

**LESS THAN ROOM SERVICE; JUNE 21, 2009, FATHER'S DAY; MARK 4:35-41; THOMAS H. YORTY, WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

One of the great refrains of the Bible are the words, "Do not be afraid." From the angels announcing Jesus' birth to Jesus himself those calming words are given by a loving God.

And yet, fear like a fungus grows on our relationships, in the dark and dank corners of our careers, in anticipation of a visit to the doctor. We harbor fears for our present and future as a church and community, as a nation and world.

Fear is seductive because wherever anything could go wrong something in us can't resist entertaining the thought of what would happen if it did. It seems almost second nature to focus on disaster: a teenager out with the car misses curfew; the days before the test results; retiring with a vastly reduced 401k.

But those words, "Do not be afraid," are offered not as a mere palliative or as something nice to say or as words spoken naively or insincerely but as a command.

For to succumb to fear is to succumb to distrust or even rejection of God's alternative to fear which is faith. But not just faith in the abstract or ethereal but faith in the biblical promises and experience of God's people over the millennia that the God who watches over will not let us fall; that this God knows our needs better than we do and that this loving God promises never to abandon us.

Note those promises say nothing of freedom from the vagaries of life's twists and turns; of life's consequences for poor judgment or self-serving decisions; nor do they contain guarantees and assurances that our lives will follow the exact course we map out for them.

So if we are to choose faith over fear at some point, at many points, on most if not on all days we face a decision to let go or not.

A decision to let go of the scenarios of disaster and destruction but also of imposing our will and way over God's will and way for our lives which, says Jesus and the Bible, is the path to our best, most fulfilled lives.

While the Bible does not promise that God's will and way for us will shelter us from the bumps and bruises of life; some of which occur to us randomly, some of which we unwittingly or wittingly bring on ourselves – the Bible does say that if we embrace God's path for our lives nothing can separate us from God and therefore from facing life's greatest difficulties with dignity and grace and calm.

Today's story from the Gospel of Mark describes the disciples experiencing a situation that takes them outside of their control and comfort zone.

The reading immediately preceding today's story is Jesus telling his followers that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed tiny at first but then it grows to become one of the greatest of plants. And the process by which it grows is in God's care and control. We simply need to trust and accept that the seed will respond.

But when the storm comes up and swamps the boat the disciples demonstrate little trust and rouse Jesus from his sleep admonishing him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

There it is: fear in control; and the fears of the disciples have them jumping to the conclusion of disaster; that they will perish. This is a wonderful metaphor Mark gives us. So many circumstances in life are like storms that swamp our boats and we cry out, like victims, “God don’t you care; where are you; we are perishing.”

Mark offers this story not to tell us that God is uncaring or that the storms of life are not real but to put us in the boat with the disciples to examine again how fear can take over our lives; or take over the life of the church – fundamentalism and McCarthyism are examples of fear in the driver’s seat of religion and politics.

Mark was written when the early Christian movement was beginning to experience rejection and persecution. The little boat of the early church was being tossed on the sea of a hostile culture. In fact, Mark cleverly uses a boat – taken from the ark, one of the first symbols for the church – to address in today’s story the question of fear and faith.

There is another interesting clue to the meaning of this story; after Jesus invites the disciples to go the other side, Mark says, “leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, *just as he was.*”

My hunch is that Mark is setting up a contrast between taking Jesus with us in life, in the life of the church “just as he is” or when the going gets tough trying to exchange that Jesus for Jesus “just as we want him to be.”

The disciples in the story and in the early church don’t want Jesus in the middle of the squall ‘just as he is’ asleep on the cushion in the stern of the boat. They want him to rescue them from their time of trial, remove the danger. They want some other Jesus than the Jesus they presently have.

And this has been a pernicious problem since the beginning of the church. Scholars and preachers today on both sides of the theological spectrum are producing a plethora of books on Jesus; not Jesus ‘as he is’ but Jesus as they wish him to be.

The historical information depicting Jesus provides only a scant outline; the Gospels themselves fill in that outline according to issues and problems facing the early church to whom they were writing. Beyond these simple portraits many if not most modern writers make Jesus into a straw man to knock down or superman to idolize depending on what ax they are grinding or culture war they are fighting.

I recently heard of one book just published that claims there was no historical Jesus at all and the figure the Gospels present was a pagan.

The impulse to abandon the God of our ancestors and make gods of our own choosing goes back to the golden calf the people of Israel fashioned in the wilderness when Moses was away on Mt. Sinai.

This impulse rears its head whenever the church is in crisis: during the first century persecutions; the Reformation; slavery and Civil War in this country; the years just preceding and during the Great Depression; Civil Rights – any time the ark of God’s people is rocked by the wind and waves of a stormy culture.

Two writers who steer admirably clear of exchanging Jesus just as he was – for Jesus as we want him to be in the midst of our crisis are Roman Catholic Garry Wills and Harvard Chaplain Peter Gomes.

I am sure there are others but Wills' *What Jesus Meant* and Gomes' *The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus* do a fine job claiming the ground between abdicating faith to reason and science on the one hand and turning Jesus into a talisman for a prosperous life on the other hand.

Maybe it is hard to take Jesus as he is because we, in North America, we of relative affluence, in a society of advanced technological devices in a consumer driven society believe that religion, even Jesus should be served to suit our palate.

But I am wondering today if this impulse to follow a Jesus of our own making or a spirituality of our own concoction rather than Jesus as he is doesn't stunt our spiritual growth and scuttle the great vessel of the church; which is on the same mission as Noah in his ark – to rescue and preserve life from the floods of our time.

The correct formula for following Jesus as I recall is not that Jesus would change but that we would change. Repent and be baptized is the Biblical phrase; that is literally, in the Greek, turn around and be made new. Conversion is another word; transformation too gets at the depth and totality of this change.

Nicodemus finds his heart after spending a lifetime in his head; Zaccheus restores to those he has fleeced double what he took; the rich young man unfortunately was unable to change, to sell what he had, give the proceeds to the poor and follow Jesus but the point is still change for those who would navigate this life in the church of Jesus Christ.

But the older I get the more difficult I realize it is to change. I amaze myself with the routines of my life from oatmeal every morning to wearing button-down shirts all these years. Change just isn't easy.

But somehow if we are to be the ones to change and not Jesus then it seems to me we need to relocate ourselves. For much of the mainline church in recent history religion has become not a ship of faith to sail the troubled waters of our time but a kind of theological hotel we escape to for the weekend or at least Sunday morning; a hotel with room service and a spiritual menu du jour for every religious palate.

Rather today's Gospel calls us into the vessel of the church to sail with Jesus to the other side, the land where God reigns; the kingdom that starts in our hearts like a mustard seed and grows into a mighty plant giving shade and shelter to all.

To get there means trusting him without demanding who he should be or what he should do; trusting his reason for summoning us into this vessel called the church even when we think it is about to capsize.

Someone said 'courage is fear that has said its prayers.' If we could be that honest raising Alissa and Simon; if we could teach them and all of our children to live with courage like that and remember Jesus' words to those frightened followers on Easter morning 'do not be afraid', whatever else they face in life, they'll be just fine.

That's a worthy goal for any father or mother or mentor.

Of course, the other clue to the meaning of the story is Jesus' power to calm the storm. He did do that and does it still for troubled hearts who turn to him. Amen.

**LESS THAN ROOM SERVICE; JUNE 21, 2009, FATHER'S DAY; MARK 4:35-41; THOMAS H. YORTY, WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

One of the great refrains of the Bible are the words, "Do not be afraid." From the angels announcing Jesus' birth to Jesus himself those calming words are given by a loving God.

And yet, fear like a fungus grows on our relationships, in the dark and dank corners of our careers, in anticipation of a visit to the doctor. We harbor fears for our present and future as a church and community, as a nation and world.

Fear is seductive because wherever anything could go wrong something in us can't resist entertaining the thought of what would happen if it did. It seems almost second nature to focus on disaster: a teenager out with the car misses curfew; the days before the test results; retiring with a vastly reduced 401k.

But those words, "Do not be afraid," are offered not as a mere palliative or as something nice to say or as words spoken naively or insincerely but as a command.

For to succumb to fear is to succumb to distrust or even rejection of God's alternative to fear which is faith. But not just faith in the abstract or ethereal but faith in the biblical promises and experience of God's people over the millennia that the God who watches over will not let us fall; that this God knows our needs better than we do and that this loving God promises never to abandon us.

Note those promises say nothing of freedom from the vagaries of life's twists and turns; of life's consequences for poor judgment or self-serving decisions; nor do they contain guarantees and assurances that our lives will follow the exact course we map out for them.

So if we are to choose faith over fear at some point, at many points, on most if not on all days we face a decision to let go or not.

A decision to let go of the scenarios of disaster and destruction but also of imposing our will and way over God's will and way for our lives which, says Jesus and the Bible, is the path to our best, most fulfilled lives.

