

## “Deal with it!”

June 21, 2009

Text: *Psalm 107:1-9, Mark 4:35-41*

### I.

In **M. Scott Peck’s** best-selling book of over thirty years ago, entitled, *The Road Less Traveled*, the first words of the book are—very simply: ***Life is difficult.***

He went on to say that this awareness that *life is difficult* is one of the greatest truths we need to learn in life. In this regard, the first of the **four noble truths** that Buddha taught his followers is: ***Life is suffering.***

What all this points to is the harsh reality we all deal with every day: stuff is going to happen—in our family relationships; at work and in our efforts to support and take care of our families; in our neighborhoods, in community, here at church, and all about.

Stuff is going to happen. Health issues ... fairness issues ... survival issues ... and all the time: details. So, once again, the question becomes: what are we going to do? All the time, it comes down to this: what are we going to do?

1. We could procrastinate, delay, and look for one excuse after another.
2. Or, we could try to sweep our problems under the table and hope they’ll, somehow, go away (denial: never a good plan).
3. Or, we could complain to anyone who will listen.

In response to all of this, we’ve got choices—every day; and this is where faith comes in.

### II.

In the reading I shared from **Mark 4**, Jesus was tired. It had been a long day ... a day of teaching and of trying to talk to his disciples and early followers about what we might call *the meaning of life*. For Jesus, it was *the Kingdom of God*. What was it like? What did it mean?

But, now, he was tired and, coming near his disciples by the lake side, he said to them: ***Let’s go across to the other side*** (most likely, to get away from it all). And they got in the boat and pushed away from the shore. And as you recall the story, soon a storm rose up and their boat was swamped with water.

Overcome with fear, the disciples arouse Jesus, who has been sleeping in the rear of the boat. Seeing the stormy conditions, Jesus says simply, *Peace! Be still!* And instantly the wind dies down and calm comes over the sea.

Jesus then says to them, *Why all the fear, guys, have you no faith?*

And the disciples, seeing the way even nature responds to Jesus' command, are in awe; and they began saying to one another: who is this? Even the wind and sea obey him.

### III.

In revisiting this biblical story, I sometimes wonder if Jesus might have felt like responding differently ... something like: *Hey, guys, I'm tired. It's been a long day. Deal with it!*

Although this reading from **Mark 4** comes fairly early in Mark's gospel, still the language suggests that Jesus might have expected more. After calming the storm and wondering *why all the fear*, he asks them—not, *Have you no faith?*, but—*Have you STILL no faith?*

... which suggests that they could well have had faith by now. Some time has evidently passed. *Have you STILL no faith?*

He might have wanted to say to them: *Come on, guys! You've seen the power of the Spirit in what we've been doing ...*

- *the healing of the paralytic ...*
- *the cleansing of the leper ...*
- *the multiple healings at Peter's house.*
- *You've heard some of the parables and other teachings ...*
- *and earlier today at the sea side before pushing off in the boat, you witnessed the countless healings ...*

*And still, no faith? Come on, guys! Deal with it!*

### IV.

What we learn from this story is that in tough times, when storms brew and our lives seem overwhelmed with one anxious happening after another, we're not alone. Jesus may not be resting in the back of our boat, but the spirit of the God of peace, calm and reassurance is forever with us.

Love is with us. God's spirit is all about us. We are not, therefore, helpless or powerless.

In faith ... with lives deeply rooted in a trusting sense of God's presence, God gives us the strength and the means to deal with whatever comes our way in life. And how do we know this? Because we are loved; God has loved us in Christ.

To know in our heart and spirit the love of God; to have a vivid sense of God's presence; to learn over time to look for the goodness in life; to believe in the awesome power of love to change everything.

All of this gives us courage. So that when troubles come our way—health matters, tension at work, emotional challenges, whatever it might be—we can **deal with them**. When our finances are challenged and we wonder how are we ever going to make it through, we're given courage and confidence to where we can handle it.

## V.

Get this, friends: when we're loved—unconditionally—we can deal with anything. The nature of creation is such that there is always a glimmer of light, a radiance of hope coming from somewhere. Again, we are never helpless or powerless.

God gives us the strength and the means to deal with whatever is on our plate. We simply need to meet God half way, seeking to practice the presence of God everyday.

So, what does that mean? I say that all the time in sermons: to *practice the presence of God*.

What it means is to live our lives as if God existed. We sort of take this for granted don't we—the existence of God—we just assume, as Christians, that we all believe in God. But do we *really* believe ... to the point where our faith and our sense of God's presence in our lives are riveting. There are compelling implications here. CHECK IT OUT!

1. What if we know that God is listening to everything we say ... really listening? And what if God were really observing all that we do? Would we say and do everything we said and did this past week, or yesterday?
2. To *practice the presence of God*, as Christians, is to live our lives—everyday—as if Jesus were our constant companion; walking with us, interacting with us. We have to admit: that would be a load. With Jesus, the bar is pretty high.
3. To *practice the presence of God* is to make our faith real—now, today, at this moment. When we truly *practice the presence of God*, we're able to deal with whatever comes our way because we learn, over time—in faith—that we can do it. Our faith empowers us and builds up our confidence.

## VI.

In his book, *Preaching Through a Storm*, **Beecher Hicks** says, *You're either coming out of a storm, in a storm or heading for a storm.*

Certainly, there's a lot of truth to that, as both Jesus and the Apostle Paul could attest to.

When stormy days come, as they always do; when challenges mount up, as they always will; when we're worried about this ... anxious about that; when fear and uncertainty seem to be all around us, we can make it through because we have the capacity—the strength, the courage, the audacity, and the spirit to do it.

**Life is, indeed, difficult.** But the way to move on in our lives is by dealing with whatever is on our plate right now. For sure, there's comfort in knowing that Jesus is in the back of the boat, but there are times when he needs his rest ... and he needs us to stand up.

Remember Hurricane Wilma? I sure do. For hours, the wind raged and torrential rains swept down upon us. I don't know about you, but I was more than a little concerned, particularly as our pool enclosure began to detach and crumble, threatening to slam through our back windows and sliding glass doors. And then, gradually, it all stopped. The winds died down ... the rain stopped. And what did we do?

In our neighborhood, almost immediately, everybody was outside, assessing the damage ... to do what? To ***deal with it***. After all, the chaos and clutter from fallen trees and branches and the debris from this and that weren't going to suddenly go away by themselves. Instinctively, we knew had no choice but to ***deal with it***.

And ***deal with it*** we did.

Sometimes that's what we have to do in life. We can't always wait for God to come to us in a miracle or through prayer to rescue us and set our life back on track. We all have things in our lives we need to take care of ... things that only we can do ... things we've been putting off, but things we need to deal with.

So the message today is: **Take care of business. Do what you need to do. Stand up and meet the challenges that are before you. Do it. Deal with it!**

And then, with the Psalmist, give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever.

**All praise be unto God ! Amen!**

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