

Metho-huh? Week 2: Faith in the Storm

Scripture

Hebrews 11:1-3; 11:29-12:2

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ²Indeed, by faith^{*} our ancestors received approval. ³By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible. And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— ³³who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. ³⁵Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. ³⁶Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two,^{*} they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented— ³⁸of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰since God had provided something better so that they would not, without us, be made perfect. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely,^{*} and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, ²looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of^{*} the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Mark 4:35-40

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side.'³⁶ And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. ³⁷A great gale arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. ³⁸But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?' ³⁹He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. ⁴⁰He said to them, 'Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?'

Questions:

- 1.) In 1735, John Wesley came to Savannah, Ga. This stay in America is not a proud moment of his. He fell for his student, Sophia Hopkey. With another's advice, he broke off the relationship in order to focus on his priestly duties. About a year later, Sophia appeared in his church with her new husband. He deliberately refused to give her communion.

What motivated John Wesley to skip over her turn for receiving communion? What is your reaction to this story of the Methodist founder?

Christianity is full of people making not very wise moves like this. What other stories of poor choices come to mind within the faith?

- 2.) Pastor Sandy, in recounting the Mark passage, said that either Jesus was really exhausted or not worried at all about the storm. Jesus asks them the question: "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"

How do we act when we are stressed out or afraid? When stress comes, what is your default mode?

Jesus points out the lack of faith. Do fear and faith necessarily cancel each other out? Or does the presence of one just strain the power of the other?

- 3.) John Wesley escaped legal problems by getting on the boat back to England. Like the disciples on the boat in Galilee, a storm hit. Wesley met the Moravians who showed how Christians are to properly manage fear: praying and singing in community, they passed safely through the storm.

Have we seen others' acts of faith and been inspired during our dark times?

- 4.) Reading Martin Luther's Preface to the Romans led John Wesley's heart to be "strangely warmed" at his Aldersgate experience. A bit of the quote shared last Sunday is the following:

Faith is a living, unshakeable confidence in God's grace; it is so certain, that someone would die a thousand times for it. This kind of trust in and knowledge of God's grace makes a person joyful, confident, and happy with regard to God and all creatures. This is what the Holy Spirit does by faith..... Ask God to work faith in you; otherwise you will remain eternally without faith, no matter what you try to do or fabricate.

Pastor Sandy mentioned that Marcus Borg identifies two approaches to faith: either an approach with the head, or an approach with a continued opening of the heart. With this text

from Luther, how do you suppose Wesley interpreted it? Does faith lead to an open heart?
How do we increase our faith?

Prayer: Lord, our faith can be so small. Open our hearts to be full of more grace for and through others. Work faith in us through the power of the Holy Spirit. Thank you for grace to carry us through the storms. Amen.