While the Bible does not promise that God's will and way for us will shelter us from the bumps and bruises of life; some of which occur to us randomly, some of which we unwittingly or wittingly bring on ourselves – the Bible does say that if we embrace God's path for our lives nothing can separate us from God and therefore from facing life's greatest difficulties with dignity and grace and calm.

Today's story from the Gospel of Mark describes the disciples experiencing a situation that takes them outside of their control and comfort zone.

The reading immediately preceding today's story is Jesus telling his followers that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed tiny at first but then it grows to become one of the greatest of plants. And the process by which it grows is in God's care and control. We simply need to trust and accept that the seed will respond.

But when the storm comes up and swamps the boat the disciples demonstrate little trust and rouse Jesus from his sleep admonishing him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

There it is: fear in control; and the fears of the disciples have them jumping to the conclusion of disaster; that they will perish. This is a wonderful metaphor Mark gives us. So many circumstances in life are like storms that swamp our boats and we cry out, like victims, “God don’t you care; where are you; we are perishing.”

Mark offers this story not to tell us that God is uncaring or that the storms of life are not real but to put us in the boat with the disciples to examine again how fear can take over our lives; or take over the life of the church – fundamentalism and McCarthyism are examples of fear in the driver’s seat of religion and politics.

Mark was written when the early Christian movement was beginning to experience rejection and persecution. The little boat of the early church was being tossed on the sea of a hostile culture. In fact, Mark cleverly uses a boat – taken from the ark, one of the first symbols for the church – to address in today’s story the question of fear and faith.

There is another interesting clue to the meaning of this story; after Jesus invites the disciples to go the other side, Mark says, “leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, *just as he was.*”

My hunch is that Mark is setting up a contrast between taking Jesus with us in life, in the life of the church “just as he is” or when the going gets tough trying to exchange that Jesus for Jesus “just as we want him to be.”

The disciples in the story and in the early church don’t want Jesus in the middle of the squall ‘just as he is’ asleep on the cushion in the stern of the boat. They want him to rescue them from their time of trial, remove the danger. They want some other Jesus than the Jesus they presently have.

And this has been a pernicious problem since the beginning of the church. Scholars and preachers today on both sides of the theological spectrum are producing a plethora of books on Jesus; not Jesus ‘as he is’ but Jesus as they wish him to be.

The historical information depicting Jesus provides only a scant outline; the Gospels themselves fill in that outline according to issues and problems facing the early church to whom they were writing. Beyond these simple portraits many if not most modern writers make Jesus into a straw man to knock down or superman to idolize depending on what ax they are grinding or culture war they are fighting.

I recently heard of one book just published that claims there was no historical Jesus at all and the figure the Gospels present was a pagan.

The impulse to abandon the God of our ancestors and make gods of our own choosing goes back to the golden calf the people of Israel fashioned in the wilderness when Moses was away on Mt. Sinai.

This impulse rears its head whenever the church is in crisis: during the first century persecutions; the Reformation; slavery and Civil War in this country; the years just preceding and during the Great Depression; Civil Rights – any time the ark of God’s people is rocked by the wind and waves of a stormy culture.

Two writers who steer admirably clear of exchanging Jesus just as he was – for Jesus as we want him to be in the midst of our crisis are Roman Catholic Garry Wills and Harvard Chaplain Peter Gomes.

I am sure there are others but Wills' *What Jesus Meant* and Gomes' *The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus* do a fine job claiming the ground between abdicating faith to reason and science on the one hand and turning Jesus into a talisman for a prosperous life on the other hand.

Maybe it is hard to take Jesus as he is because we, in North America, we of relative affluence, in a society of advanced technological devices in a consumer driven society believe that religion, even Jesus should be served to suit our palate.

But I am wondering today if this impulse to follow a Jesus of our own making or a spirituality of our own concoction rather than Jesus as he is doesn't stunt our spiritual growth and scuttle the great vessel of the church; which is on the same mission as Noah in his ark – to rescue and preserve life from the floods of our time.

The correct formula for following Jesus as I recall is not that Jesus would change but that we would change. Repent and be baptized is the Biblical phrase; that is literally, in the Greek, turn around and be made new. Conversion is another word; transformation too gets at the depth and totality of this change.

Nicodemus finds his heart after spending a lifetime in his head; Zaccheus restores to those he has fleeced double what he took; the rich young man unfortunately was unable to change, to sell what he had, give the proceeds to the poor and follow Jesus but the point is still change for those who would navigate this life in the church of Jesus Christ.

But the older I get the more difficult I realize it is to change. I amaze myself with the routines of my life from oatmeal every morning to wearing button-down shirts all these years. Change just isn't easy.

But somehow if we are to be the ones to change and not Jesus then it seems to me we need to relocate ourselves. For much of the mainline church in recent history religion has become not a ship of faith to sail the troubled waters of our time but a kind of theological hotel we escape to for the weekend or at least Sunday morning; a hotel with room service and a spiritual menu du jour for every religious palate.

Rather today's Gospel calls us into the vessel of the church to sail with Jesus to the other side, the land where God reigns; the kingdom that starts in our hearts like a mustard seed and grows into a mighty plant giving shade and shelter to all.

To get there means trusting him without demanding who he should be or what he should do; trusting his reason for summoning us into this vessel called the church even when we think it is about to capsize.

Someone said 'courage is fear that has said its prayers.' If we could be that honest raising Alissa and Simon; if we could teach them and all of our children to live with courage like that and remember Jesus' words to those frightened followers on Easter morning 'do not be afraid', whatever else they face in life, they'll be just fine.

That's a worthy goal for any father or mother or mentor.

Of course, the other clue to the meaning of the story is Jesus' power to calm the storm. He did do that and does it still for troubled hearts who turn to him. Amen.

**LESS THAN ROOM SERVICE; JUNE 21, 2009, FATHER'S DAY; MARK 4:35-41; THOMAS H. YORTY, WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

One of the great refrains of the Bible are the words, "Do not be afraid." From the angels announcing Jesus' birth to Jesus himself those calming words are given by a loving God.

And yet, fear like a fungus grows on our relationships, in the dark and dank corners of our careers, in anticipation of a visit to the doctor. We harbor fears for our present and future as a church and community, as a nation and world.

Fear is seductive because wherever anything could go wrong something in us can't resist entertaining the thought of what would happen if it did. It seems almost second nature to focus on disaster: a teenager out with the car misses curfew; the days before the test results; retiring with a vastly reduced 401k.

But those words, "Do not be afraid," are offered not as a mere palliative or as something nice to say or as words spoken naively or insincerely but as a command.

For to succumb to fear is to succumb to distrust or even rejection of God's alternative to fear which is faith. But not just faith in the abstract or ethereal but faith in the biblical promises and experience of God's people over the millennia that the God who watches over will not let us fall; that this God knows our needs better than we do and that this loving God promises never to abandon us.

Note those promises say nothing of freedom from the vagaries of life's twists and turns; of life's consequences for poor judgment or self-serving decisions; nor do they contain guarantees and assurances that our lives will follow the exact course we map out for them.

So if we are to choose faith over fear at some point, at many points, on most if not on all days we face a decision to let go or not.

A decision to let go of the scenarios of disaster and destruction but also of imposing our will and way over God's will and way for our lives which, says Jesus and the Bible, is the path to our best, most fulfilled lives.

While the Bible does not promise that God's will and way for us will shelter us from the bumps and bruises of life; some of which occur to us randomly, some of which we unwittingly or wittingly bring on ourselves – the Bible does say that if we embrace God's path for our lives nothing can separate us from God and therefore from facing life's greatest difficulties with dignity and grace and calm.

Today's story from the Gospel of Mark describes the disciples experiencing a situation that takes them outside of their control and comfort zone.

The reading immediately preceding today's story is Jesus telling his followers that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed tiny at first but then it grows to become one of the greatest of plants. And the process by which it grows is in God's care and control. We simply need to trust and accept that the seed will respond.

But when the storm comes up and swamps the boat the disciples demonstrate little trust and rouse Jesus from his sleep admonishing him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

There it is: fear in control; and the fears of the disciples have them jumping to the conclusion of disaster; that they will perish. This is a wonderful metaphor Mark gives us. So many circumstances in life are like storms that swamp our boats and we cry out, like victims, “God don’t you care; where are you; we are perishing.”

Mark offers this story not to tell us that God is uncaring or that the storms of life are not real but to put us in the boat with the disciples to examine again how fear can take over our lives; or take over the life of the church – fundamentalism and McCarthyism are examples of fear in the driver’s seat of religion and politics.

Mark was written when the early Christian movement was beginning to experience rejection and persecution. The little boat of the early church was being tossed on the sea of a hostile culture. In fact, Mark cleverly uses a boat – taken from the ark, one of the first symbols for the church – to address in today’s story the question of fear and faith.

There is another interesting clue to the meaning of this story; after Jesus invites the disciples to go the other side, Mark says, “leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, *just as he was.*”

My hunch is that Mark is setting up a contrast between taking Jesus with us in life, in the life of the church “just as he is” or when the going gets tough trying to exchange that Jesus for Jesus “just as we want him to be.”

