

“Wake Up and Help Me Worry!”
The Reverend James D. Dennis, Jr.
Sunday, June 25, 2006

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Sermon Text: Mark 4:35-41

I have been told over my two years here that, even from folks who listen very carefully, even from retired pastors, Jim, I know you work hard on your sermons. You give us a lot to think about. Usually, there is a pause, maybe a little too much. I will endeavor to be short and sweet and to the point, but I ask you to listen and to hear it for yourselves. At the end of this service, I especially invite you if something in it touches you, please come forward and have a time of prayer during our closing hymn. I feel this is a subject, which touches us all.

Some of you know and some of you don't that electronics is one of my hobbies, and when I was at Duke, having a heavy class load and working part-time and newly-married and one young two-year-old, I usually had one electronics project on the side. It sort of calmed me down. One evening, I was working on a project, reading a schematic, soldering something together, and Caroline came bursting into the room with our little two-year-old Dave, whose mouth was covered with Dimetapp purple cough medicine stain. Now, I've had Dimetapp and it does taste good, but this was a crisis! To me, my first thought was confirmation and smiled that our son was a genius. He remembered, at two-years-old, where we kept the Dimetapp. He figured out how to open the refrigerator. He overcame and defeated the childproof cap. He took a couple of big swigs of his favorite tasting purple medicine. I was proud! Caroline was in every sense of the word hysterical. She's not here, and that's why I can tell this. She was ready to take him to the emergency room. I got up from the electronics project. I went to the medicine cabinet, and at that time, we had a bottle of ipecac. Some of you know what that is. I figured the dosage for his body weight and his age, and I gave him a little bit more for good measure, and then I went back to my project. Caroline was absolutely furious at me! She said, "How dare you go back to your whatever when our son's life is at stake!" I explained to her that ipecac was already irritating his stomach lining. He had just drunk the Dimetapp. It was not going to have time to absorb because, within a few minutes, it would either be on the floor or in the bathroom depending upon where you aimed him. The funny thing was, she understood every bit of this, but she was still angry because I did not drop what I was doing and help her worry. I thought she was doing enough worrying for the both of us. I kept doing what I was doing, and she said something about my heart being cold and questioned whether or not my parents were married.

Sometimes, even when the situation is well in hand, people still want us to help them worry! They want us to join in their worry, to amplify the worry, to echo the worry, to magnify the problem side of the equation and minimize the solution, which is right there in front of you. Now, Myra's already preached my sermon, but I'm going to do it again.

Jesus was worn out, and if you think preaching your heart out, believing that what you are saying is important and can change people's lives, if you don't believe that can wear you out then try it sometime. Jesus, I am sure, preached in an impassioned way, in a pleading way, in an outreaching, heartrending way, and he was pleading that people honestly look at themselves and then courageously reach out to God and accept the love

and the forgiveness they needed. So, as they went to the other side of the lake, Jesus took a nap, and that is why I very rarely go out when people invite me to lunch right after service, right after worship, because I can push myself and I can go to lunch right after worship, but my normal posture after preaching is sleeping on the couch, pretending to listen to the news. Jesus was tired after preaching. I understand it. If the things that I say are true, then they are important. They are desperately important and so I know that Jesus projected his heart and his soul and himself into every word, into every parable, to grasp the attentions and the hearts and the minds and the souls of his listeners. He was asleep. He was spent. He was none too happy when the disciples woke him up because of a storm! Did they not know that he was tired? Had they not heard the things that he had said? Did they not yet understand whom he was to the degree that they would no longer be frightened by such small things as storms? They still did not know or trust him. They did not know who he was.

Once, a man called up the armory on a military base to get the status of weapons and vehicles, and a private answered the phone. He said, “Well, we’ve got three Jeeps. We’ve got four tanks. We’ve got 500 rifles. We’ve got a ton of ammo. Oh yeah, we’ve got a couple of Cadillac SUVs for the fat generals to go around in.” There was absolute silence on the other end. Then a very gruff, “Private! Do you know who I am?” He said, “No.” The man said, “Well, I am General Weston.” The private said, “General, do you know who I am?” The general said, “No!” The private said, “See you later, fatty!”

They didn’t know who Jesus was. Jesus, waking up from his nap, said boys, after all you have seen and heard, do you still have no faith? Have you no faith? The way I read the passage, the disciples are asking, don’t you care that we are dying here? In typical fashion, Jesus answers a question with a question, you’re asking me if I care? Where is your faith? Where is your trust in me? They had faith all right. They had faith that the wind and the waves were going to tear up the boat or sink the boat, and they were going to die, or the waves were going to come over the top of the boat and capsize it, and fill it up, and they would go to the bottom of the lake and die! That is what they believed. That is what they focused on, the storm, and that is what they saw, and they saw no resources, they saw no potentialities, they saw no possibility of rescue, and they wanted only for Jesus to wake up and help them worry. Well, Jesus can do more! Jesus can do more. He asked, have you no faith? The implication of that question is, do you not know who I am? Have you not figured out that yet? You are worried about the wind and the waves, and I’m here confronting the powers of sin and death and evil in the world and in the human heart, and you’re worried about a storm! Have you no faith? Do you not know who I am? I can see that you are worried. Here, Jesus says, here, let me show you who I am. So Jesus said to the wind, and actually in the Greek, it says that he told the wind, “Hush!” The way you would tell a little yapping puppy to hush. It’s like a diminutive. It’s like a small bother. He says, hush! Then after he told the wind to hush, he looked at them and said, why are you afraid? I’m right here with you. Trust me. Have some faith in me. Trust me. How could you possibly be in a panic when I am right here with you?

