**Reflection on Mark 4:35–41**

**Rev. Christine Gilbert for St. Andrew’s Uniting Church**

When evening had come, Jesus implored his disciples to cross over to the other side. *When evening had come.* It seems strange to set out on a darkening sea. But in the Jewish culture of the Gospel writer, sundown, not the sun’s rising, signals a new day. So, as we stand on the cusp of the longest night of the year and of a season defined by its darkness, the Gospel reminds us that life and possibility take shape in the dark, too. Embryos growing, seeds breaking open, dreams that lead to visions and new actions all begin in the dark.

Jesus and the disciples are constantly crossing over in the Gospel of Mark. They no sooner get settled in one place when Jesus is off again. What might be implied here? What might it mean to cross over to a different place?

The Gospel writer seems to use this image to indicate a change in perspective, a difference in viewpoint such as the one we gain when we cross from one side of the room to another. Some of you have noticed how even in the absence of pews, we have come to find ourselves sitting in relatively the same place week after week. There’s something within us, it seems, that appreciates and maybe even needs regularity. But in noticing this, some have made an intentional effort to cross over, to take on a different view of the room, of the space setting and of the community.

Similarly, the image of crossing over in the Gospel is an invitation to change our way of seeing and hearing. We are urged to take on the perspective of God’s realm as taught and revealed by Jesus, which in many ways is an alternative to the worldview we typically live and breathe in our society and culture. “Follow me,” Jesus encourages, “Take on my view of things, learn to live and love as I do.”

The pandemic experience has been a crossing over journey for the whole world. Together, collectively, we are given a new view of one another and the world in which we live. For those who choose to look, this time has revealed the disparity, divisions and injustices that exist in our world and has sharpened our awareness of the harm caused by humans to the environment. It has also unveiled possibilities for change going forward, if we dare.

As Uniting Church President Deidre Palmer has written,

One of the key learnings in this time of crisis is how deeply we are connected to one another, how deeply we depend on each other. What we have seen clearly is that we are only as strong and healthy as the most vulnerable members of our society. …It has shown us that when we make sacrifices for the well-being of the whole society, everyone benefits.

Choosing to set out on a new path is not always peaceful. We may be called upon to make what Richard Rohr calls “good trouble” so, in his words, “society can spiritually and politically mature.” In other words, finding a new, more life-giving path includes truth telling, protest, and prophecy. As passionately as we might feel, though, putting ourselves out there is not easy for most of us. And we ourselves may find it challenging to implement *in our own lives* the changes we so desire, to endure the pain, sacrifice and upheaval that are often part of it.

In the middle of the transition from where we are to where we are going, insecurities, resistances, doubts and fears rise in us like waves in a sea storm. After all, even the most experienced fishers were overcome in the Gospel story and we, too, might give in to our anxiety and disquiet at times.

Full of fear, the disciples wake Jesus who is asleep on the cushion. He gazes at them and at the waves that have destabilised and upset them. He stills the storm and brings peace to their anxiousness.

Jesus is able to do this because he is untouched by the storm. He already lives out of a different perspective. The realm of God has well and truly taken hold in his outlook and in him there is consistency, inner peace and pure love regardless of the external circumstances.

The invitation for us, then, is to find ways to abide in Christ, *to gaze with him* on the storms of anxiety and fear so they can be calmed by his peace and love. Redon’s image of “The Mystical Boat” captures this invitation for us beautifully. In it we see figures in the stern, gazing together into the future. Though the water is choppy and the sky grey, the figures appear to be undisturbed. They are not rushing about or straining against the waves, but intent to let the spirit-wind carry them towards their destination.

What would enable you to be in a place like this with Christ? What helps you look at the realities of life and, rather than being overcome by them, experience peace and calm assurance? Our five-week series will end by exploring this question more fully. But for now…

It seems the season of winter and the darkness it brings in particular are especially conducive to the spiritual work required of us when so much has come undone and so many possibilities await our discernment. Darkness itself brings on a unique perspective. Even the most familiar spaces feel different in the dark––larger and more expansive. We must move slowly or risk stubbing our toes and bruising our knees, or something worse!

There seems to be a wish to rush ahead for many. We want the pandemic to end and for life to feel more secure and normal. This is completely understandable. But this season encourages a gentler pace and *patience.* We need time to learn the lessons and discover the gifts of this significant experience.

In the dark, we also grope around for that which is unseen. How many of us have knocked over clocks and lotion bottles as we search for the light on our bedside table? Our usual ways of knowing do not work and we need alternative means of gaining information and discernment. So it is with our journey towards the new perspectives that are being revealed. We are invited to draw on deep, inner wisdom and reach with the heart towards that which is unseen, yet whose presence is palpable and entirely trustworthy.

Michael Leunig encourages this inward reach as he prays for a time of reflection and resonance in preparation for winter.

Dear God,

Let us prepare for winter. The sun has turned away from us and the nest of summer hangs broken in a tree. Life slips through our fingers and, as darkness gathers, our hands grow cold. It is time to go inside. It is time for reflection and resonance. It is time for contemplation. Let us go inside.

Amen.