The disciples in the story and in the early church don’t want Jesus in the middle of the squall ‘just as he is’ asleep on the cushion in the stern of the boat. They want him to rescue them from their time of trial, remove the danger. They want some other Jesus than the Jesus they presently have.

And this has been a pernicious problem since the beginning of the church. Scholars and preachers today on both sides of the theological spectrum are producing a plethora of books on Jesus; not Jesus ‘as he is’ but Jesus as they wish him to be.

The historical information depicting Jesus provides only a scant outline; the Gospels themselves fill in that outline according to issues and problems facing the early church to whom they were writing. Beyond these simple portraits many if not most modern writers make Jesus into a straw man to knock down or superman to idolize depending on what ax they are grinding or culture war they are fighting.

I recently heard of one book just published that claims there was no historical Jesus at all and the figure the Gospels present was a pagan.

The impulse to abandon the God of our ancestors and make gods of our own choosing goes back to the golden calf the people of Israel fashioned in the wilderness when Moses was away on Mt. Sinai.

This impulse rears its head whenever the church is in crisis: during the first century persecutions; the Reformation; slavery and Civil War in this country; the years just preceding and during the Great Depression; Civil Rights – any time the ark of God’s people is rocked by the wind and waves of a stormy culture.

Two writers who steer admirably clear of exchanging Jesus just as he was – for Jesus as we want him to be in the midst of our crisis are Roman Catholic Garry Wills and Harvard Chaplain Peter Gomes.

I am sure there are others but Wills' *What Jesus Meant* and Gomes' *The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus* do a fine job claiming the ground between abdicating faith to reason and science on the one hand and turning Jesus into a talisman for a prosperous life on the other hand.

Maybe it is hard to take Jesus as he is because we, in North America, we of relative affluence, in a society of advanced technological devices in a consumer driven society believe that religion, even Jesus should be served to suit our palate.

But I am wondering today if this impulse to follow a Jesus of our own making or a spirituality of our own concoction rather than Jesus as he is doesn't stunt our spiritual growth and scuttle the great vessel of the church; which is on the same mission as Noah in his ark – to rescue and preserve life from the floods of our time.

The correct formula for following Jesus as I recall is not that Jesus would change but that we would change. Repent and be baptized is the Biblical phrase; that is literally, in the Greek, turn around and be made new. Conversion is another word; transformation too gets at the depth and totality of this change.

Nicodemus finds his heart after spending a lifetime in his head; Zaccheus restores to those he has fleeced double what he took; the rich young man unfortunately was unable to change, to sell what he had, give the proceeds to the poor and follow Jesus but the point is still change for those who would navigate this life in the church of Jesus Christ.

But the older I get the more difficult I realize it is to change. I amaze myself with the routines of my life from oatmeal every morning to wearing button-down shirts all these years. Change just isn't easy.

But somehow if we are to be the ones to change and not Jesus then it seems to me we need to relocate ourselves. For much of the mainline church in recent history religion has become not a ship of faith to sail the troubled waters of our time but a kind of theological hotel we escape to for the weekend or at least Sunday morning; a hotel with room service and a spiritual menu du jour for every religious palate.

Rather today's Gospel calls us into the vessel of the church to sail with Jesus to the other side, the land where God reigns; the kingdom that starts in our hearts like a mustard seed and grows into a mighty plant giving shade and shelter to all.

To get there means trusting him without demanding who he should be or what he should do; trusting his reason for summoning us into this vessel called the church even when we think it is about to capsize.

Someone said 'courage is fear that has said its prayers.' If we could be that honest raising Alissa and Simon; if we could teach them and all of our children to live with courage like that and remember Jesus' words to those frightened followers on Easter morning 'do not be afraid', whatever else they face in life, they'll be just fine.

That's a worthy goal for any father or mother or mentor.

Of course, the other clue to the meaning of the story is Jesus' power to calm the storm. He did do that and does it still for troubled hearts who turn to him. Amen.

**LESS THAN ROOM SERVICE; JUNE 21, 2009, FATHER'S DAY; MARK 4:35-41; THOMAS H. YORTY, WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

One of the great refrains of the Bible are the words, "Do not be afraid." From the angels announcing Jesus' birth to Jesus himself those calming words are given by a loving God.

And yet, fear like a fungus grows on our relationships, in the dark and dank corners of our careers, in anticipation of a visit to the doctor. We harbor fears for our present and future as a church and community, as a nation and world.

Fear is seductive because wherever anything could go wrong something in us can't resist entertaining the thought of what would happen if it did. It seems almost second nature to focus on disaster: a teenager out with the car misses curfew; the days before the test results; retiring with a vastly reduced 401k.

But those words, "Do not be afraid," are offered not as a mere palliative or as something nice to say or as words spoken naively or insincerely but as a command.

For to succumb to fear is to succumb to distrust or even rejection of God's alternative to fear which is faith. But not just faith in the abstract or ethereal but faith in the biblical promises and experience of God's people over the millennia that the God who watches over will not let us fall; that this God knows our needs better than we do and that this loving God promises never to abandon us.

Note those promises say nothing of freedom from the vagaries of life's twists and turns; of life's consequences for poor judgment or self-serving decisions; nor do they contain guarantees and assurances that our lives will follow the exact course we map out for them.

So if we are to choose faith over fear at some point, at many points, on most if not on all days we face a decision to let go or not.

A decision to let go of the scenarios of disaster and destruction but also of imposing our will and way over God's will and way for our lives which, says Jesus and the Bible, is the path to our best, most fulfilled lives.

While the Bible does not promise that God's will and way for us will shelter us from the bumps and bruises of life; some of which occur to us randomly, some of which we unwittingly or wittingly bring on ourselves – the Bible does say that if we embrace God's path for our lives nothing can separate us from God and therefore from facing life's greatest difficulties with dignity and grace and calm.

Today's story from the Gospel of Mark describes the disciples experiencing a situation that takes them outside of their control and comfort zone.

The reading immediately preceding today's story is Jesus telling his followers that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed tiny at first but then it grows to become one of the greatest of plants. And the process by which it grows is in God's care and control. We simply need to trust and accept that the seed will respond.

But when the storm comes up and swamps the boat the disciples demonstrate little trust and rouse Jesus from his sleep admonishing him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

There it is: fear in control; and the fears of the disciples have them jumping to the conclusion of disaster; that they will perish. This is a wonderful metaphor Mark gives us. So many circumstances in life are like storms that swamp our boats and we cry out, like victims, “God don’t you care; where are you; we are perishing.”

Mark offers this story not to tell us that God is uncaring or that the storms of life are not real but to put us in the boat with the disciples to examine again how fear can take over our lives; or take over the life of the church – fundamentalism and McCarthyism are examples of fear in the driver’s seat of religion and politics.

Mark was written when the early Christian movement was beginning to experience rejection and persecution. The little boat of the early church was being tossed on the sea of a hostile culture. In fact, Mark cleverly uses a boat – taken from the ark, one of the first symbols for the church – to address in today’s story the question of fear and faith.

There is another interesting clue to the meaning of this story; after Jesus invites the disciples to go the other side, Mark says, “leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, *just as he was.*”

My hunch is that Mark is setting up a contrast between taking Jesus with us in life, in the life of the church “just as he is” or when the going gets tough trying to exchange that Jesus for Jesus “just as we want him to be.”

The disciples in the story and in the early church don’t want Jesus in the middle of the squall ‘just as he is’ asleep on the cushion in the stern of the boat. They want him to rescue them from their time of trial, remove the danger. They want some other Jesus than the Jesus they presently have.

And this has been a pernicious problem since the beginning of the church. Scholars and preachers today on both sides of the theological spectrum are producing a plethora of books on Jesus; not Jesus ‘as he is’ but Jesus as they wish him to be.

The historical information depicting Jesus provides only a scant outline; the Gospels themselves fill in that outline according to issues and problems facing the early church to whom they were writing. Beyond these simple portraits many if not most modern writers make Jesus into a straw man to knock down or superman to idolize depending on what ax they are grinding or culture war they are fighting.

I recently heard of one book just published that claims there was no historical Jesus at all and the figure the Gospels present was a pagan.

The impulse to abandon the God of our ancestors and make gods of our own choosing goes back to the golden calf the people of Israel fashioned in the wilderness when Moses was away on Mt. Sinai.

This impulse rears its head whenever the church is in crisis: during the first century persecutions; the Reformation; slavery and Civil War in this country; the years just preceding and during the Great Depression; Civil Rights – any time the ark of God’s people is rocked by the wind and waves of a stormy culture.

Two writers who steer admirably clear of exchanging Jesus just as he was – for Jesus as we want him to be in the midst of our crisis are Roman Catholic Garry Wills and Harvard Chaplain Peter Gomes.

I am sure there are others but Wills' *What Jesus Meant* and Gomes' *The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus* do a fine job claiming the ground between abdicating faith to reason and science on the one hand and turning Jesus into a talisman for a prosperous life on the other hand.

