from one of my all-time favorite books, Leif Enger’s *Peace Like a River*. In the opening pages of that story, Reuben Land, the narrator of the story, tells of the apparent miracle by which his father saved his life when he had just been born. He then reflects on how often we tend to domesticate miracles, using the word to describe all manner of things that merit our attention and appreciation but that are not, finally, truly miraculous. He then goes on to press that distinction: ‘Real miracles bother people, like strange sudden pains unknown in medical literature. It’s true: They rebut every rule all we good citizens take comfort in. Lazarus obeying orders and climbing up out of the grave — now there’s a miracle, and you can bet it upset a lot of folks who were standing around at the time (*Peace Like a River*, 3).’ Then comes the quotation I shared last week as, quoting his sister, Reuben says, ‘People fear miracles because they fear being changed.’ Which is the source, I think, of this other kind of fear that stands somewhere between a holy awe and mighty terror: the fear of being changed. And make no mistake, Jesus is asking the disciples to change. In this very moment he is drawing them from the familiar territory of Capernaum to the strange and foreign land of the Garasenes. And he is moving them from being fishermen to disciples. And he is preparing them to welcome a kingdom so very different from the one they’d either expected or wanted.”

I love this reflection because it rings so true to our human experience. We would rather stay where we are comfortable and safe than to go out on the dangerous seas of life, discipleship, and transformation. We call that kind of safety being prudent, wise, and practical, while in fact, it is often limiting us and stifling our potential and the potential of the world around us for healing and transformation. Think back to Moana and how she followed her heart and ended up saving her people. Yes, she faced danger and the journey was very difficult, but she was grounded in who she was and who she belonged to as she set off on the journey. She also knew that the monster she faced was someone who forgot who they were. And so she restores her heart to her and reminds her of who she is:

https://youtu.be/f81_F16rDII

How does that relate to our experience of being grounded in who we are as children of God and not in the false securities of the world? How do we go about life without trusted maps or GPS step by step instructions to show us the way? Think of how difficult this is

for us in the church and in the world. In the church we struggle sometimes because the results are not always guaranteed. We are in the boat fighting the waters that are overwhelming our boat. We would rather stay in the safe territories of what we have known. In our personal lives, it is easier to play it safe and to focus on what the world tells us about success and personal fulfillment. But Jesus is leading us to abundant life and that means that we have to trust him and to accept that miracles of transformation do happen beyond the safety of what we know. We can be grounded not in the illusions of safety but in the power of God's love that is within our hearts. This is especially important in moments of panic and deep fear. The temptation is to just go back to safety, but in faith we know that all things are possible. The British Navy has a strange custom. If there is a sudden disaster aboard ship, the "still" is blown. Now this particular still is not a place where whiskey is made, but it's a whistle that calls the crew to a moment of silence in a time of crisis. When the still is blown, people aboard know that it means, "Prepare to do the wise thing." Observers of this system note that the moment of calm has helped avert many a catastrophe. It has prevented many scatterbrained actions.

What is your still? What helps you to ground yourself in God's love? Life offers us many opportunities for great fear! We have no choice about being changed. Our choice is whether we let change be transformative or not. Whether it is in our personal lives, or in the conditions of our world, we are often faced with a storm. We can choose to play it safe and never cross to the other side to join the mission of Christ. We can choose to dwell in our hurt feelings and never find healing in our relationships. We can give up on peacemaking and justice ministries because the world seems so corrupt and hopeless. We can give up or resist the transformation of our church because we are scared about the future. But in faith, we can also find the courage to claim our center. We can practice every day the kind of faith that helps anchor our lives in the love of God that even in the midst of the worst storm, we are never off balance or feel alone. This week's Lenten challenge is to take one day to skip lunch and use the time to read and pray about global hunger issues. Through your experience of hunger, open yourself to compassion and prayer for people who are hungry every day. It is a grounding kind of practice.

We are going to take a few moments to just ground ourselves in God's love. I invite you to sit and feel the earth beneath your feet, center your heart in love, and open your whole being to the light of God. Remember for a few moments, that no storm and no fear can take this deep peace out of your heart. (first service) I would like to end with a song scene from the movie Coco. It is the song which the father of Coco sang to her as he was leaving on his work travels. It was supposed to be a reminder of the love that connects them beyond the distance and even beyond the limits of life and death. I find that this song could apply to our connection to Christ and this love is always with us in all the ups and downs of life. We will use this song as our call to table of Christ:

<https://youtu.be/BsAyDcPhpYE>

Amen.