Now, here's the Main Street part. Let's leave that old Bible story and come right down into our lives. Imagine Jesus looking right at you or into your heart and soul and explaining in one word what faith means, trust. Imagine Jesus saying to you, trust me, do not panic. I am right here with you. Have some faith in me. Trust me. How could you possibly panic while I am right here with you? Imagine that said to you from Jesus to whatever your panic is today. Hear it for yourself because it is for you and it is for me and it is for now and whatever crisis in which we dwell and whatever panic of the moment. Jesus is saying trust me. That is what faith is. Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not understand that you can trust me?

Now, the disciples got a lesson from this encounter, a lesson that we are already supposed to know. A lesson that we should know. They looked at each other, filled with wonder and awe and fear, and they asked, who in the world is this man that even the wind and the sea obey him? Who do you think he is? More than a man, that much is for sure. I'm not sure which the disciples were more afraid of, the wind and the waves or the man who could say hush like to a puppy and make the storm go away. They only thought they were afraid in the middle of the storm. Now, imagine they find themselves sitting in the middle of the boat, in the dead calm, with this man who could speak to the wind and the waves and make it stop. Now, they were really afraid. They were in awe. Who can do such a thing? What kind of man is he? Is God in flesh?

An unthinkable idea to so many, a blasphemous to other faiths, the idea was just sinking in to the disciples' heads when they saw a sleepy Jesus wake up and shush the wind. They only wanted Jesus to wake up and help them worry, and He woke up, and He made a storm scurry. They were left wondering, frightened of His power, of a man who was more than a man. I think that's a big point of this story. That was the point then because they did not know. We do know now, and we do have faith now, and we do have trust, and we do have knowledge of who Jesus is because death could not hold Him. Forgiveness was His to offer, and He did. Who else can offer forgiveness but God alone?

We know who Jesus is, and we know that it would be the bare minimum request of God in Christ to ask Him to help us worry as if He had no power, as if He did not care, as if helping us worry is the best that God in Christ can do! God is here, and God does not sleep. God is trustworthy, and if we are saved and made whole and rescued from the storm of life, it may be for a better life and higher realm of spiritual existence or it may sometimes be a rescue from the panic of a situation that makes us cringe right here in our daily life. We must trust God – now – and trust God forever. Don't ever ask God, don't you care if we are perishing? Don't you care, God? We know the answer to that. God cares. The cross is the answer to that. The outcast birth in a barn in Bethlehem is the answer to that. The humiliation, the temptations, the perfect life that He lived in God's will, facing all of that on our behalf is the answer to that question. Yes, God cares if we are perishing, and God can do more than just help us worry. God can save us from the storms of life and save us from the certain judgment of sin and death, which hangs over our heads without Him. We are not without Him.

In a “Peanuts” cartoon, Linus, I can use this for only a few more years because the younger folks have no idea who Linus and Charlie Brown are, but I’m using it today. In a “Peanuts” cartoon, Linus observes, “You look kind of upset, Charlie Brown.” He says, “Yeah, I worry a lot about school. I also worry a lot that I worry a lot about school.” He sits there in silence for a few minutes, and then Charlie Brown says, “Good grief, my anxieties have anxieties!”

One thing about Jesus, He kept His calm. He turned over a few tables in the temple, but that was righteous indignation. That was not worry. He never seemed rushed or worried or nervous about anything. Yes, He prayed a mighty prayer before the cross, but that ended. That ended in trust. Worry is the enemy of faith. Jesus said, “A house divided cannot stand.” The word that He used for worry means a divided mind. We could say a worried mind cannot stand. A worried marriage – that cannot make up its mind to stay stuck or to grow up – cannot stand. A worried faith that sort of – but not really – believes cannot stand. A worried church that cannot agree on what to do in God’s name cannot stand.

Most of what we worry about is borrowed misery. Most of our future worries never happen. I can guarantee you that 100% of our past worries changed nothing at all. Give up worrying about the past. God has given us imagination to make up things to worry about, and we need to use our imagination in better ways. Stop worrying about the past. It is dead. Stop making up things for the future. They may, and usually, never happen.

One of my favorite stories, as I close on time. An old man is standing with a friend on a crowded bus, and a young stranger asks him what time it is. The old man, usually polite, just kept staring straight ahead, intently straight ahead. He paid no attention to the young man’s request for the time. His friend said, “What gives? Why were you so discourteous?” The old man replied, “If I had given him the time of day, next he would want to know where I was going, then we might talk about our interests, and if we did, he might invite himself to my house for dinner, and if he did, he would meet my lovely daughter. If they met, they would fall in love, and get married, and I do not want my daughter marrying someone who cannot afford a watch!” That’s borrowed worry, and some of you; if you are honest, worry about things just that absurd.

Jesus scolds the fearful disciples in the storm. Why are you afraid oh, ye of little faith! Then in Matthew, Jesus asks, “And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life?” That’s sarcasm, folks. The short version, worry does not help! Faith and trust, knowledge that no matter what, God is there, come life or death, God is there, that helps. Jesus is in the boat with you. Whatever your boat of the moment, whatever storms you’re passing through, Jesus is in the boat with you. Cling to Him. Cast your worries overboard. Amen.