Maybe it is hard to take Jesus as he is because we, in North America, we of relative affluence, in a society of advanced technological devices in a consumer driven society believe that religion, even Jesus should be served to suit our palate.

But I am wondering today if this impulse to follow a Jesus of our own making or a spirituality of our own concoction rather than Jesus as he is doesn't stunt our spiritual growth and scuttle the great vessel of the church; which is on the same mission as Noah in his ark – to rescue and preserve life from the floods of our time.

The correct formula for following Jesus as I recall is not that Jesus would change but that we would change. Repent and be baptized is the Biblical phrase; that is literally, in the Greek, turn around and be made new. Conversion is another word; transformation too gets at the depth and totality of this change.

Nicodemus finds his heart after spending a lifetime in his head; Zaccheus restores to those he has fleeced double what he took; the rich young man unfortunately was unable to change, to sell what he had, give the proceeds to the poor and follow Jesus but the point is still change for those who would navigate this life in the church of Jesus Christ.

But the older I get the more difficult I realize it is to change. I amaze myself with the routines of my life from oatmeal every morning to wearing button-down shirts all these years. Change just isn't easy.

But somehow if we are to be the ones to change and not Jesus then it seems to me we need to relocate ourselves. For much of the mainline church in recent history religion has become not a ship of faith to sail the troubled waters of our time but a kind of theological hotel we escape to for the weekend or at least Sunday morning; a hotel with room service and a spiritual menu du jour for every religious palate.

Rather today's Gospel calls us into the vessel of the church to sail with Jesus to the other side, the land where God reigns; the kingdom that starts in our hearts like a mustard seed and grows into a mighty plant giving shade and shelter to all.

To get there means trusting him without demanding who he should be or what he should do; trusting his reason for summoning us into this vessel called the church even when we think it is about to capsize.

Someone said 'courage is fear that has said its prayers.' If we could be that honest raising Alissa and Simon; if we could teach them and all of our children to live with courage like that and remember Jesus' words to those frightened followers on Easter morning 'do not be afraid', whatever else they face in life, they'll be just fine.

That's a worthy goal for any father or mother or mentor.

Of course, the other clue to the meaning of the story is Jesus' power to calm the storm. He did do that and does it still for troubled hearts who turn to him. Amen.

**LESS THAN ROOM SERVICE; JUNE 21, 2009, FATHER'S DAY; MARK 4:35-41; THOMAS H. YORTY, WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

One of the great refrains of the Bible are the words, "Do not be afraid." From the angels announcing Jesus' birth to Jesus himself those calming words are given by a loving God.

And yet, fear like a fungus grows on our relationships, in the dark and dank corners of our careers, in anticipation of a visit to the doctor. We harbor fears for our present and future as a church and community, as a nation and world.

Fear is seductive because wherever anything could go wrong something in us can't resist entertaining the thought of what would happen if it did. It seems almost second nature to focus on disaster: a teenager out with the car misses curfew; the days before the test results; retiring with a vastly reduced 401k.

But those words, "Do not be afraid," are offered not as a mere palliative or as something nice to say or as words spoken naively or insincerely but as a command.

For to succumb to fear is to succumb to distrust or even rejection of God's alternative to fear which is faith. But not just faith in the abstract or ethereal but faith in the biblical promises and experience of God's people over the millennia that the God who watches over will not let us fall; that this God knows our needs better than we do and that this loving God promises never to abandon us.

Note those promises say nothing of freedom from the vagaries of life's twists and turns; of life's consequences for poor judgment or self-serving decisions; nor do they contain guarantees and assurances that our lives will follow the exact course we map out for them.

So if we are to choose faith over fear at some point, at many points, on most if not on all days we face a decision to let go or not.

A decision to let go of the scenarios of disaster and destruction but also of imposing our will and way over God's will and way for our lives which, says Jesus and the Bible, is the path to our best, most fulfilled lives.

While the Bible does not promise that God's will and way for us will shelter us from the bumps and bruises of life; some of which occur to us randomly, some of which we unwittingly or wittingly bring on ourselves – the Bible does say that if we embrace God's path for our lives nothing can separate us from God and therefore from facing life's greatest difficulties with dignity and grace and calm.

Today's story from the Gospel of Mark describes the disciples experiencing a situation that takes them outside of their control and comfort zone.

The reading immediately preceding today's story is Jesus telling his followers that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed tiny at first but then it grows to become one of the greatest of plants. And the process by which it grows is in God's care and control. We simply need to trust and accept that the seed will respond.

But when the storm comes up and swamps the boat the disciples demonstrate little trust and rouse Jesus from his sleep admonishing him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

There it is: fear in control; and the fears of the disciples have them jumping to the conclusion of disaster; that they will perish. This is a wonderful metaphor Mark gives us. So many circumstances in life are like storms that swamp our boats and we cry out, like victims, “God don’t you care; where are you; we are perishing.”

Mark offers this story not to tell us that God is uncaring or that the storms of life are not real but to put us in the boat with the disciples to examine again how fear can take over our lives; or take over the life of the church – fundamentalism and McCarthyism are examples of fear in the driver’s seat of religion and politics.

Mark was written when the early Christian movement was beginning to experience rejection and persecution. The little boat of the early church was being tossed on the sea of a hostile culture. In fact, Mark cleverly uses a boat – taken from the ark, one of the first symbols for the church – to address in today’s story the question of fear and faith.

There is another interesting clue to the meaning of this story; after Jesus invites the disciples to go the other side, Mark says, “leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, *just as he was.*”

My hunch is that Mark is setting up a contrast between taking Jesus with us in life, in the life of the church “just as he is” or when the going gets tough trying to exchange that Jesus for Jesus “just as we want him to be.”

The disciples in the story and in the early church don’t want Jesus in the middle of the squall ‘just as he is’ asleep on the cushion in the stern of the boat. They want him to rescue them from their time of trial, remove the danger. They want some other Jesus than the Jesus they presently have.

And this has been a pernicious problem since the beginning of the church. Scholars and preachers today on both sides of the theological spectrum are producing a plethora of books on Jesus; not Jesus ‘as he is’ but Jesus as they wish him to be.

The historical information depicting Jesus provides only a scant outline; the Gospels themselves fill in that outline according to issues and problems facing the early church to whom they were writing. Beyond these simple portraits many if not most modern writers make Jesus into a straw man to knock down or superman to idolize depending on what ax they are grinding or culture war they are fighting.

I recently heard of one book just published that claims there was no historical Jesus at all and the figure the Gospels present was a pagan.

The impulse to abandon the God of our ancestors and make gods of our own choosing goes back to the golden calf the people of Israel fashioned in the wilderness when Moses was away on Mt. Sinai.

This impulse rears its head whenever the church is in crisis: during the first century persecutions; the Reformation; slavery and Civil War in this country; the years just preceding and during the Great Depression; Civil Rights – any time the ark of God’s people is rocked by the wind and waves of a stormy culture.

Two writers who steer admirably clear of exchanging Jesus just as he was – for Jesus as we want him to be in the midst of our crisis are Roman Catholic Garry Wills and Harvard Chaplain Peter Gomes.

I am sure there are others but Wills' *What Jesus Meant* and Gomes' *The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus* do a fine job claiming the ground between abdicating faith to reason and science on the one hand and turning Jesus into a talisman for a prosperous life on the other hand.

Maybe it is hard to take Jesus as he is because we, in North America, we of relative affluence, in a society of advanced technological devices in a consumer driven society believe that religion, even Jesus should be served to suit our palate.

But I am wondering today if this impulse to follow a Jesus of our own making or a spirituality of our own concoction rather than Jesus as he is doesn't stunt our spiritual growth and scuttle the great vessel of the church; which is on the same mission as Noah in his ark – to rescue and preserve life from the floods of our time.

The correct formula for following Jesus as I recall is not that Jesus would change but that we would change. Repent and be baptized is the Biblical phrase; that is literally, in the Greek, turn around and be made new. Conversion is another word; transformation too gets at the depth and totality of this change.

Nicodemus finds his heart after spending a lifetime in his head; Zaccheus restores to those he has fleeced double what he took; the rich young man unfortunately was unable to change, to sell what he had, give the proceeds to the poor and follow Jesus but the point is still change for those who would navigate this life in the church of Jesus Christ.

But the older I get the more difficult I realize it is to change. I amaze myself with the routines of my life from oatmeal every morning to wearing button-down shirts all these years. Change just isn't easy.

But somehow if we are to be the ones to change and not Jesus then it seems to me we need to relocate ourselves. For much of the mainline church in recent history religion has become not a ship of faith to sail the troubled waters of our time but a kind of theological hotel we escape to for the weekend or at least Sunday morning; a hotel with room service and a spiritual menu du jour for every religious palate.

Rather today's Gospel calls us into the vessel of the church to sail with Jesus to the other side, the land where God reigns; the kingdom that starts in our hearts like a mustard seed and grows into a mighty plant giving shade and shelter to all.

