

**Peace, Be Still: A Sermon for Confirmation Sunday**  
**The Monroe Congregational Church, UCC**  
**Rev. Jennifer Gingras**  
**May 31, 2015**

*Mark 4:35-41*

Fifteen years ago, I worked for a marketing start-up along with a dozen other folks. The owners of the company were really fun to work with. They pushed us hard, but also provided ways for us to unwind. Our Westport office was a converted boathouse right on the river, near the Black Duck, if you are familiar with that area.

It wasn't long after we moved in that the owners bought a sleek, new powerboat. It was state of the art, with a GPS system and all the bells and whistles. They arranged for the entire staff to undergo Light Watercraft training so that we could borrow the boat any time we wanted.

This was a great idea in theory, but the reality was that we all spent a lot of time working really hard and staring out the back window at the dock, wishing we were out on the open seas.

One lazy, late August afternoon we finally had our chance. The client was satisfied with our most recent numbers and cancelled a planning meeting. It had been such a hot and humid day, and my team decided we'd spend our found time celebrating out on the water.

So I grabbed the keys, told the receptionist where we were headed, and the five of us went out to the dock.

We decided that we would take turns as captain, since we all had been licensed to do so. Looking back, I'm not sure that was the best decision. None of us had a lot of experience piloting a boat. It might have been a better idea to get someone who really knew what they were doing to go with us. But we were young, and smart, and oh, so sure of ourselves. What could go wrong?

Those of you who are boaters know that quite a lot of things can go wrong.

Taking turns piloting the craft meant that we were all paying attention to the current driver of the boat, and not necessarily looking at the sky above us.

And as it turns out, none of us checked the weather before we left, either! So we were a little surprised to find an hour from the office in more or less open seas that the sky had turned dark grey and the waves had become choppy. Suddenly, we were in the thick of a summer thunderstorm.

Maybe a storm at sea is the most chaotic moment some of us will know. There is nothing steady to grasp onto when a boat is engulfed in wind and waves. That which might offer stability, like a large stone poking out of the water, becomes a threat more than a help. Everything is out of control. All of our possible moorings are far away and we feel helpless against the elements.

In Jesus' time, perhaps the storm was more a symbol of the unavoidable reach of the Roman Empire, which had upended every known support the people had known. Surely there were moments when they felt lost at sea. Everything had been stolen from them for Rome's use.

Remember that it is by the sea that Jesus taught them about the mustard seed, inviting them to trust in God and what can be possible with a teeny-tiny bit of faith. Seeds are a perfect metaphor for a persecuted, vulnerable community. They are a sign that great things can come from small, humble beginnings and that the results of the harvest are not up to us.

In the nine years I have taught confirmation here at MCC, I've never learned this lesson better than with this class. These Five Guys started back in September with some of the usual questions: why do bad things happen to good people? Where do we go when we die? What do people in other religion think about God?

But this year, an additional one that I've never heard was added: Is God Batman? Well, to be honest, that's one I never considered. But maybe it clues us in to the unique qualities of these Five Guys.

As the year progressed, we found that talking about their questions was good, but talking when doing stuff together was better.

At the mid-point in the year, John, one of the sponsors, came to me with an idea. Let's pull the sponsors and confirmands together to work on a project.

We decided they'd build model boats together. Now, the packaging on these boat kits said that the project was beginner's level. Even with some of the most talented mechanical minds in a room together, they experienced it as a little more challenging.

It was really hard work to put these boats together. There were lots of instructions and lots of pieces. Some of them were frustrated, and some had to figure out how to unstick their crazy glued fingers from balsa wood.

But the point of the exercise wasn't to be the first confirmand/sponsor pair to finish a model boat, instead, it was all about learning to trust. It was learning to be patient and forgive when pieces were accidentally broken. And maybe it was even a little bit about learning to manage through chaos.

The truth is; we all encounter chaos sometimes, and our attempts to neatly order our lives often fall apart. Thunderstorms lurk. Marriages collapse. Drunk drivers careen along the roads. Addictions resurface. Cancers decide they've had enough of remission. People in power abuse others and create pain and destruction in their wake.

It's like that Allstate Insurance ads that warns us: "Mayhem is Coming." We all have parts of our lives that are out of control. And we certainly cannot control the behavior of others.

In our Bible story today, the disciples on that boat could not even find faith the size of a mustard seed. After all the teachings and healings they witnessed, they still struggle with trust. The sea threatens them and tests their faith. I think the question Jesus asked them is worth asking ourselves: why are we afraid?

Now, there are some things that are simply frightening, and it is only human for us to respond to them with fear. But it's one thing to feel fear from time to time, it's quite another to live in it. Too often we turn fear into something that occupies our whole lives. We don't just feel it, we let it move in and take up residence. We don't just experience it; we turn it into a giant, category-five storm that sends us running for cover.

Part of the problem with fear is what it does to us when we give it that much power. We cling to whatever it is we fear losing, we do anything to keep it.

In the process we try to control what we cannot control, we try to cling to what we cannot hold onto, and we can become selfish, childish, angry and bitter when things don't go the way we hoped they would.

Jesus' other question to the disciples is an important too: have we still no faith?

We say we believe our God is one that loves us unconditionally. The real challenge is to entrust ourselves, our loved ones, our hopes and dreams, our very lives into the care of this loving God, especially when we're afraid. If the essence of fear is trying to control, than the essence of faith is in the letting go.

When we can do that—when we can let go, we find peace, contentment, and even joy. I'm not going to pretend that this is easy, because it's not. The challenge is to look beneath the fear and see the sustaining hand of God's grace and mercy, even when life's twists and turns are so frightening.

Faith is not a magic charm that somehow protects us from loss or hardship or catastrophe. Faith is basic trust in the One who says, "I will never leave you or forsake you" (Heb. 13:5).

Zack, Kyle, Nick, Jordan and Tyler... burn these this into your memory today (ready?): Having faith does not mean that bad things will never happen to you or the ones you love.

I wish it did, but life is not that simple. Having faith means that when bad things happen, when the storms come our way, we are able to find our way home, to find peace in the midst of raging wind and foamy waves.

There's a reason that early Christians used a boat a symbol for the church, because like a crew tossed on stormy seas, we are all in this together. I hope that wherever you go, however you serve, and whatever you do with the life that is ahead of you, you remember that. Amen.