

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, July 18, 2021**

**TRAVELS WITH JESUS:
DON't YOU CARE?
Mark 4:35-41**

Not a day goes by that something bad doesn't happen. Not a day goes by that a tragedy doesn't take place somewhere in the world. Not a day goes by without something happening that brings heartache or even heartbreak. Not a single day.

A high-rise condo building in Surfside, Florida collapses, resulting in nearly 100 deaths. Devastating floods in Germany and Belgium bring death and destruction. Hurricanes, tornadoes, and other natural disasters threaten different parts of the world. Cancer and other life-threatening illnesses continue to afflict people we know and love. Violence plagues our society. Discrimination and persecution against persons or groups on the basis of their religious beliefs or ethnicity continue unabated around the world. In places like Cuba, oppression and poverty are a way of life. There is also this COVID thing we have been dealing with for the last year and a half.

In the midst of all these things, it is natural to ask: Where is God? Why does He allow all these bad things to happen? Does God care? Does God care what happens to me and to those I love? Does He *really* care?

It is a question that rose to the surface when the disciples of Jesus found themselves, without warning, in a storm out on the Sea of Galilee that was just too big, too strong, too powerful, and too chaotic for them to handle.

This is one of the most memorable and amazing stories in the life of Jesus. It is found in three of the four Gospels in the New Testament -- in Matthew (8:23-27), Mark (4:35-41), and Luke (8:22-25).

We have had some interruptions in our "Travels with Jesus" over the last several weeks because I've been away. You may or may not recall that in the most recent installment in this series, Jesus' mother and brothers had come looking for Jesus. They were concerned about His well-being, both physically and mentally. They seemed to think He was taking this "Messiah" thing too seriously and thought it was time for an intervention. For His own good, they wanted to take Jesus back home to Nazareth with them, because they thought He was "out of His mind" (Mark 3:21). This, at the same time the Pharisees were accusing Him of being a tool of the devil, of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul, the prince of demons (3:22).

In today's Scripture, after a long day of teaching a huge audience that had come to hear Him on the lakeshore, Jesus was ready for a break. He *needed* a break. The fact that He needed a break, that He was tired both physically and mentally, is one of those irrefutable signs of the full humanity of Jesus. He was 100 percent human, just like you and me.

And, in a mystery we can't fully comprehend but affirm by faith, He was and is fully God – “True God ... (and) true man, united in one Person forever” (EPC *Essentials of Our Faith*).

Jesus was worn out. He was physically and emotionally spent. Unlike some of us, Jesus was smart enough to know that He needed a break. He needed to call a time out. He needed some time away from the rigors and demands of a life of continually giving of Himself to others, in order to get recharged. So, as we read in verse 35, when evening came, He said to His disciples: “Let’s go across to the other side of the lake.”

They set out in the quiet calm of the early evening for a 5-mile sunset cruise across the lake. They weren’t alone, apparently. Seeing Jesus and the disciples depart, a flotilla of small boats joined them on the water. In His tiredness, Jesus found a pillow (probably a sandbag) in the cargo hold and promptly went to sleep.

They hadn’t gotten far, though, when a furious storm erupted on the lake and whipped it into a wild frenzy. It should not have surprised the disciples, at least the professional fishermen among them, because they were seasoned sailors who knew about storms on the Sea of Galilee. They knew the lake was notorious for fierce storms that came right out of the blue. A storm on the lake, even a sudden one, was not out of the ordinary at all. Just as “storms” of suffering and hardship, disappointment, rejection, pain, and loss are not out of the ordinary as we go through life in this world. Storms happen. Hardships happen. Heartache happens. But grace happens, too. So do help and hope and healing and peace.

This, apparently, was *not* an ordinary storm. These veteran sailors who had made their living out on the lake were scared to death. They did everything they could think of, everything they knew to do from all their years of training and experience, and they were losing the battle. The wind was whipping and the waves were crashing against the boat, swamping it with water, threatening to send it and everyone in it to the bottom of the lake. Matthew, who was there, uses the word *seismos* to describe the storm (Matthew 8:24). *Seismos* is usually translated “earthquake.” In fact, Matthew calls it a *seismos megas* – a great earthquake, a *mega*-earthquake. That’s what it felt like to the disciples of Jesus. They were at their wits’ end. They thought it was going to be *the end* for them.

And where was Jesus while all this was happening? What was Jesus doing while His disciples were fighting for their lives? He was sound asleep in the back of the boat. Completely oblivious. Without a care in the world.

