This past week has been a week for me. The storm that came through on Saturday, June 17, with winds blowing at over 100 miles per hour knocked out the power at my house in Tulsa. Thankfully no damage to my house from fallen trees, but no power and no indication of when it might be coming on. I got through last Sunday with no power but on my Monday afternoon with the PSO announcement that it could be Saturday, June 24, I packed up the cat and drove to my mom’s house in Blackwell and was there all week. Each day (and actually several times each day), I checked my PSO account to see the message “Your power is out. The estimated restoration time is Friday, June 23, by 11:00 pm, then Saturday the 24th at 5:00 pm.” This morning the message read “We’re sorry. We are unable to provide an estimated time of restoration for your outage. Please check back later.”

This past week was definitely a liminal point in my life, wondering what is next and when I might get to return home. My cat definitely crossed into a new terrain as this was his first vacation at grandma’s house. Watching him on that first day as he seemed to cautiously pause and consider what comes next. In many ways, coming out of the official end of a worldwide pandemic, the church is also in this same liminal space and asking some of the same questions. We survived not meeting together as a community and learning how to use technology, and now we see the other side of doing ministry together in new and different ways. As we come out of the pandemic climate, we face a climate in our culture when Christian rhetoric has been weaponized in ways that demonize others and fuel hateful responses and many people can no longer see the good news proclaimed by Jesus that reflect the love of God to all God’s creation.

*Prayer: O God, we pray, speak in this place, in the calming of our minds and in the longing of our hearts, by the words of my lips and in the thoughts that we form. Speak, O Lord, for your servants listen. Amen.*

Up to this point in Mark’s gospel story, Jesus has been preaching to the home crowd throughout Galilee and has developed quite a following, so much so that for the majority of chapter 4, Jesus is in this boat, on the Sea of Galilee preaching from it like a pulpit to the large crowd gathered on the shore.

Now technically, the Sea of Galilee is actually a freshwater lake fed partly by underground springs although its main source is the Jordan River. It is situated in northeast Israel, between the Golan Heights and the Galilee region, and the lake has been called by different names throughout its history, usually depending on the dominant settlement on its shores. With the changing fate of the towns, the lake's name also changed. The Sea of Galilee was a key place for Jesus’ disciples. Jesus called Simon (Peter), Andrew, James, and John to be His disciples while they were working as fishermen. Later, Jesus found Matthew sitting at a tax booth beside the sea and called him. A short while after, Jesus went to a mountain above the sea to winnow His followers to twelve disciples. Finally, at the end of it all, after the resurrection, in John’s gospel, Jesus went to the Sea of Galilee and found 7 of his disciples fishing, and there on the seaside, Jesus cooked them breakfast. But on this day in our story, Jesus has spoken a lot of words about the Kingdom of God, and now on the heels of all of Jesus’ teaching to his disciples on the nature of the kingdom, the disciples find themselves not just listening to lectures about the Kingdom of God, but sailing across the very kingdom itself, for that evening, Jesus says to his disciples, “Let us go across to the other side.”

According to one commentator, “Jesus likes to show up in liminal spaces in Mark—sites of transition or risk. He chooses to go to marginal spaces, away from life’s regular patterns. The Sea of Galilee was one of those liminal spaces. Geographically, it separated the peoples of one shore from those on the other side, and socio-politically, it provided sustenance to Galileans and generated resources that Rome could extract from those who depended on it to make a living. So, it kept populations distanced from each other, and it fed imperial appetites.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

When Jesus says “let us go to the other side,” he is literally talking about the “Other;” he is asking his disciples to go with him to encounter and minister to Gentiles—those who are deemed different because of geography, culture, and religion. The other side is almost always a scary or undesirable place, or at least we think it is. We humans have a tendency to banish whatever makes us fearful to the other side: the “other side” of the tracks, the “other side” of the aisle, the “other side” of the fence. There is always a boundary we were taught not to cross, and we’re taught the boundary is there for a reason: for our protection, for our privilege, for our purity. It’s a wall, a fence, a law, or attitude. But Jesus wants to cross it to conduct ministry, to open minds to new possibilities, and to set people free to enter into a new future in freedom and wholeness because the good news is never for those just on one side of the sea. Jesus meddles with borders, not because he has a penchant for chaos, but because the kingdom of God extends divine holiness and a commitment to human well-being to places that we might have thought were beyond the pale.[[2]](#footnote-2) Nothing will inhibit his desire to do ministry “on the other side.” Crossing to the other side with Jesus may be a risky, unpredictable proposition, and in this passage, the wind and sea create a visual manifestation of the dangers of being in the boat with him. Here the wind and the sea represent a threat to Jesus’ ministry—the established order resisting the new social reality called the kingdom of God.

A great storm arises in this nighttime crossing and the disciples panic while Jesus chooses to sleep. This carpenter-by-trade has trusted his disciples, many of whom are experienced fishermen, to get him to the other side across the sea. Just a chapter earlier when Jesus appointed the twelve to proclaim the message, he also told them they would have the authority to cast out demons, even those that stir up wind and waves. But on this night, they are too busy calming themselves to calm the storm—“Jesus is in the back of the boat. He’ll save us.” To quote Carrie Underwood: “Jesus, take the wheel, Take it from my hands, 'Cause I can't do this on my own, I'm letting go." But faith is trusting that the power of God is always at work in the church, and in us.

