

**Children’s Moment**

Hello, girls and boys. Esperanza and I pray for you and your family. We love you and we appreciate you.

We’ve been talking about growing spiritually and what it means to be part of a church family for the past few weeks. Last week, we talked about the seeds of faith that help us to grow, even when things change.

I have a question: how are the seeds you planted during Lent, the six weeks before Easter, doing? Esperanza and I wanted to share how our garden is doing with you one, last time. Let’s take a look ...

How are the plants doing Esperanza? [*tour of plants, ending with tomatoes*].

Those tomatoes are amazing! We’ll be able to start eating them this week. One of our favorite foods is bruschetta, which is tomatoes, basil, garlic and olive oil. You mix it up and put it on toasted bread. Yum!!

It’s amazing to see how those tiny seeds have become vibrant, healthy plants. We’re seeing fruit come from the work we did. But I have to tell you a secret: God did most of the work. Esperanza and I watered and tended the plants, but God provided the soil. God provided the sun. God gave us the water. And God made the plant grow, even when we weren’t watching.

The seed of faith God plants in you does the same thing. Pastors, teachers, parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters, and friends all help care for us and our faith. But God gets the credit for helping us to grow and become all we can be, by faith.

Each one of you is God’s child. You are special. You are loved. You are part of God’s family – in Corona and wherever you may go. That means you’re part of something greater than yourself. Never forget that! Jesus loves you and so do we.

*Please pray with me: God, thank you for planting the seed of faith inside of us. Thank you for the blessings you give to us that help us grow and become the very special, very unique person we are meant to be. Help our families to be healthy and help us to love others, caring for them and loving them the same way you love and care for us. Amen.*

**Message: "Be Still"**

**What a day! What an inauspicious beginning.** Just a day of teaching and healing, a day like many other days in the life of those who said yes to Jesus. But this was a particularly exhausting day. A tiring day. Jesus wanted to get away. No elaborate farewells, no ritual good-byes. He turns to his disciples and says, "Let's go!"

**And off they go.** They get in a boat and they set off across the sea. Or rather the lake. It's not that big really. It's not like an ocean crossing. But the geography surrounding this lake makes it susceptible to pop-up storms. Out of nowhere with nothing on the horizon, then - bam - there it is. You're in the middle of a storm.

**That's the nature of storms. They just happen.** Sometimes we can look back and see them coming; but most of the time, they just come. It's almost as if someone, something was out to get us. There's a feeling about the storm in Mark's narrative. There's the sense it isn't just a storm, a natural occurrence, a common thing. There's something bigger here, something malevolent.

**Jesus tells the storm to calm down, by shouting "Peace! Be Still."** These are the same words Mark tells us Jesus used to cast out demons. There, it is translated as "Be quiet! Come out...!" Same words. This storm, Mark implies, is demonic, evil, needing the hand of a savior.

**We've been visited by evil in our world.** You name it in your place or see it in the wider world, our nation, at the heart of things. The storm of evil is all too evident. That evil exists is beyond debate. It's not always easy to name it, to identify it in a messy world, a world broken by sin and fear.

**But sometimes it's the responsibility of those who claim the name of Christ to identify evil,** whether it be in a culture and country so foreign to us as to be almost incomprehensible, or one that's all too familiar and even claiming to be the true face of patriotism. Like Christ, sometimes we need to stand in the face of the demonic and tell it to be quiet and get out.

**But let’s not get ahead of ourselves.** The narrative isn’t about the storm. The storm demands our attention. It wants to be the major character, the biggest threat, the loudest voice. But it’s not.

**This isn’t a story about storms.** It’s a story about Jesus. It’s a story about faith. That’s easy to miss. We’re distracted when we’re afraid. That’s how we lose hope. And often one of the first things to go when we’re upset and distracted is faith, belief in a loving God, and hope in tomorrow and today.

**That’s why Jesus jumps down the throats of the disciples.** They let go. “Have you still no faith?” Still? Just before this situation, Mark tells us Jesus always spoke in parables, in riddles and stories. People often wandered off confused, uncertain. It was as if Jesus didn’t want to spoon feed people. He wanted them to meet him halfway. Take a risk and say I believe, even when I don’t fully understand. I believe, even as I doubt. Jesus was OK with doubts. Doubters get a pass from Jesus.