The disciples were frantic. In their panic, they woke Jesus up and chastised Him: “How can you sleep at a time like this? Don’t you care what happens to us? Don’t you care that we are about to drown?” (4:38)

Jesus, don’t You care what happens to me? Does God really care about the things that happen in our lives?

Does He care about what happens in *your* life? Does He really care about the pain and suffering, the evil, the violence and hate, the grief and heartache, the tragedies and disasters, the crises and setbacks, the defeats and disappointments that befall us in this world?

This may surprise you, but I'm going to suggest that there are some things God does *not* care about. At least not nearly as much as we may care about them. God does not care who wins the Super Bowl or the World Series or the Stanley Cup. God doesn't care who wins the Olympic gold in basketball or swimming or track and field.

I knew a pastor who was asked to pray with a team before a big game. It was a very short prayer. Just four words: "Lord, let us win!"

I am in favor of prayer. Prayer is a good thing. Including prayer before a big game. But *how* we pray matters. And *what* we pray for matters, too.

God is not nearly so concerned with who wins and loses as He is with the heart-attitudes and well-being of those who play and those who watch. He is concerned about how the game is played and about what winning or losing does to those who compete, as well as to those who just watch and cheer.

I don't think God cares what tie I wear, or whether I even wear a tie when I come to church on Sunday. Nor does God care what flavor of blizzard I have at Dairy Queen.

There are some things God does not care about, including things some people think are of the utmost importance, such as things like wealth, prestige, position, power, and popularity. God is not so impressed by the things that impress us. In James 2:1-9, the Bible says that God doesn't play favorites – and neither should we in the church. It is not how much or how little you have that God is concerned about, but what you do with what you have ... and what it does to you. It is not how you dress or who you know or what your title is that God cares about, but what is in your heart. How you live. And how you treat other people, including those closest to you.

So, you see, there are some things in life God does *not* care about, at least not in the way we care about them.

But what about the storms of this life that catch us off-guard and knock us off our feet? What about the problems and hardships of life that threaten to undo us? What about the burdens we carry that sometimes feel so heavy? What about the fears and uncertainties of life in this fallen world that so often have a grip on us? Doesn't God care about what is happening in our world? In your life and mine?

Some people today will tell you it is silly – irrational – to ask if God cares because, they say, there is no God. They say that God – at least the God of the Bible – does not exist and never did. If there is no God, then it is meaningless to ask if He cares about you and me. If there is no God, then we are alone to face the storms and challenges and hardships

of life. If there is no God, then, to paraphrase the apostle Paul, we who believe in God are of all creatures most to be pitied (1 Corinthians 15:19).

But if the “new atheists,” as they are called, are wrong – and the old atheists, too – if there *is* a God, if the God who reveals Himself in the Bible, in creation and history, and in the person and work of Jesus is real, then you can be sure that *God does care* about the details of your life and that *He is with you* in all the storms of life you have to face. He is the great “I AM,” eternally relevant, never out-of-date, the same yesterday, today and forever. And *He will be with you* no matter what, in good times and hard times, in fair weather and raging storms, in sickness and in health, even when you find yourself in the dark valley of the shadow of death. So, you need fear no evil (Psalm 23:4).

There is a God. The God of the Bible is real. He is alive. And He will never let you out of His sight. Not even for a moment.

Some people think yes, there is a God, but He is too pre-occupied with running the universe to concern Himself with the ordinary (or not-so-ordinary) problems we face. He is too busy to give attention to the dilemmas and question marks of our lives. Running the universe, after all, is a big job, and it is just not realistic to think that a God with such awesome responsibilities could possibly be interested in the details of our lives. He is a good God, they say, but He is just too busy. He’s got too much on His plate to rescue us from every storm or crisis we face.

That, however, is not what the Bible says. God is not finite like we are. He is not made in *our* image. The Bible tells us of a God who is in charge of everything, a God who does not fail and who will not fail to fulfill His purposes for this world, a God who knows each one of us by name and cares about the details of our lives. Peter, another of the disciples who was with Jesus in the boat during the storm on the Sea of Galilee, said you can “cast all your cares on Him” – on God our Heavenly Father, on the Lord Jesus, who is God in flesh and blood – “because He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7; cf. Psalm 55:22).

Someone else may object that while God is real, He is just overmatched by the evil that runs rampant in the world. There was a very popular book in the 1980s called *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. It was written by a Jewish rabbi named Harold Kushner, whose answer to the suffering and storms of life is that God is doing the best He can to make a bad situation livable in a chaotic world where evil is out of control. God’s intentions are good, Kushner says, but He is simply not able to handle everything that comes our way. The problems that plague us are just too big for God. It is not that He is too busy. It is that He is too weak.

