

TITLE: "Deep Heart's Core"

TEXT: Mark 4:35-41 (NT p. 39)

³⁵On that day, when evening had come, [Jesus] said to [the disciples], "Let us go across to the other side." ³⁶And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. ³⁷A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. ³⁸But [Jesus] was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" ³⁹[Jesus] woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. ⁴⁰[Jesus] said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" ⁴¹And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Introduction – "Innisfree"

I have always liked the poem, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" by William Butler Yeats. He wrote this about the inspiration for his poem:

[At that point in my life] I still had the ambition, formed...in my teens, of living in imitation of Thoreau on Innisfree, a little island on [Lake] Gill, and when walking through Fleet Street [in London] very homesick I heard a little tinkle of water and saw a fountain in a shop window which balanced a little ball upon its jet, and began to remember lake water. From the sudden remembrance came my poem "Innisfree" (The Trembling of the Veil – 1926).

Amazing how a sight, sound or smell can bring to our mind's eye a previous experience. ...I'll now read the poem. Close your eyes and enjoy the lovely imagery.

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and waddles made:
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honeybee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the crickets sing;
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
And evening full of linnet's wings.

I will rise and go now, for always night and day
 I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
 While I stand on the roadway, on the pavements gray,
 I hear it in the deep heart's core.

...Yeats had Innisfree in his deep heart's core. ...What is in your deep heart's core this morning? What gives YOU that sense of deep renewing peace?

1. Who is this?

What does this poem have to do with this morning's text? Well strangely, it's the CONTRAST between the two that struck me. Yeats heard the trickle of water in a little fountain in the middle of the City of London and it reminded him of waves lapping on the shore of an island he had visited as a child....a peaceful image.

In the text, the disciples also heard the sound of water; unfortunately it was in the form of roaring waves accompanied by howling wind. We can only imagine the scene. It was a pitch black night, waves were crashing over the side of the boat and the boat was filling with water. Some of the disciples who not used to being on the lake were crying out in terror. The professional fishermen who knew what they were doing were trying to bail and keep the bow to the waves.

Fearing he would soon die, one of the disciples woke Jesus and asked, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" ...I'm not sure what he expected the Lord to do, but Jesus was the leader and the disciple thought he should do SOMETHING rather than just SLEEP!

Let me insert a thought. Let us imagine that our lives are little boats floating on the sea of life. Sometimes, our lives go along as peacefully as Yeats remembers the waters around Innisfree. Other times there are storms: a relationship is in trouble, an illness or accident occurs, our job is in jeopardy, a child is in trouble, or someone we love dies.

As Christians, we know INTELLECTUALLY that Jesus cares about our plight, but when we are REALLY scared and REALLY desperate, and the situation seems to be going from bad to worse, we want to KNOW whether Jesus cares, and also whether Jesus is going to DO something constructive to help us.

In the text, Jesus DID do something. He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased abruptly, and the storm-tossed seas became dead calm, neither of which could possibly have happened naturally. The disciples who had spent their lives on that water, KNEW this had to be God, so they looked at each other in amazement and asked, "Who then IS this, that even the wind and sea obey him?" Who indeed? Who indeed IS Jesus?

THAT is the question each of us needs to ask ourselves this morning. Who IS Jesus? If Jesus is simply an historical figure who lived 2,000 years ago, then he is not going to help us face the storms in our lives. ...If Jesus is simply a good teacher who we should try to emulate, then he won't be much help either.

But if Jesus is who he says he is, if Jesus IS the Son of God, if he really DID rise from the dead and he really IS here this morning and he really CAN come to live in our hearts, then Jesus CAN help us no matter what we have to face in this life.

I believe we are here on earth for one reason: to answer the question, "Who is JESUS?" The answer to that question will determine your quality of life as long as you live on earth and it will determine WHERE you live and HOW you live for all eternity.

2. Our greatest fear

The most interesting parts of the text, to me, are the questions Jesus asks. The first was, "Why are you afraid?" Why WERE the disciples afraid? They thought they were about to drown in a storm. But I think there was more to it than that. The disciples had asked Jesus, "Do you not care that we are perishing?" It was not just fear of dying that concerned them, it was whether Jesus really CARED if they died and, if he DID care, whether he cared enough to DO something to save them.

I can understand their fear. The fear that someone who CAN help us in our distress, but is unconscious or unresponsive to our cry for help, is an elemental one. I think that is why young children sometimes cry out in the night. They may be scared of something they imagine, but they also may be even more frightened of the thought that a parent will not come when she or he calls.

A man was walking along a path by a cliff above the shore on a pitch-black night when he stumbled and fell over the edge. On the way down, to what he was sure would be his death, his hand struck and clung to a root sticking out of the cliff's face. He hung on desperately and yelled for help. When no one responded, and his strength was almost gone, he yelled out, "God, are you there

A voice from far above answered, “Yes, my son, I am here.”

