

Stilling Storms
Father's Day

Text: Mark 4:35-41

A mother was out walking with her 4-year-old daughter. The child picked up something off the ground and started to put it into her mouth. The mother took it away and said, 'Don't do that!'

'Why not?' asked the child.

'Because it's on the ground,' said her mother. 'You don't know where it's been. It's dirty, and it's probably loaded with germs that could make you sick.'

The child looked at her mother with total admiration and said, "Mommy, how do you know all this stuff? You're so smart.'

The mother said, 'All Moms know this stuff. It's on the Mom's Test. You have to know it or they don't let you be a Mom.'

There was silence for a minute or so as the child thought this through. 'Oh, I get it,' she said at last. 'And if you don't pass the test you have to be the Daddy?'

Welcome to this Father's Day, 2009.

As someone said, 'Father's Day is like Mother's Day, except the gift is cheaper.' And that's true. But there are some fine Dads in our congregation and we want to honour them. After all, it's not easy being a Dad.

A woman wrote to a magazine to tell about an event that had occurred in her family when she was about eighteen months old. Her mother was out and her dad was in charge of her and her brother who was four years old. She says that she had just recovered from an accident in which she had received some injuries. Someone had given her a little 'tea set' as a get-well gift and it was one of her favourite toys.

Her Dad was in the living room one evening engrossed in the evening news and her brother was playing nearby in the living room when the little girl brought her Dad a little cup of make believe 'tea', which was just plain water. After several cups of this tea and lots of praise from Dad for making such a yummy concoction, the little girl's Mom came home. Her Dad made Mom wait in the living room to watch this eighteen-month-old bring him a cup of tea, because it was 'just the cutest thing!'

Her Mom waited, and sure enough, here the girl came down the hall with a cup of tea for her Daddy. Mom watched Dad drink this special team, then asked, 'Did it ever occur to you that the only place that baby can reach to get water is the toilet?'

‘Yuck!’. It’s not easy being a Dad.

One day said he found out what is meant by the term ‘a spitting image’, when he tried to feed cereal to his infant son.

Which reminds me of a news story sometime back about a 43 year-old German man who was airlifted to the hospital after he fell off a second story balcony. It seems this 43 year old man was engaged in a spitting contest with his 12 year old son. You have to be male to appreciate the significance of this story. Anyway, according to the story, this father lost his balance leaning too far forward attempting to out-spit his son. He tumbled over the ledge and landed on a balcony of the apartment below.

It’s not easy being a Dad, but never before has it been more important that we have good Dads. These are stressful times – times that require superlative parenting. Not every biological father is a good Dad. And today there are stepdads who are facing the challenge of being a Dad to children who may or may not be ready to accept them. There are also grandfathers who are filling the role of surrogate Dads. This is a new world, particularly with regard to the family. Today we sincerely salute all those men who have consciously seeking to provide a wholesome Christian environment to young people, in whatever role they may be in, just as we saluted Christian women on Mother’s Day.

Our scripture lesson today concerns that time when Christ stilled the storm on the Sea of Galilee. You know the story from Mark’s Gospel. Jesus and his disciples are crossing the sea when a furious squall comes up. The waves are breaking over the boat. It’s nearly swamped. While this is going on, Jesus is in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The frightened disciples wake him and say, “*Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?*”

What happens next is one of the most dramatic scenes in Scripture. Jesus gets up, rebukes the wind and says to the waves, “*Quiet! Be still!*”

Suddenly the wind dies down and it is completely calm.

Jesus then turns to his disciples and asks, “*Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?*”

Then Mark says something really interesting. He says, “*They were terrified and asked each other, ‘Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!’*”

The disciples were more frightened by the fact that Jesus could still the storm than they were of the storm itself. And they should be frightened. Jesus was no ordinary man. Only the power of God can still an angry storm and Jesus had done just that.

Christ is still in the business of stilling storms. We need to understand that. Sometimes those storms are in our individual hearts. Sometimes those storms are in our families. Sometimes the storms are in society. But Christ is still in the business of stilling storms.

Wherever there are people there are storms. You would agree with that, wouldn't you? Wherever there are people there are storms. These storms may be personal storms, storms raging in our individual hearts and minds. Or they may be storms in our social relationships. Either way, they can bring peril.

There was a fascinating but somewhat cruel study done in Russia sometime back. Scientists subjected a group of chimpanzees to an assortment of experiences that made them violently and helplessly jealous. For example, they would take a chimpanzee who had been living happily with his family and suddenly rip him from his family to an adjoining cage from which he could see and hear his family but could not reach them. In full view another chimpanzee was given his place. Screaming with rage, he could only watch as his fury mounted. Within three months he was dead of severe hardening of the arteries and of high blood pressure. He was killed by his jealousy and rage.

A storm within one's own soul can have tragic circumstances. Jealousy, anger, bitterness, guilt. The list of storms that can rock our individual souls is lengthy indeed. We need a Saviour when such storms rage within.

But there are other storms, storms that may rock our relationships. Those storms may be in our marriages or between us and our children or in our workplace or our community or in the world as a whole.