To get there means trusting him without demanding who he should be or what he should do; trusting his reason for summoning us into this vessel called the church even when we think it is about to capsize.

Someone said 'courage is fear that has said its prayers.' If we could be that honest raising Alissa and Simon; if we could teach them and all of our children to live with courage like that and remember Jesus' words to those frightened followers on Easter morning 'do not be afraid', whatever else they face in life, they'll be just fine.

That's a worthy goal for any father or mother or mentor.

Of course, the other clue to the meaning of the story is Jesus' power to calm the storm. He did do that and does it still for troubled hearts who turn to him. Amen.

**LESS THAN ROOM SERVICE; JUNE 21, 2009, FATHER'S DAY; MARK 4:35-41; THOMAS H. YORTY, WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

One of the great refrains of the Bible are the words, "Do not be afraid." From the angels announcing Jesus' birth to Jesus himself those calming words are given by a loving God.

And yet, fear like a fungus grows on our relationships, in the dark and dank corners of our careers, in anticipation of a visit to the doctor. We harbor fears for our present and future as a church and community, as a nation and world.

Fear is seductive because wherever anything could go wrong something in us can't resist entertaining the thought of what would happen if it did. It seems almost second nature to focus on disaster: a teenager out with the car misses curfew; the days before the test results; retiring with a vastly reduced 401k.

But those words, "Do not be afraid," are offered not as a mere palliative or as something nice to say or as words spoken naively or insincerely but as a command.

For to succumb to fear is to succumb to distrust or even rejection of God's alternative to fear which is faith. But not just faith in the abstract or ethereal but faith in the biblical promises and experience of God's people over the millennia that the God who watches over will not let us fall; that this God knows our needs better than we do and that this loving God promises never to abandon us.

Note those promises say nothing of freedom from the vagaries of life's twists and turns; of life's consequences for poor judgment or self-serving decisions; nor do they contain guarantees and assurances that our lives will follow the exact course we map out for them.

So if we are to choose faith over fear at some point, at many points, on most if not on all days we face a decision to let go or not.

A decision to let go of the scenarios of disaster and destruction but also of imposing our will and way over God's will and way for our lives which, says Jesus and the Bible, is the path to our best, most fulfilled lives.

While the Bible does not promise that God's will and way for us will shelter us from the bumps and bruises of life; some of which occur to us randomly, some of which we unwittingly or wittingly bring on ourselves – the Bible does say that if we embrace God's path for our lives nothing can separate us from God and therefore from facing life's greatest difficulties with dignity and grace and calm.

Today's story from the Gospel of Mark describes the disciples experiencing a situation that takes them outside of their control and comfort zone.

The reading immediately preceding today's story is Jesus telling his followers that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed tiny at first but then it grows to become one of the greatest of plants. And the process by which it grows is in God's care and control. We simply need to trust and accept that the seed will respond.

But when the storm comes up and swamps the boat the disciples demonstrate little trust and rouse Jesus from his sleep admonishing him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

There it is: fear in control; and the fears of the disciples have them jumping to the conclusion of disaster; that they will perish. This is a wonderful metaphor Mark gives us. So many circumstances in life are like storms that swamp our boats and we cry out, like victims, “God don’t you care; where are you; we are perishing.”

Mark offers this story not to tell us that God is uncaring or that the storms of life are not real but to put us in the boat with the disciples to examine again how fear can take over our lives; or take over the life of the church – fundamentalism and McCarthyism are examples of fear in the driver’s seat of religion and politics.

Mark was written when the early Christian movement was beginning to experience rejection and persecution. The little boat of the early church was being tossed on the sea of a hostile culture. In fact, Mark cleverly uses a boat – taken from the ark, one of the first symbols for the church – to address in today’s story the question of fear and faith.

There is another interesting clue to the meaning of this story; after Jesus invites the disciples to go the other side, Mark says, “leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, *just as he was.*”

My hunch is that Mark is setting up a contrast between taking Jesus with us in life, in the life of the church “just as he is” or when the going gets tough trying to exchange that Jesus for Jesus “just as we want him to be.”

The disciples in the story and in the early church don’t want Jesus in the middle of the squall ‘just as he is’ asleep on the cushion in the stern of the boat. They want him to rescue them from their time of trial, remove the danger. They want some other Jesus than the Jesus they presently have.

And this has been a pernicious problem since the beginning of the church. Scholars and preachers today on both sides of the theological spectrum are producing a plethora of books on Jesus; not Jesus ‘as he is’ but Jesus as they wish him to be.

The historical information depicting Jesus provides only a scant outline; the Gospels themselves fill in that outline according to issues and problems facing the early church to whom they were writing. Beyond these simple portraits many if not most modern writers make Jesus into a straw man to knock down or superman to idolize depending on what ax they are grinding or culture war they are fighting.

I recently heard of one book just published that claims there was no historical Jesus at all and the figure the Gospels present was a pagan.

The impulse to abandon the God of our ancestors and make gods of our own choosing goes back to the golden calf the people of Israel fashioned in the wilderness when Moses was away on Mt. Sinai.

This impulse rears its head whenever the church is in crisis: during the first century persecutions; the Reformation; slavery and Civil War in this country; the years just preceding and during the Great Depression; Civil Rights – any time the ark of God’s people is rocked by the wind and waves of a stormy culture.

Two writers who steer admirably clear of exchanging Jesus just as he was – for Jesus as we want him to be in the midst of our crisis are Roman Catholic Garry Wills and Harvard Chaplain Peter Gomes.

I am sure there are others but Wills' *What Jesus Meant* and Gomes' *The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus* do a fine job claiming the ground between abdicating faith to reason and science on the one hand and turning Jesus into a talisman for a prosperous life on the other hand.

Maybe it is hard to take Jesus as he is because we, in North America, we of relative affluence, in a society of advanced technological devices in a consumer driven society believe that religion, even Jesus should be served to suit our palate.

But I am wondering today if this impulse to follow a Jesus of our own making or a spirituality of our own concoction rather than Jesus as he is doesn't stunt our spiritual growth and scuttle the great vessel of the church; which is on the same mission as Noah in his ark – to rescue and preserve life from the floods of our time.

The correct formula for following Jesus as I recall is not that Jesus would change but that we would change. Repent and be baptized is the Biblical phrase; that is literally, in the Greek, turn around and be made new. Conversion is another word; transformation too gets at the depth and totality of this change.

Nicodemus finds his heart after spending a lifetime in his head; Zaccheus restores to those he has fleeced double what he took; the rich young man unfortunately was unable to change, to sell what he had, give the proceeds to the poor and follow Jesus but the point is still change for those who would navigate this life in the church of Jesus Christ.

But the older I get the more difficult I realize it is to change. I amaze myself with the routines of my life from oatmeal every morning to wearing button-down shirts all these years. Change just isn't easy.

But somehow if we are to be the ones to change and not Jesus then it seems to me we need to relocate ourselves. For much of the mainline church in recent history religion has become not a ship of faith to sail the troubled waters of our time but a kind of theological hotel we escape to for the weekend or at least Sunday morning; a hotel with room service and a spiritual menu du jour for every religious palate.

Rather today's Gospel calls us into the vessel of the church to sail with Jesus to the other side, the land where God reigns; the kingdom that starts in our hearts like a mustard seed and grows into a mighty plant giving shade and shelter to all.

To get there means trusting him without demanding who he should be or what he should do; trusting his reason for summoning us into this vessel called the church even when we think it is about to capsize.

Someone said 'courage is fear that has said its prayers.' If we could be that honest raising Alissa and Simon; if we could teach them and all of our children to live with courage like that and remember Jesus' words to those frightened followers on Easter morning 'do not be afraid', whatever else they face in life, they'll be just fine.

That's a worthy goal for any father or mother or mentor.

Of course, the other clue to the meaning of the story is Jesus' power to calm the storm. He did do that and does it still for troubled hearts who turn to him. Amen.

**LESS THAN ROOM SERVICE; JUNE 21, 2009, FATHER'S DAY; MARK 4:35-41; THOMAS H. YORTY, WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

One of the great refrains of the Bible are the words, "Do not be afraid." From the angels announcing Jesus' birth to Jesus himself those calming words are given by a loving God.

And yet, fear like a fungus grows on our relationships, in the dark and dank corners of our careers, in anticipation of a visit to the doctor. We harbor fears for our present and future as a church and community, as a nation and world.

Fear is seductive because wherever anything could go wrong something in us can't resist entertaining the thought of what would happen if it did. It seems almost second nature to focus on disaster: a teenager out with the car misses curfew; the days before the test results; retiring with a vastly reduced 401k.

But those words, "Do not be afraid," are offered not as a mere palliative or as something nice to say or as words spoken naively or insincerely but as a command.

For to succumb to fear is to succumb to distrust or even rejection of God's alternative to fear which is faith. But not just faith in the abstract or ethereal but faith in the biblical promises and experience of God's people over the millennia that the God who watches over will not let us fall; that this God knows our needs better than we do and that this loving God promises never to abandon us.