“God is that really YOU?”

“Yes.”

“Will you help me?”

“Yes.”

God said, “Just let go.”

The man looked down into the utter darkness, then looked up and said, “Is anyone ELSE up there?”

You see, God knew that the man’s feet were dangling only a few feet from the sand and that is why God said, “Just let go.” When you are out on a limb, does God care enough to rescue you?

3. Have you still not faith?

Jesus then asks the disciples, “Have you still no faith?” That word “still” is important. It indicates that there were times in the past when Jesus had come to their rescue. So why, all-of-a-sudden, did they think that Jesus would abandon them right in the middle of a crisis?

I think this is a valid question to EACH of us as the little boat of our existence floats on the sea of life. Do we have the faith to believe that God loves us enough to save us when we are in trouble?

The Bible is full of assurances that we SHOULD have that faith:

Dt. 31: 6 – “Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread...because it is the Lord your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you.”

Ps. 91: 3,4 – “For [God] will deliver you from the snare of the fowler / and from the deadly pestilence; / he will cover you with his pinions, / and under his wings you will find refuge...”

Lk. 11: 6,7 – “Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God’s sight. But even the hairs of your head are all counted. Do not be afraid...” (Scott just sang about this in “His Eye Is on the Sparrow.”)

My favorite comes from Ro. 8:38, 39 – “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Conclusion - The Deep Heart’s Core

How do you GET that kind of faith? Let’s get back to Yeat’s poem and the phrase “deep heart’s core.” Faith depends upon who is in YOUR deep heart’s core? If JESUS is in your deep heart’s core, then the Lord WILL calm your fears because you will know, you will KNOW, that in life and in death you, and those you love, belong to Jesus.

The older of my two younger sisters died a year-and-a-half ago. I still have a hard time with that. Every day. When we have faith in Jesus Christ, God does not insulate us from the storms of life. God DOES promise to be there with us and to guide us through each situation. Painful as my sister’s death is to me, because I have Jesus in my deep heart’s core, I know that she is with the Lord and I know that I will see her again, and that gives me comfort and hope.

Let me tell you a story:

Horatio Spafford was born on October 20, 1828 in North Troy, New York. He was a successful lawyer in Chicago who maintained a keen interest in Christian activities, deeply spiritual and devoted to the scriptures. Sometime in 1871, a fire in Chicago heavily devastated the city, and months before that, Spafford had invested hugely in real estate by the shore of Lake Michigan. The disaster greatly wiped out his holdings. Before the fire, Spafford also experienced the loss of his son.

Two years after the fire, Horatio Spafford planned a trip to Europe for him and his family. He wanted a rest for his wife and four daughters, and also to assist Moody and Sankey in one of their evangelistic campaigns in Great Britain. The day in November they were due to depart, Spafford had a last minute business transaction and had to stay behind in Chicago.

The following is an excerpt from the memoirs of Mr. Sankey:

When Mr. Moody and I were holding meetings in Edinburgh, in 1874, we heard the sad news of the loss of the French steamer, "Ville de Havre," on her return from America to France. ...On board the steamer was a Mrs. Spafford, with her four children. In mid-ocean a collision took place with a large sailing vessel, causing the steamer to sink in half an hour. Nearly all on board were lost.

Mrs. Spafford got her children out of their berths and up on deck. On being told that the vessel would soon sink, she knelt down in prayer, asking God that they might be saved if possible; or be made willing to die, if that was his will. In a few minutes the vessel sank to the bottom of the sea, and the children were lost.

One of the sailors of the vessel, named Lockurn—whom I afterward met in Scotland—while rowing over the spot where the vessel disappeared, discovered Mrs. Spafford floating in the water. Ten days later she was landed at Cardiff, Wales. From there she cabled her husband the message, "Saved alone."

When we returned to Chicago to work, I was entertained at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Spafford for a number of weeks. During that time Mr. Spafford wrote the hymn, "It is well with my soul," in commemoration of the death of his children. P. P. Bliss composed the music and sang it for the first time at a meeting in Farwell Hall. The comforting fact in connection with this incident was that in one of our small meetings in North Chicago, a short time prior to their sailing for Europe, the children had [accepted Jesus as their savior].

Here are the words to that hymn:

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
when sorrows like sea billows roll;
whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
let this blest assurance control,
that Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
and hath shed his own blood for my soul.

I don't know what you, or I, will have to face in the future, but I DO know this: If Jesus is in your deep heart's core, you will, eventually, be able to say, "It is well with my soul." Let us now sing that hymn together; and if Jesus is not in your deep heart's core, invite Jesus to come and live there as we sing.

Hymn #493....