In the nineteenth century, philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer compared the human race to porcupines huddled together on a bitter cold winter night. The colder it gets outside, the more we huddle together for warmth; but the closer we get to one another, the more we hurt one another with our sharp quills.

Pastor John Ortberg has a delightful discussion on porcupines in his book, 'Everybody's Normal Until You Get to Know Them. Porcupines are members of the rodent family, says Ortberg. They have around 30,000 quills attached to their bodies. Each quill can be driven into an enemy, and the enemy's body heat will cause the microscopic barb to expand and become more firmly embedded. The wound can fester; the more dangerous ones, affecting vital organs, can be fatal.

The porcupine is not generally regarded as a loveable animal, Ortberg continues. Books and movies celebrate almost every other conceivable animal. Dogs, cats, horses, pigs – like 'Babe' or Arnold Ziffel in the old TV show 'Green Acres' – spiders – as in 'Charlotte's Web' – dolphins in 'Flipper' – bears like 'Gentle Ben' – and killer whales as in 'Free Willy'. Even skunks like Pepe Le Pew. There are no famous porcupines that I am aware of.

'as a general rule, porcupines have two methods for handling relationships: withdrawal or attack. They either head for a tree or stick out their quills. They are generally solitary animals. Wolves run in packs; sheep huddle in flocks; we speak of herds of elephants and gaggles of geese and even a murder of crows. But there is no special name for a group of porcupines. They travel alone.

‘Porcupines don’t always want to be alone. In the late autumn, a young porcupine’s thoughts turn to love. But love turns out to be a risky business when you’re a porcupine. Females are open to dinner and a movie only once a year; the window of opportunity closes quickly. And a girl porcupine’s ‘no’ is the most widely respected turndown in all the animal kingdom. Fear and anger make them dangerous little creatures to be around.’

People can be like porcupines, can’t they? How often, even in the closest of relationships, we can hurt one another. Even worse, toxic feelings have a way of intensifying if not dealt with at the earliest possible moment. It is not enough to ride out these storms. Someone needs to calm the storms. That someone, of course, is Christ. But how? How does Christ calm these storms? Let me suggest several ways.

First of all, Christ calms the storm within us. We will not do well in dealing with stormy relationships if we cannot conquer the storms in our own hearts and souls.

In the movie ‘Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story’, Lee’s mentor tells him: ‘You have to conquer the demons inside you. Otherwise you will pass them on to your children.’

One reason we have conflict with others is that we have conflict within ourselves. We are often part of the problem rather than part of the solution. We strike back when we should keep quiet. We disparage when it’s time to encourage. We sulk when we should be reaching out. We have to calm the storm within us before we can have satisfactory relationships with others.

Baseball superstar Mickey Mantle was interviewed shortly before his death. He had been a hero on the ball field, but not such a superstar outside baseball. After his playing days ended, he checked into the Betty Ford Clinic to deal with the consequences of a lifetime of alcohol abuse. Part of his struggle involved the loss of his son, Billy, who had died of a heart attack while suffering from Hodgkin’s disease, a genetic disease which had killed Mantle’s father and grandfather at an early age.

In the interview, Mickey Mantle said, ‘One of the things I learned at the Betty Ford Clinic was why I was depressed. I wasn’t a good father. I always felt like I wasn’t there for my kids like my father was for me.’

Sometimes we have to conquer our own personal demons before we can reach out to others. Christ calms the storm first by calming us.

Secondly he calms the storm by helping us imitate his way of dealing with people. Remember how he dealt with people? Gentleness, kindness, forgiveness. Never lashing out. Could we be like that – even as we firmly maintain our own integrity? It’s tough. We can accomplish this enormous task only one way – by walking as closely to him as we can.

Sometime back the BBC produced a television series called 'Walking with Dinosaurs'. It seems that dinosaurs had a good trick to improve their own safety. They would always walk in single file, each one following in the footsteps of the one before. That way, any other creature that came across their trail would be unable to tell whether there were only one or two of these huge creatures up ahead, or a large herd.

We read in 1 Peter 2: "*to this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps.*" *He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.* When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats." (21-23) That's quite an example. The only way we can follow Christ's example is to walk as closely with him as possible, to walk in his steps. We need more than his words, his advice. We need his Spirit to come into us making us new people.

Christ can calm storms – storms within our own hearts, storms in our homes, storms within our community and world. this is so important.

It's said that surgeons invited to dinner parties are often asked to carve the meat – or worse yet, to watch the host carve while commenting on the surgeon's occupation. At one party, one surgeon was watching the carving while his host kept up a running commentary: 'How am I doing, doc? How do you like my technique? I'd make a pretty good surgeon, don't' you think.'

When the host finished and the slices of meat lay neatly on the serving platter, the surgeon spoke up, 'Anybody can take them apart, Harry. Now let's see you put them back together.'

What's true of meat is also true of relationships. It is much easier to carve them apart than it is to put them back together again. Christ can heal a severed relationship, but it is better if things do not get that far in the first place. We need to have Christ calm the storms in our individual lives before they destroy us. We need him to calm the storms in our families and other precious relationships before such relationships are permanently damaged. If there is a storm going on in your life, won't you give it to Christ today?