Note those promises say nothing of freedom from the vagaries of life's twists and turns; of life's consequences for poor judgment or self-serving decisions; nor do they contain guarantees and assurances that our lives will follow the exact course we map out for them.

So if we are to choose faith over fear at some point, at many points, on most if not on all days we face a decision to let go or not.

A decision to let go of the scenarios of disaster and destruction but also of imposing our will and way over God's will and way for our lives which, says Jesus and the Bible, is the path to our best, most fulfilled lives.

While the Bible does not promise that God's will and way for us will shelter us from the bumps and bruises of life; some of which occur to us randomly, some of which we unwittingly or wittingly bring on ourselves – the Bible does say that if we embrace God's path for our lives nothing can separate us from God and therefore from facing life's greatest difficulties with dignity and grace and calm.

Today's story from the Gospel of Mark describes the disciples experiencing a situation that takes them outside of their control and comfort zone.

The reading immediately preceding today's story is Jesus telling his followers that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed tiny at first but then it grows to become one of the greatest of plants. And the process by which it grows is in God's care and control. We simply need to trust and accept that the seed will respond.

But when the storm comes up and swamps the boat the disciples demonstrate little trust and rouse Jesus from his sleep admonishing him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

There it is: fear in control; and the fears of the disciples have them jumping to the conclusion of disaster; that they will perish. This is a wonderful metaphor Mark gives us. So many circumstances in life are like storms that swamp our boats and we cry out, like victims, “God don’t you care; where are you; we are perishing.”

Mark offers this story not to tell us that God is uncaring or that the storms of life are not real but to put us in the boat with the disciples to examine again how fear can take over our lives; or take over the life of the church – fundamentalism and McCarthyism are examples of fear in the driver’s seat of religion and politics.

Mark was written when the early Christian movement was beginning to experience rejection and persecution. The little boat of the early church was being tossed on the sea of a hostile culture. In fact, Mark cleverly uses a boat – taken from the ark, one of the first symbols for the church – to address in today’s story the question of fear and faith.

There is another interesting clue to the meaning of this story; after Jesus invites the disciples to go the other side, Mark says, “leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, *just as he was.*”

My hunch is that Mark is setting up a contrast between taking Jesus with us in life, in the life of the church “just as he is” or when the going gets tough trying to exchange that Jesus for Jesus “just as we want him to be.”

The disciples in the story and in the early church don’t want Jesus in the middle of the squall ‘just as he is’ asleep on the cushion in the stern of the boat. They want him to rescue them from their time of trial, remove the danger. They want some other Jesus than the Jesus they presently have.

And this has been a pernicious problem since the beginning of the church. Scholars and preachers today on both sides of the theological spectrum are producing a plethora of books on Jesus; not Jesus ‘as he is’ but Jesus as they wish him to be.

The historical information depicting Jesus provides only a scant outline; the Gospels themselves fill in that outline according to issues and problems facing the early church to whom they were writing. Beyond these simple portraits many if not most modern writers make Jesus into a straw man to knock down or superman to idolize depending on what ax they are grinding or culture war they are fighting.

I recently heard of one book just published that claims there was no historical Jesus at all and the figure the Gospels present was a pagan.

The impulse to abandon the God of our ancestors and make gods of our own choosing goes back to the golden calf the people of Israel fashioned in the wilderness when Moses was away on Mt. Sinai.

This impulse rears its head whenever the church is in crisis: during the first century persecutions; the Reformation; slavery and Civil War in this country; the years just preceding and during the Great Depression; Civil Rights – any time the ark of God’s people is rocked by the wind and waves of a stormy culture.

Two writers who steer admirably clear of exchanging Jesus just as he was – for Jesus as we want him to be in the midst of our crisis are Roman Catholic Garry Wills and Harvard Chaplain Peter Gomes.

I am sure there are others but Wills' *What Jesus Meant* and Gomes' *The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus* do a fine job claiming the ground between abdicating faith to reason and science on the one hand and turning Jesus into a talisman for a prosperous life on the other hand.

Maybe it is hard to take Jesus as he is because we, in North America, we of relative affluence, in a society of advanced technological devices in a consumer driven society believe that religion, even Jesus should be served to suit our palate.

But I am wondering today if this impulse to follow a Jesus of our own making or a spirituality of our own concoction rather than Jesus as he is doesn't stunt our spiritual growth and scuttle the great vessel of the church; which is on the same mission as Noah in his ark – to rescue and preserve life from the floods of our time.

The correct formula for following Jesus as I recall is not that Jesus would change but that we would change. Repent and be baptized is the Biblical phrase; that is literally, in the Greek, turn around and be made new. Conversion is another word; transformation too gets at the depth and totality of this change.

Nicodemus finds his heart after spending a lifetime in his head; Zaccheus restores to those he has fleeced double what he took; the rich young man unfortunately was unable to change, to sell what he had, give the proceeds to the poor and follow Jesus but the point is still change for those who would navigate this life in the church of Jesus Christ.

But the older I get the more difficult I realize it is to change. I amaze myself with the routines of my life from oatmeal every morning to wearing button-down shirts all these years. Change just isn't easy.

But somehow if we are to be the ones to change and not Jesus then it seems to me we need to relocate ourselves. For much of the mainline church in recent history religion has become not a ship of faith to sail the troubled waters of our time but a kind of theological hotel we escape to for the weekend or at least Sunday morning; a hotel with room service and a spiritual menu du jour for every religious palate.

Rather today's Gospel calls us into the vessel of the church to sail with Jesus to the other side, the land where God reigns; the kingdom that starts in our hearts like a mustard seed and grows into a mighty plant giving shade and shelter to all.

To get there means trusting him without demanding who he should be or what he should do; trusting his reason for summoning us into this vessel called the church even when we think it is about to capsize.

Someone said 'courage is fear that has said its prayers.' If we could be that honest raising Alissa and Simon; if we could teach them and all of our children to live with courage like that and remember Jesus' words to those frightened followers on Easter morning 'do not be afraid', whatever else they face in life, they'll be just fine.

That's a worthy goal for any father or mother or mentor.

Of course, the other clue to the meaning of the story is Jesus' power to calm the storm. He did do that and does it still for troubled hearts who turn to him. Amen.

**LESS THAN ROOM SERVICE; JUNE 21, 2009, FATHER'S DAY; MARK 4:35-41; THOMAS H. YORTY, WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

One of the great refrains of the Bible are the words, "Do not be afraid." From the angels announcing Jesus' birth to Jesus himself those calming words are given by a loving God.

And yet, fear like a fungus grows on our relationships, in the dark and dank corners of our careers, in anticipation of a visit to the doctor. We harbor fears for our present and future as a church and community, as a nation and world.

Fear is seductive because wherever anything could go wrong something in us can't resist entertaining the thought of what would happen if it did. It seems almost second nature to focus on disaster: a teenager out with the car misses curfew; the days before the test results; retiring with a vastly reduced 401k.

But those words, "Do not be afraid," are offered not as a mere palliative or as something nice to say or as words spoken naively or insincerely but as a command.

For to succumb to fear is to succumb to distrust or even rejection of God's alternative to fear which is faith. But not just faith in the abstract or ethereal but faith in the biblical promises and experience of God's people over the millennia that the God who watches over will not let us fall; that this God knows our needs better than we do and that this loving God promises never to abandon us.

Note those promises say nothing of freedom from the vagaries of life's twists and turns; of life's consequences for poor judgment or self-serving decisions; nor do they contain guarantees and assurances that our lives will follow the exact course we map out for them.

So if we are to choose faith over fear at some point, at many points, on most if not on all days we face a decision to let go or not.

A decision to let go of the scenarios of disaster and destruction but also of imposing our will and way over God's will and way for our lives which, says Jesus and the Bible, is the path to our best, most fulfilled lives.

While the Bible does not promise that God's will and way for us will shelter us from the bumps and bruises of life; some of which occur to us randomly, some of which we unwittingly or wittingly bring on ourselves – the Bible does say that if we embrace God's path for our lives nothing can separate us from God and therefore from facing life's greatest difficulties with dignity and grace and calm.

Today's story from the Gospel of Mark describes the disciples experiencing a situation that takes them outside of their control and comfort zone.

The reading immediately preceding today's story is Jesus telling his followers that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed tiny at first but then it grows to become one of the greatest of plants. And the process by which it grows is in God's care and control. We simply need to trust and accept that the seed will respond.

But when the storm comes up and swamps the boat the disciples demonstrate little trust and rouse Jesus from his sleep admonishing him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

There it is: fear in control; and the fears of the disciples have them jumping to the conclusion of disaster; that they will perish. This is a wonderful metaphor Mark gives us. So many circumstances in life are like storms that swamp our boats and we cry out, like victims, “God don’t you care; where are you; we are perishing.”

Mark offers this story not to tell us that God is uncaring or that the storms of life are not real but to put us in the boat with the disciples to examine again how fear can take over our lives; or take over the life of the church – fundamentalism and McCarthyism are examples of fear in the driver’s seat of religion and politics.

