Journeying Forward

When I was 12 years old living in New York City with my parents, I was getting ready to go to high school. In New York City when I was growing up at least, you had to apply to go to high school. The process was like applying to college. I researched what were the best schools for what I wanted to study, back then I was deciding between law and business. And so, I applied to several, and if you don’t get into any of the schools you apply to, you attend your zone school, but more often than not your zone school was not where you wanted to go.

During this process I had some questions and so I went to visit the guidance Counselor, Mr. Schilkraut. He was an older gentleman who was getting ready to retire at the end of the year and was still as dedicated as when he first began his career. During our conversation he looked at my transcript and decided I was a good candidate for a program called A Better Chance. The program helps inner city students who excel at school to go to a better school district. For me it was the opportunity to go to New Canaan High School in New Canaan CT.

As you may have noticed New Canaan is not in New York City and I would have to be away from Home during my formative years if I got accepted into the program and my family decided to let me attend. Well eventually after interviews and tests, I was one of two kids who were accepted into the program. And we had a decision to make. My mom had high hopes for me and wanted the best and what she and my dad concluded was, for me to reach my full potential I would have to go to New Canaan High School.

Because sometimes, in order to get to where God is calling you, you must leave the comforts of one place for the unknown. And no matter how much you prepare and make sure everything can go right, you just never know what’s going to happen. And that is exactly what the disciples learned. That there are times in our lives when God takes us from comfort to discomfort in order to get us to something greater.

To understand where I am coming from we must look at the text in context, what comes before this story and what comes after it. Before they head out on the water Jesus has been baptized in the Jordan and he is beginning to call the disciples. And Jesus is with them teaching in the synagogues, and Jesus is beginning to teach to them in parables as they walk around and all of this is happening around Galilee. The importance of this is that Jesus is starting to have a following.

We learned last week that he is teaching in parables not just to the apostles but also those that are around them and he explains the parables in private to the apostles. To sum up, Jesus has a following and they have not left their home areas yet, they are still in their comfort zone area.

And now Jesus instructs them to get in the boat. Why, so that they can go to the other side of the sea of Galilee. And so we ask ourselves what is over there, what is on the other side? The other side are towns, that no in good standing Jewish person would find themselves, they have pig farms, and worship multiple deities and have child sacrifices to the god Pan. It is not a place very welcoming to the Israelites. And yet that is where Jesus is taking them. And just think of the stuff that happens there. The only story outside of the crucifixion the feeding of the 5000 happen there on the other side of the sea of Galilee. Peter confesses Jesus as messiah on the other side of the sea of Galilee. Jesus heals people on the other side of the sea of Galilee. Jesus raises a dead girl to life on the other side of the sea of Galilee. And Jesus sends out the twelve two by two on the other side of the sea of Galilee.

They are leaving the comfort of Galilee to something unknown, and without the trip to the other side of the sea of Galilee the apostles would not have developed into the people needed to spread the Gospel. They had to leave the comforts of Galilee for the discomfort of the unknown because the unknown was the stepping stone that was going to keep them going along the path that God had for them.

Sometimes in order to get to where God is calling you, you must leave something behind, or set something aside to get to where you need to go, even if it means you must travel over the sea. Because the benefit of the other side far outweighs the consequences of staying put. Even if we know the seas can be dangerous to travel because a storm might happen at any moment like the disciples experienced.

The sad part for many people is that they let the comforts of where they are, distract them from getting to where God is calling them. We must remember that as we mature in the faith and learn Satan’s tricks, it is not just Satan convincing us to do what is bad. Satan begins to trick us to stick with what is good instead of moving to what is greater.

Just because something is good, or fine, does not mean it is the best, does not mean that’s the end of the road for you to settle down and be content. It does not mean that God does not have better for you. We must always be asking ourselves is this where I am supposed to be, or am I supposed to get in the boat and head to the other side. Is this the stepping stone, or is it the peak?

And if you are in a different position, maybe you see where God is calling you and you think it is to scary, or you are happy being content and not complete, I urge you to get in the boat. And it may be hard. Its not always leaving a bad situation for something greater. It can also be as we talked about leaving something good or fine for something great. And leaving may have a cost. Because just as God calls us to something, God is also calling us from something. I was called away from family support around me. I was called from my childhood friends and my baseball team. I was called from the diversity of New York City, and the amazing pizza and bagels. And it was hard. And, it was worth it in the end because I truly believe it was the right thing to do. When we decided to accept the call here at Cross and Crown, we were called from another welcoming and nurturing congregation, Lord of Life. We had a home there, fiends there, family there, and we had to pack up and travel across the sea to Florence South Carolina. I was content, I was happy, and yet had to leave the comfort of that place for where God was calling me because that was equipping me for here.

Maybe Its one house for another, maybe its one job for another, maybe its from one group of friends to another, maybe its from one relationship to another, maybe its from one school to another, Whatever it may be we must remember that Jesus is in the boat too.

Once you have decided to get in the boat, it is crucial to remember that we are not alone. In the Gospel reading the apostles are in the boat and Jesus is there too. And this is important because when life is calm and things are going smooth in our transition and in life we can easily get over confident and begin to think we can manage the turmoil and challenges on our own.

Jesus is in the boat and the Bible says, a great windstorm arose and the waves beat into the boat so that the boat was already being swamped. And here is my point that we need to learn from the disciples. The storm arose and it may have come up in the blink of an eye. And so okay take a little bit of time but, get your bearings and go to Jesus. But they do not do that. IT is not until the boat is getting swamped and they fear for their lives that they go to Jesus and wake him up. Too often in our lives we wait until things are really bad to go to Jesus for help. The disciples have seen him work miracles and yet they waited. Well why did they wait. I have a hypothesis.

You see, maybe they worked to find out the best time to leave from the port and head to the other side. They may have sat down and strategized by looking at the farmers almanac for the right time of year to travel, and looked at the meteorologist forecast for the week in order to figure out the perfect day to travel across the sea.

They could have checked the doppler radar and made sure nothing was around and it was all perfect and ready for them to go. And all this planning could have made them confident in their own abilities and make them think they did not need Jesus awake for this journey. And so, when the storm comes, they think they can handle it on their own. They try to do everything they can to get to the other side through the storm on their own ability especially with having fisherman on board who have been traversing the sea their whole lives.

And still, the truth is, we can only go so far on our own. There are times we can’t do it on our own, we must remember that Jesus is on the boat too waiting to be utilized. Because what I learned in life so far is that God does not just step into every situation. God has given us free will, and at times will allow us to struggle when we try to do stuff on our own in order to remind us that we must depend on Him. We must go to Jesus not when the boat is getting full of water, we must go when we see the clouds start to build up, and the sky gets dark, and the sea billows are roaring and be able to go to Jesus.

We must remember that they woke up Jesus in the story and there are times in our journey to the other side of the sea that we will have to hand over the reigns to God completely. Yes, God wants us to work in tandem with him while God is in control. And sometimes we must get out of the way and watch God overcome the obstacles in our way. Because there are certain things in our lives that only Jesus can overcome. They could not calm the storm, only Jesus could. And it does not matter how much planning we may have done and how equipped we are, Jesus is greater than anything that can come our way.

And so we must learn from the disciples, that its not always bad situations that God calls us away from. God can also call us away from what is good and what can make us content. And whatever it is that God is calling us to leave behind or set aside, it is always because God is calling us to something greater. And it may cause us some pain and struggle along the way, and it is always worth it because what God is calling us to is the path that is best for us. So, get in the boat, it is ready for you, and the savior is waiting in them to help you on board. And when the storms come, do not wait for your life to be threatened, go to him at the first sign of danger.