Like those disciples, we are also sometimes too busy trying to calm ourselves to calm the wind and waves that batter peoples’ lives. Too many followers of Jesus don’t believe they have the power to stand above the forces of prejudice, hatred, bigotry, violence, abuse, and terror. So they do not stand. They do not rebuke. Instead, they huddle down in the bottom of their boats and watch the squall through stained glass windows, and wait on God to do something. Karoline Lewis of Luther Seminary reminds us: “It’s one thing to talk about the Kingdom of God. It’s another thing to experience it. It’s one thing to expound on theories about the Kingdom of God. It’s another thing to act on those claims. It’s one thing to imagine what the Kingdom of God might be like. It’s another thing to insist on what the Kingdom of God is and needs to be. The disciples need a lesson on the implications of the Kingdom of God -- and so do we. The sea crossing is the very space and place that we need to think about, to ponder, to experience, the truths of God’s Kingdom.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Jesus is trying to get us to the other side, because left to our own devices, we’d rather stay where we are. That’s human nature. But it also seems to be the nature of faith and of the Church. How easy it is to stay in our comfort zones, to remain in what is known. Some folks would rather ignore the desperate need for change than make the change happen. So, they sit. And they wait. For what? The right time? For someone else to make the first move? Maybe this is why Jesus doesn’t give the disciples any time to think about the trip -- “On that day … ” We would think about it forever. “[[4]](#footnote-4) Thinking about it” is always one of our best excuses. Sadly, too many churches today spend an inordinate amount of time thinking about issues rather than showing up and being the voice for change in their communities. Worse yet, some churches would rather bury their heads in the sand and ignore the call of Jesus to love your neighbor.

If the disciples had said to Jesus, “Well, what if there is a storm?”, they would have never gotten into the boat because there are always storms on the Sea of Galilee and when you least expect it. In fact, too many modern Disciples blame the wind and storm for their inaction to speak up for those who have been oppressed and marginalized. And sadly, some members of Christian faith communities intentionally create storms for others based solely on differences based on race, class, sexual orientation, gender identity, etc. and they continually work to bring winds of change that reverse progress made in advancing human rights. And others who disagree with what is happening, stay silent in the cultural storms waiting on Jesus to take the wheel. Yet, there are a small number of followers of Jesus/some Disciples of Christ who brave the wind and storms to be the beacon of light and hope in the world by showing what the alternative reality of the kingdom of God can be. Disciples Christian Church is one of those who stand firm when the cultural winds blow and create storms around them because you all believe that faithful, not fearful, discipleship must take seriously speaking the good news in a relevant way to and in the world and working on behalf of justice for all. How I wish so many other churches could do the same. I know that sometimes it gets tiring to fight against the wind, yet Jesus calls us to get in the boat to get to the other side of the sea to minister to all God’s beloved community.

One of the pieces of historical information that I share in my History of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) course is that on September 25, 1966, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke in Dallas at the annual gathering of the International Convention of Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) [the precursor to what we today call General Assembly].

I was lucky enough to receive a copy of Dr. King’s address given at that gathering—8 single spaced typed pages. I share with you some of Dr. King’s speech to the Disciples altering some of the words to reflect language that is more inclusive. Here is what Dr. King had to say to Disciples and to the white Church as some of the rhetoric is reminiscent of his writing in Letter from a Birmingham Jail: “It has always been the responsibility of the church to broaden horizons, challenge the status quo, and break the mores when necessary. Honesty compels us to admit that religious bodies in America have not been faithful in their prophetic mission on the question of racial justice. In the midst of a nation rife with racial animosity, the church too often has been content to mouth pious irrelevances and sanctimonious trivialities; it has often remained silent behind the safe security of stained-glass windows… If the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become little more than an irrelevant social club with a thin veneer of religiosity.… Of course, there are always those who will argue that churches should not get mixed up in such earthly temporal matters as social and economic improvement… They make an undue dichotomy between souls and bodies, love and justice, the sacred and the secular. They end up with a religion, which operates only on the vertical plane with no thrust on the horizontal. However sincere, this view of religion is all too confined…a religion true to its nature must also be concerned about humanity’s social conditions. Religion deals not only with the hereafter, but also with the here….[The church must] take the lead in social reform. It is not enough for religious institutions to be active in the realm of ideas: they must move out into the arena of life…. The churches must become increasingly active in social action outside their doors. They must take an active stand against the injustices and indignities that Black and other non-white minorities confront in housing, education, police protection, and in city and state courts. They must support strong civil rights legislation and exert their influence in the area of economic justice….St. Augustine’s words speak to us as never before: ’Those that sit at rest while others take pains are tender turtles and buy their quiet with disgrace.’Honesty impels me to admit that this type of forthright stand is always costly and never altogether comfortable…. We must make a choice. Will we continue to bless a status quo that needs to be blasted and reassure a social order that needs to be reformed, or will we give ourselves unreservedly to God and God’s kingdom?” What a challenge Dr. King gave to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and to the larger Church that day.

The Church (capital C) must do better to find ways to point to God’s presence in the world because the gospel is a living, vibrant force that should make us want to get out and cross to the other side, to move towards each other in love and compassion, move towards bringing in the kingdom. We have to remember the wind and the sea in our scripture passage represent a threat to Jesus’ ministry—the established order resisting the new social reality called the kingdom of God.

Crossing to the other side at Jesus’ command may try our faith, but it also puts us in a position to experience the stilling of our storms, the restoration of the broken and the marginalized, and the transformation of death to life. The hardest thing is getting into the boat. The act of faith is getting into the boat and believing that another side is not only possible, it is essential. So Disciples Christian Church, continue to find new seas to cross and shores to get to. And, keep getting in the boat.…….Amen.

1. Matt Skinner, “Commentary,” Working Preacher, June 24, 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Matt Skinner, “Commentary,” Working Preacher, June 24, 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Karoline Lewis, “Commentary,” Working Preacher, June 14, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Karoline Lewis, “Commentary,” Working Preacher, June 14, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)