**But those who were afraid got a reprimand from Jesus.** Mark says Jesus always spoke in parables, except when he spoke to the disciples. He explained everything to them. Everything? Everything. Jesus told them who he was. He told them what he was about. He told them what it meant. Everything. Have you still no faith? What else can I do, says Jesus? What else can I give you? What do you need, Cliff’s Notes? For heaven’s sake!

**At the end of the narrative, the disciples are in awe.** “Who is this?” they said. Even the winds and waves obey him! Who is this? They’d never seen anything like it before. Jesus never stilled a storm before. Never stopped a wind, never smoothed out a wave. It’s no wonder it never occurred to them to ask Jesus to do such a thing. They had no idea that this was in his toolbox.

**Frankly, if they had gently awakened Jesus and said, “Um, it’s pretty wild out here, anything you can do?”** he probably would have smiled and then given them a “watch this” look and brought them to safety.

**The problem is, they don’t ask him to do anything.** Did you notice that? They don’t say, “We need help here.” No, what they say is infinitely more offensive to Jesus.

**It’s evidence they’ve been dozing, their minds wandering as Jesus patiently walked them through his purpose and what he was doing.** Even worse, they missed the mission statement, the center of everything. They forgot the most famous verse in all of the Gospels: “For God so loved the world” ... *so loved* (John 3:16).

**“Don’t you care?” They shouted in their fear.** They lost their grip on the main truth about Christ. “Don’t you care?” You might as well shout at the birds in the air, “Don’t you fly?” Or shout at the raindrops, “Don’t you fall?” Or shake a fist at the sun, “Don’t you shine?”

***Don’t you care?*** Of course, Jesus cares. That’s why he’s sleeping on a cushion in the middle of a storm. He’s exhausted from caring for everyone everywhere. Of course, Jesus cares.

**But in their panic, in their fear, they forgot.** They lost their grip on him and thought only of their own lives. The boat was swamped, and they gave up. On life, on hope, on him. They gave up.

**Do you still have no faith?** It’s easy to forget in the middle of a storm. Forget to hold on to God. Not because Jesus will still every storm, but he will stand with you in the swamped boat, in the crashing waves. God cares, and that’s everything in the middle of a storm.

**There’s a sense of disappointment.** He talks to them like children who are misbehaving. They aren’t leaning into the wind. They aren’t taking a risk, loving like they should, like they could. He doesn’t want them to wait. Now is the time, he says, right now. Yes, the winds are blowing; yes, so much is uncertain; yes, there are plenty of threats. But now is the time to claim faith.

**Paul tells a similar story in (2 Cor. 6).** Paul shares what he endured, hinting, that our lives aren’t going to get any easier. In fact, he suggests that making the choice to believe, to have faith, may bring a whole lot of trouble. And yet, it’s worth the choice. It’s worth the storms that come. Paul would argue that it’s the only way to survive the storms that come – by claiming this relationship, by claiming this family.

**Be at peace. Be still. Claim your relationship with Jesus.** Claim your relationship with each other. Claim your relationship with our church and denomination. Don't be afraid. Don't hold back. If you've become disillusioned or drifted away over the past months, it's time to come back.

**Jesus will do his part. He does the great work of salvation.** But we have a part, too. Ours is to have faith. We are to hold on, to believe in something that is bigger than our wants, bigger than our ego, bigger than our selfish desire. We can't expect him to do our part. Blessings are made to be shared, to be passed on. That's what love does.

**We, as individuals, choose to be a part of something bigger than ourselves.** We become part of a family, a spiritual family. We become part of a community when we choose to have faith on this day. That means we choose to support others and receive support in return. We have resources when we face the storms that come. We offer resources when someone else is struggling to find their feet in the winds that blow. That's how we survive the storm: together.

**Jesus makes our lives together better in every way.**

**Have faith. Trust God. Come back to us. Your soul will be glad.**

**Mark 4:35-41 (CEB)**

Later that day, when evening came, Jesus said to them, “Let’s cross over to the other side of the lake.” They left the crowd and took him in the boat just as he was. Other boats followed along.

Gale-force winds arose, and waves crashed against the boat so that the boat was swamped. But Jesus was in the rear of the boat, sleeping on a pillow. They woke him up and said, “Teacher, don’t you care that we’re drowning?”

He got up and gave orders to the wind, and he said to the lake, “Silence! Be still!” The wind settled down and there was a great calm. Jesus asked them, “Why are you frightened? Don’t you have faith yet?”

Overcome with awe, they said to each other, “Who then is this? Even the wind and the sea obey him!”