Kushner’s view of God was and is attractive to many people. It offers an answer to the question of how a good and loving God can allow evil to flourish. God is doing the best He can.

This is not the biblical answer, though. It is not what the Bible teaches about God. In the Bible we meet a God who is not only all-loving, but all-powerful, too. A God who is not only good, but able. More than able.

The Bible says that God is “holy, holy, holy” (Isaiah 6:3). The three-fold repetition of the word *holy* means holy to the highest degree. God is holy to the max.

The Bible also teaches that God is “*omni, omni, omni.*” He is *omniscient*. He knows literally everything, including your deepest secrets, your most painful wounds, and the most private longings of your heart. He knows everything about everything.

He is *omnipresent*. He is everywhere. There is no place you will ever go where God has not gone before you. There is no place you can ever go where God is not with you. Read Psalm 139 and let David’s testimony there take root in your heart. There is no storm you can ever encounter in which Jesus is not with you. He will not always deliver you *from* the storms, but He will bring you safely *through* the storms, including death itself. He will bring you safely home to heaven.

He is *omnipotent*. Omni-potent. All-powerful. He is sovereign over nature, over winds and waves, over hurricanes and tornadoes, over floods and droughts, over disasters of every kind. He is sovereign over sin, over all the forces of evil, over Satan and all the demons of hell, over life and death. He will not be defeated.

The God of the Bible is Yahweh El-Shaddai, the LORD God Almighty, who created everything there is and who sustains the whole universe by the word of His power (Hebrew 1:3). He is the Holy One who has no rivals, the One who heals the sick and raises the dead, the One who has authority to forgive sins and the power to change lives, including yours and mine. He is the One who can muzzle the wind and still the storm by speaking a single word.

God is not helpless in the face of life’s storms. Neither are we, because He is with us, and He has already done something about the troubles and storms we encounter in this life. He has done the most important thing.

What has He done? God the Father sent Jesus the Son to us. He sent Jesus to save us. Jesus came to redeem us from our sin. Then God sent the Holy Spirit to us to give us the grace and strength we need in every situation. At every moment.

Does God care? You bet He does! The good news is that the God who cares about us is big enough to still the storms on the sea and the storms in our hearts. He is big enough to run the universe, but never too busy to care about the little things, the nagging problems, and the burdens of our hearts.

He is with us in every storm, even when it seems that He is asleep. He will redeem every trouble. He will bring us safely through. In His time. In His way. For our good and for His glory.

God does not always choose to heal. But He does promise that His grace will be sufficient (2 Corinthians 12:9).

God does not always keep us from trouble. In fact, Jesus said: “In this world you will have trouble.” Count on it. It is a given. It is not an aberration. It is a fact of life. “But take heart,” said Jesus. “I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

God does not always prevent bad things from happening to us or to those we love. He does not always answer our prayers the way we want. When we don’t get the answer we hope for, we may be tempted to think that God doesn’t care. Or that our problems are too big for Him to handle.

In their high anxiety, the disciples of Jesus cried out: “Lord, don’t You care what happens to us? Why don’t You do something?”

What did Jesus do? He told the wind to pipe down and the sea to be still. Then what happened? Instantly, it became perfectly calm. Jesus turned to the disciples and said: “Why are you so afraid? Don’t you have any faith at all?” (4:40) In other words: “Don’t you realize who I am?”

The truth is, they didn’t. Not yet. When they saw the power of Jesus over nature – a sign of His full deity – they were terrified. Literally, what Mark says is that they were “frightened with a great fear” – not just frightened, but frightened with a *mega* fear.

Jesus wants us to replace our mega fears with a mega faith. A mega trust in Him.

You see, this is really the heart of the issue for us, just as it was for the first disciples of Jesus.

When the storms of life come, where is your faith? Do you know who Jesus really is? Are you trusting in Him to be with you and to bring you safely through the storm, whatever it is?

The storms of life should not surprise us when they come. Storms are just a fact of life. And having Jesus in your boat doesn’t guarantee that you will have smooth sailing. If you think it does, you’re in for a big shock. But wouldn’t you rather be in the middle of a storm *with Jesus* than anywhere *without Him*?

Does God care? You can bet your life on it. You can build your life on it. You can give Him all your cares, all your worries, all your anxieties, because He cares for You. Because He is able.

If you want to know how much Jesus cares for you, just look at the cross, where Jesus stretched out His nail-pierced hands to say: “This is how much I love you.”

No matter what storms may come, let the blessed assurance of God's steadfast, unchanging love and care keep your heart in perfect peace.

Lord, let it be so in us, now and always. Amen.