Mark was written when the early Christian movement was beginning to experience rejection and persecution. The little boat of the early church was being tossed on the sea of a hostile culture. In fact, Mark cleverly uses a boat – taken from the ark, one of the first symbols for the church – to address in today’s story the question of fear and faith.

There is another interesting clue to the meaning of this story; after Jesus invites the disciples to go the other side, Mark says, “leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, *just as he was.*”

My hunch is that Mark is setting up a contrast between taking Jesus with us in life, in the life of the church “just as he is” or when the going gets tough trying to exchange that Jesus for Jesus “just as we want him to be.”

The disciples in the story and in the early church don’t want Jesus in the middle of the squall ‘just as he is’ asleep on the cushion in the stern of the boat. They want him to rescue them from their time of trial, remove the danger. They want some other Jesus than the Jesus they presently have.

And this has been a pernicious problem since the beginning of the church. Scholars and preachers today on both sides of the theological spectrum are producing a plethora of books on Jesus; not Jesus ‘as he is’ but Jesus as they wish him to be.

The historical information depicting Jesus provides only a scant outline; the Gospels themselves fill in that outline according to issues and problems facing the early church to whom they were writing. Beyond these simple portraits many if not most modern writers make Jesus into a straw man to knock down or superman to idolize depending on what ax they are grinding or culture war they are fighting.

I recently heard of one book just published that claims there was no historical Jesus at all and the figure the Gospels present was a pagan.

The impulse to abandon the God of our ancestors and make gods of our own choosing goes back to the golden calf the people of Israel fashioned in the wilderness when Moses was away on Mt. Sinai.

This impulse rears its head whenever the church is in crisis: during the first century persecutions; the Reformation; slavery and Civil War in this country; the years just preceding and during the Great Depression; Civil Rights – any time the ark of God’s people is rocked by the wind and waves of a stormy culture.

Two writers who steer admirably clear of exchanging Jesus just as he was – for Jesus as we want him to be in the midst of our crisis are Roman Catholic Garry Wills and Harvard Chaplain Peter Gomes.

I am sure there are others but Wills' *What Jesus Meant* and Gomes' *The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus* do a fine job claiming the ground between abdicating faith to reason and science on the one hand and turning Jesus into a talisman for a prosperous life on the other hand.

Maybe it is hard to take Jesus as he is because we, in North America, we of relative affluence, in a society of advanced technological devices in a consumer driven society believe that religion, even Jesus should be served to suit our palate.

But I am wondering today if this impulse to follow a Jesus of our own making or a spirituality of our own concoction rather than Jesus as he is doesn't stunt our spiritual growth and scuttle the great vessel of the church; which is on the same mission as Noah in his ark – to rescue and preserve life from the floods of our time.

The correct formula for following Jesus as I recall is not that Jesus would change but that we would change. Repent and be baptized is the Biblical phrase; that is literally, in the Greek, turn around and be made new. Conversion is another word; transformation too gets at the depth and totality of this change.

Nicodemus finds his heart after spending a lifetime in his head; Zaccheus restores to those he has fleeced double what he took; the rich young man unfortunately was unable to change, to sell what he had, give the proceeds to the poor and follow Jesus but the point is still change for those who would navigate this life in the church of Jesus Christ.

But the older I get the more difficult I realize it is to change. I amaze myself with the routines of my life from oatmeal every morning to wearing button-down shirts all these years. Change just isn't easy.

But somehow if we are to be the ones to change and not Jesus then it seems to me we need to relocate ourselves. For much of the mainline church in recent history religion has become not a ship of faith to sail the troubled waters of our time but a kind of theological hotel we escape to for the weekend or at least Sunday morning; a hotel with room service and a spiritual menu du jour for every religious palate.

Rather today's Gospel calls us into the vessel of the church to sail with Jesus to the other side, the land where God reigns; the kingdom that starts in our hearts like a mustard seed and grows into a mighty plant giving shade and shelter to all.

To get there means trusting him without demanding who he should be or what he should do; trusting his reason for summoning us into this vessel called the church even when we think it is about to capsize.

Someone said 'courage is fear that has said its prayers.' If we could be that honest raising Alissa and Simon; if we could teach them and all of our children to live with courage like that and remember Jesus' words to those frightened followers on Easter morning 'do not be afraid', whatever else they face in life, they'll be just fine.

That's a worthy goal for any father or mother or mentor.

Of course, the other clue to the meaning of the story is Jesus' power to calm the storm. He did do that and does it still for troubled hearts who turn to him. Amen.

**LESS THAN ROOM SERVICE; JUNE 21, 2009, FATHER'S DAY; MARK 4:35-41; THOMAS H. YORTY, WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

One of the great refrains of the Bible are the words, "Do not be afraid." From the angels announcing Jesus' birth to Jesus himself those calming words are given by a loving God.

And yet, fear like a fungus grows on our relationships, in the dark and dank corners of our careers, in anticipation of a visit to the doctor. We harbor fears for our present and future as a church and community, as a nation and world.

Fear is seductive because wherever anything could go wrong something in us can't resist entertaining the thought of what would happen if it did. It seems almost second nature to focus on disaster: a teenager out with the car misses curfew; the days before the test results; retiring with a vastly reduced 401k.

But those words, "Do not be afraid," are offered not as a mere palliative or as something nice to say or as words spoken naively or insincerely but as a command.

For to succumb to fear is to succumb to distrust or even rejection of God's alternative to fear which is faith. But not just faith in the abstract or ethereal but faith in the biblical promises and experience of God's people over the millennia that the God who watches over will not let us fall; that this God knows our needs better than we do and that this loving God promises never to abandon us.

Note those promises say nothing of freedom from the vagaries of life's twists and turns; of life's consequences for poor judgment or self-serving decisions; nor do they contain guarantees and assurances that our lives will follow the exact course we map out for them.

So if we are to choose faith over fear at some point, at many points, on most if not on all days we face a decision to let go or not.

A decision to let go of the scenarios of disaster and destruction but also of imposing our will and way over God's will and way for our lives which, says Jesus and the Bible, is the path to our best, most fulfilled lives.

While the Bible does not promise that God's will and way for us will shelter us from the bumps and bruises of life; some of which occur to us randomly, some of which we unwittingly or wittingly bring on ourselves – the Bible does say that if we embrace God's path for our lives nothing can separate us from God and therefore from facing life's greatest difficulties with dignity and grace and calm.

Today's story from the Gospel of Mark describes the disciples experiencing a situation that takes them outside of their control and comfort zone.

The reading immediately preceding today's story is Jesus telling his followers that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed tiny at first but then it grows to become one of the greatest of plants. And the process by which it grows is in God's care and control. We simply need to trust and accept that the seed will respond.

But when the storm comes up and swamps the boat the disciples demonstrate little trust and rouse Jesus from his sleep admonishing him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

There it is: fear in control; and the fears of the disciples have them jumping to the conclusion of disaster; that they will perish. This is a wonderful metaphor Mark gives us. So many circumstances in life are like storms that swamp our boats and we cry out, like victims, “God don’t you care; where are you; we are perishing.”

Mark offers this story not to tell us that God is uncaring or that the storms of life are not real but to put us in the boat with the disciples to examine again how fear can take over our lives; or take over the life of the church – fundamentalism and McCarthyism are examples of fear in the driver’s seat of religion and politics.

Mark was written when the early Christian movement was beginning to experience rejection and persecution. The little boat of the early church was being tossed on the sea of a hostile culture. In fact, Mark cleverly uses a boat – taken from the ark, one of the first symbols for the church – to address in today’s story the question of fear and faith.

There is another interesting clue to the meaning of this story; after Jesus invites the disciples to go the other side, Mark says, “leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, *just as he was.*”

My hunch is that Mark is setting up a contrast between taking Jesus with us in life, in the life of the church “just as he is” or when the going gets tough trying to exchange that Jesus for Jesus “just as we want him to be.”

The disciples in the story and in the early church don’t want Jesus in the middle of the squall ‘just as he is’ asleep on the cushion in the stern of the boat. They want him to rescue them from their time of trial, remove the danger. They want some other Jesus than the Jesus they presently have.

And this has been a pernicious problem since the beginning of the church. Scholars and preachers today on both sides of the theological spectrum are producing a plethora of books on Jesus; not Jesus ‘as he is’ but Jesus as they wish him to be.

The historical information depicting Jesus provides only a scant outline; the Gospels themselves fill in that outline according to issues and problems facing the early church to whom they were writing. Beyond these simple portraits many if not most modern writers make Jesus into a straw man to knock down or superman to idolize depending on what ax they are grinding or culture war they are fighting.

I recently heard of one book just published that claims there was no historical Jesus at all and the figure the Gospels present was a pagan.

The impulse to abandon the God of our ancestors and make gods of our own choosing goes back to the golden calf the people of Israel fashioned in the wilderness when Moses was away on Mt. Sinai.

