

Gracious God, we pray for those in China, Italy and New York City who grieve. We pray for those in who live in fear. We pray that we grow and learn during this time of isolation and care. May these words come as your words of hope. Amen

When I was a kid, we lived in Ohio right in the midst of “Tornado Main Street”. When a tornado warning would happen, we’d sit in our finished basement and play games as my Dad listened to the TV to hear the latest reports. When it was bedtime, my father would insist that we bounce off to bed and he would stay up and listen to the weather. I would lay in bed listening to the pelting rain and the wind just whipping itself around the houses. Occasionally, I would bounce out of bed and run down to the basement. My dad would always be there with a book on his lap and the weather on. Each time I would find that he was awake. Somehow knowing that he was awake gave me the confidence to rest and finally go off to sleep.

During this time, we wonder if God is awake! We ask where God is. We feel out of control, even with our self-isolation and trying to be a part of the solution. It is easy to panic. But instead of panic, our spiritual discipline calls us to pause and pray for our neighbors around the world. Pause and embrace the gift of life in the midst of this virus. Pause and dig deeper into the world that God has given us. This story that shows up in Matthew and Mark gives us food for thought.

In our scripture today we find the disciples crossing the sea with Jesus who was NOT awake, but asleep. A storm came up and the wind was whirling. The waves were pouring over the boat and the boat was tipping side to side about to turn over. And Jesus, well Jesus was sleeping all through this dramatic event. The disciples, who were fishermen, held on for dear life. They yelled and screamed for Jesus to do something. WAKE UP, they yelled. But the sound of the wind was louder than they were. These men were fishermen. They were used to rocky seas. So, this must have been really bad! My favorite part of this story is when Jesus wakes us. He looks around at the terrified faces of the disciples and feels the storm and he says- “CALM DOWN!” And the storm does. I always wonder if he was trying to calm the storm or the disciples.

1. There are times in our lives that we say to people we love, “CALM DOWN.” That really doesn’t work. Who ever calmed down by being lectured to! We are living in a time when it is hard to be calm. We have storms raging around and inside of us. And many are holding on for dear life. Italy and China have been ravaged by this virus. And we keep on hearing the worst is about to come in the US. And we hold onto our boat with dear life. We ask why God is sleeping and why won’t God do something. Why is this happening? The thing is – God doesn’t cause terrible things to happen. But God can assure us that God will be with us in the hardest of times. It is time for prayer and listening. Knowing that God is never far from us.
2. Krista Tippett’s book *BECOMING WISE*, points out that when Moses talks to God in the burning bush, he asks God who God is. God’s answer is Yahweh. This is translated to - I will be who I will be. Which means we can’t predict who God is or who God will be in our lives There is not an easy formula as to how God will act. God can’t be boxed in. God will always surprise us. This is the core of mystery. Part of the ways that we can find a place of calm is knowing that God is always with us. God brings us peace. **God hears the cries of God’s people.** God cares. When Moses complained that he was not up for the job God has asked him to do, God told him two things- **First, I will give you someone to help you. Secondly, I will be with you all the way.**
3. And God offers us the mystery and grace in our world. Anne Lamott says – the opposite of faith is not doubt, it is certainty. If we are certain about everything, then we wouldn’t need faith. Faith is stepping forward trusting that Jesus is in the boat riding the rough seas with us. We enter difficult times, praying that the mystery and wonder of God will carry us. And God does. It doesn’t mean hard times won’t find us. It means that God in surprising ways will always show up and give us the strength and peace. God’s healing balm will touch us. In ways that are even more powerful than we can imagine.

4. I love Hebrews 11. The whole chapter is a litany of the history of the people of God. Each verse begins "By faith." By faith, Abraham and Sarah journeyed to unknown territory. By faith the people of Israel walked along the muddy bottom of the Red Sea. By faith- Faith **demands trust, courage and vision.**

What are our "BY Faith" Stories?

By faith our medical workers are caring for people tirelessly.

By faith volunteers are delivering Meals on Wheels daily

By faith others are grocery shopping for others

By faith we are taking it one day at a time.

We are called to become a part of the lineage of people who step out in uncertain times live out God's promise.

So, hold on and know that Jesus rides the stormy seas with us.