

“Peace, Be Still!”
Mark 4:35-41, Psalm 10
August 7, 2016
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Peace begins when the Spirit of God brings peace to our hearts.

This is still a strange time of year for me. It feels like that for most of my life, August has been spent in getting ready to go back to school. For twenty years, from the time I was 5 until I was 25 there was never an August when I didn't start the countdown until school began. Did I have everything I needed? When would we go school shopping? Where was that list of school supplies, or in later years, where was that list of books I was supposed to have read over the summer? And of course, who was going to be my teacher this year? All through grade school, then junior high, high school, straight on to college and then graduate school. Every August was spent thinking about September and the beginning of the school year. Then there were a few years off, but then along came Brandon, and Annie, and Kendall, and instead of worrying about those things for myself, I worried about them for my kids. So from the fall of 1992 until the fall of 2014, Erin's last year at Louisville, we had 22 more years of getting ready for school.

I remember my first day of first grade. Do you? There were many things to worry about that fall of 1964. Did I have all my supplies? Did my new haircut look stupid and would the kids pick on me because of it? What was gym class going to be like, was it as terrible as everyone said, and would I remember how to tie my new tennis shoes? At least that first day I didn't have to worry about who my teacher was. I knew already that I had Mrs. Pettigrew for first grade. I wasn't in the same class with my best friends Keith and John but that was ok, because Mrs. Pettigrew was the best teacher. She was old and gray-haired and kind and the word was that she didn't make you work too hard, like that mean Mrs. Hawley. So I went to school that day feeling pretty good. When the bell rang we lined up and went marching into our rooms and I went to Mrs. Pettigrew's room and found a desk. This was at the height of the baby boom and all the classes were overcrowded with 35-40 kids in each one. I remember up on the front bulletin board were name tags with the names of all the kids on them. And

there was mine, in nice big letters, Mark. And she started calling each child forward, alphabetical by last name, and giving them their name tag. But then something happened. She got to the “E”s and called a boy forward who was also named Mark. And she gave him the nametag. And I looked and looked and there was no other tag with my name on it. What happened? I started to get worried. I started to get red-faced and embarrassed like I had done something wrong. I was in the wrong place, but this is where my mother had told me to come. Mrs. Pettigrew got to the “J”s and kept right on going. No more “Marks”. I was beginning to panic. What was I going to do? Was there no place for me? Had I been overlooked? Had I been forgotten? Tears were coming to my eyes. Then Mrs. Pettigrew asked if there were any children whose names had not been called. I raised my hand and all the other children turned to look at me. Tears started flowing. But Mrs. Pettigrew said, “Let’s go see where you belong. We have so many children this year that I sure there was some switching around.” And she took me out in the hallway, handed me a tissue and took me to the office where of course they found my name and that I was supposed to be in another class—Mrs. Hawley. Oh no! Now I would have to work. I’d even have to learn to read!

I have to admit that was the beginning of a great first grade year, and Mrs. Hawley was a terrific teacher. But I still remember that feeling of being lost, of abandonment, that moment of panic. Have you had moments like that, when your fear or your anxiety drown out your rational mind? Now I was six, I didn’t have too much of a rational mind then, but there have been times since that I’ve felt overwhelmed, when I was scared, when I didn’t know what was going to happen. That’s the kind of moment the disciples have when they are in the boat with Jesus and the storm comes up. That’s when it feels like we are the psalmist, “Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?” Or our words could be the words of the disciples, “Do you not care that we are perishing?” Maybe that’s not where you are right now, I’m not there either, but I have been and I bet you’ve had moments like that too. Or maybe you have times like that more often than you’d like. Maybe you worry about your kids, or about our community, or our country. There’s plenty to be anxious about,

isn't there? Maybe you're facing a big change in your life, and you're not sure how it's going to turn out, and you're nervous about that. Or maybe you're waiting for some kind of news and there's anxiety in the waiting. Or maybe you're just feeling overwhelmed by your life and you're not even sure you know why. You just are. And maybe you wish you could wave a magic wand over your circumstances to make everything all right and to help you feel more at ease. Peace. Isn't that what you want, what you need? Peace? Julie Pennington-Russell comments about this passage, "Jesus and his disciples are in the boat, and it looks like that boat is going down. And there is Jesus in the back, sound asleep, with his head on a pillow. You know, I love how relentlessly honest the Bible is about us, how truthful Scripture is about how it feels to live a real human life. For one thing, it tells the truth about how sometimes when you and I are scared and we actually do manage to call on Jesus for help, it doesn't always feel as though he responds, does it? At least not when we'd like, in the way that we'd like. Sometimes in the middle of our fear we feel like those disciples did, that maybe Jesus just doesn't care enough. "Hey, we're dying here! Don't you care?" You might think that having Jesus in your boat would guarantee some smoother sailing. But, no, with Christ in your boat you meet the same scary wind and waves as everybody else."¹

Don't you think that God should be on our side? Making it a bit easier for us? Sometimes when I watch the news I wonder if God is asleep somewhere. Where's the help? What is God thinking? Why does he stand so far off? But that's not the end of the story is it? Jesus doesn't stay asleep in the boat. Mark says that he got up and he speaks rather harshly to the wind and says, "Peace!" and then looks to the waves and says calmly, "be still." And they do, and the wind dies down. The disciples cried out to him and he didn't ignore them, but he stands up in the middle of the storm and says, Peace, be still. And as many have wondered, was that command to the wind and the waves? Or maybe it was actually a command to the anxious hearts of the disciples—Peace, be still. Maybe it's a command to us. Peace, be still.

1 Pennington-Russell, Julie. "A Word for the Wind and the Waves." *Day 1*, September 14, 2008.

We long for peace. We wish there was no ISIS, no strife in South Sudan or Afghanistan. We wish there was a good solution to our national problems of race and poverty drugs and prisons and crime and guns. We sometimes hear the hatred and meanness that is directed from one group to another and we wish for peace and we wonder if God is asleep. But isn't this where peace starts? In our anxious hearts. If we have peace within us, if we are listening to that voice of Jesus telling us, "Peace, be still" then when a harsh word comes to us, we don't have to respond in kind. If our hearts are at peace, we can perhaps be concerned about the person who is poor or in prison and not just be anxious about our own needs. If our hearts are at peace, we can not worry about ourselves because we are at peace with God and our security rests with him, and we can quiet our anxieties and rest in him. Because even if storms do arise, we can be at peace, knowing that our souls, our welfare, our futures are in the hands of the one who commands the wind and the waves.