This impulse rears its head whenever the church is in crisis: during the first century persecutions; the Reformation; slavery and Civil War in this country; the years just preceding and during the Great Depression; Civil Rights – any time the ark of God’s people is rocked by the wind and waves of a stormy culture.

Two writers who steer admirably clear of exchanging Jesus just as he was – for Jesus as we want him to be in the midst of our crisis are Roman Catholic Garry Wills and Harvard Chaplain Peter Gomes.

I am sure there are others but Wills' *What Jesus Meant* and Gomes' *The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus* do a fine job claiming the ground between abdicating faith to reason and science on the one hand and turning Jesus into a talisman for a prosperous life on the other hand.

Maybe it is hard to take Jesus as he is because we, in North America, we of relative affluence, in a society of advanced technological devices in a consumer driven society believe that religion, even Jesus should be served to suit our palate.

But I am wondering today if this impulse to follow a Jesus of our own making or a spirituality of our own concoction rather than Jesus as he is doesn't stunt our spiritual growth and scuttle the great vessel of the church; which is on the same mission as Noah in his ark – to rescue and preserve life from the floods of our time.

The correct formula for following Jesus as I recall is not that Jesus would change but that we would change. Repent and be baptized is the Biblical phrase; that is literally, in the Greek, turn around and be made new. Conversion is another word; transformation too gets at the depth and totality of this change.

Nicodemus finds his heart after spending a lifetime in his head; Zaccheus restores to those he has fleeced double what he took; the rich young man unfortunately was unable to change, to sell what he had, give the proceeds to the poor and follow Jesus but the point is still change for those who would navigate this life in the church of Jesus Christ.

But the older I get the more difficult I realize it is to change. I amaze myself with the routines of my life from oatmeal every morning to wearing button-down shirts all these years. Change just isn't easy.

But somehow if we are to be the ones to change and not Jesus then it seems to me we need to relocate ourselves. For much of the mainline church in recent history religion has become not a ship of faith to sail the troubled waters of our time but a kind of theological hotel we escape to for the weekend or at least Sunday morning; a hotel with room service and a spiritual menu du jour for every religious palate.

Rather today's Gospel calls us into the vessel of the church to sail with Jesus to the other side, the land where God reigns; the kingdom that starts in our hearts like a mustard seed and grows into a mighty plant giving shade and shelter to all.

To get there means trusting him without demanding who he should be or what he should do; trusting his reason for summoning us into this vessel called the church even when we think it is about to capsize.

Someone said 'courage is fear that has said its prayers.' If we could be that honest raising Alissa and Simon; if we could teach them and all of our children to live with courage like that and remember Jesus' words to those frightened followers on Easter morning 'do not be afraid', whatever else they face in life, they'll be just fine.

That's a worthy goal for any father or mother or mentor.

Of course, the other clue to the meaning of the story is Jesus' power to calm the storm. He did do that and does it still for troubled hearts who turn to him. Amen.

**LESS THAN ROOM SERVICE; JUNE 21, 2009, FATHER'S DAY; MARK 4:35-41; THOMAS H. YORTY, WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

One of the great refrains of the Bible are the words, "Do not be afraid." From the angels announcing Jesus' birth to Jesus himself those calming words are given by a loving God.

And yet, fear like a fungus grows on our relationships, in the dark and dank corners of our careers, in anticipation of a visit to the doctor. We harbor fears for our present and future as a church and community, as a nation and world.

Fear is seductive because wherever anything could go wrong something in us can't resist entertaining the thought of what would happen if it did. It seems almost second nature to focus on disaster: a teenager out with the car misses curfew; the days before the test results; retiring with a vastly reduced 401k.

But those words, "Do not be afraid," are offered not as a mere palliative or as something nice to say or as words spoken naively or insincerely but as a command.

For to succumb to fear is to succumb to distrust or even rejection of God's alternative to fear which is faith. But not just faith in the abstract or ethereal but faith in the biblical promises and experience of God's people over the millennia that the God who watches over will not let us fall; that this God knows our needs better than we do and that this loving God promises never to abandon us.

Note those promises say nothing of freedom from the vagaries of life's twists and turns; of life's consequences for poor judgment or self-serving decisions; nor do they contain guarantees and assurances that our lives will follow the exact course we map out for them.

So if we are to choose faith over fear at some point, at many points, on most if not on all days we face a decision to let go or not.

A decision to let go of the scenarios of disaster and destruction but also of imposing our will and way over God's will and way for our lives which, says Jesus and the Bible, is the path to our best, most fulfilled lives.

While the Bible does not promise that God's will and way for us will shelter us from the bumps and bruises of life; some of which occur to us randomly, some of which we unwittingly or wittingly bring on ourselves – the Bible does say that if we embrace God's path for our lives nothing can separate us from God and therefore from facing life's greatest difficulties with dignity and grace and calm.

Today's story from the Gospel of Mark describes the disciples experiencing a situation that takes them outside of their control and comfort zone.

The reading immediately preceding today's story is Jesus telling his followers that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed tiny at first but then it grows to become one of the greatest of plants. And the process by which it grows is in God's care and control. We simply need to trust and accept that the seed will respond.

But when the storm comes up and swamps the boat the disciples demonstrate little trust and rouse Jesus from his sleep admonishing him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

There it is: fear in control; and the fears of the disciples have them jumping to the conclusion of disaster; that they will perish. This is a wonderful metaphor Mark gives us. So many circumstances in life are like storms that swamp our boats and we cry out, like victims, “God don’t you care; where are you; we are perishing.”

Mark offers this story not to tell us that God is uncaring or that the storms of life are not real but to put us in the boat with the disciples to examine again how fear can take over our lives; or take over the life of the church – fundamentalism and McCarthyism are examples of fear in the driver’s seat of religion and politics.

Mark was written when the early Christian movement was beginning to experience rejection and persecution. The little boat of the early church was being tossed on the sea of a hostile culture. In fact, Mark cleverly uses a boat – taken from the ark, one of the first symbols for the church – to address in today’s story the question of fear and faith.

There is another interesting clue to the meaning of this story; after Jesus invites the disciples to go the other side, Mark says, “leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, *just as he was.*”

My hunch is that Mark is setting up a contrast between taking Jesus with us in life, in the life of the church “just as he is” or when the going gets tough trying to exchange that Jesus for Jesus “just as we want him to be.”

The disciples in the story and in the early church don’t want Jesus in the middle of the squall ‘just as he is’ asleep on the cushion in the stern of the boat. They want him to rescue them from their time of trial, remove the danger. They want some other Jesus than the Jesus they presently have.

And this has been a pernicious problem since the beginning of the church. Scholars and preachers today on both sides of the theological spectrum are producing a plethora of books on Jesus; not Jesus ‘as he is’ but Jesus as they wish him to be.

The historical information depicting Jesus provides only a scant outline; the Gospels themselves fill in that outline according to issues and problems facing the early church to whom they were writing. Beyond these simple portraits many if not most modern writers make Jesus into a straw man to knock down or superman to idolize depending on what ax they are grinding or culture war they are fighting.

I recently heard of one book just published that claims there was no historical Jesus at all and the figure the Gospels present was a pagan.

The impulse to abandon the God of our ancestors and make gods of our own choosing goes back to the golden calf the people of Israel fashioned in the wilderness when Moses was away on Mt. Sinai.

This impulse rears its head whenever the church is in crisis: during the first century persecutions; the Reformation; slavery and Civil War in this country; the years just preceding and during the Great Depression; Civil Rights – any time the ark of God’s people is rocked by the wind and waves of a stormy culture.

Two writers who steer admirably clear of exchanging Jesus just as he was – for Jesus as we want him to be in the midst of our crisis are Roman Catholic Garry Wills and Harvard Chaplain Peter Gomes.

I am sure there are others but Wills' *What Jesus Meant* and Gomes' *The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus* do a fine job claiming the ground between abdicating faith to reason and science on the one hand and turning Jesus into a talisman for a prosperous life on the other hand.

Maybe it is hard to take Jesus as he is because we, in North America, we of relative affluence, in a society of advanced technological devices in a consumer driven society believe that religion, even Jesus should be served to suit our palate.

But I am wondering today if this impulse to follow a Jesus of our own making or a spirituality of our own concoction rather than Jesus as he is doesn't stunt our spiritual growth and scuttle the great vessel of the church; which is on the same mission as Noah in his ark – to rescue and preserve life from the floods of our time.

The correct formula for following Jesus as I recall is not that Jesus would change but that we would change. Repent and be baptized is the Biblical phrase; that is literally, in the Greek, turn around and be made new. Conversion is another word; transformation too gets at the depth and totality of this change.

Nicodemus finds his heart after spending a lifetime in his head; Zaccheus restores to those he has fleeced double what he took; the rich young man unfortunately was unable to change, to sell what he had, give the proceeds to the poor and follow Jesus but the point is still change for those who would navigate this life in the church of Jesus Christ.

But the older I get the more difficult I realize it is to change. I amaze myself with the routines of my life from oatmeal every morning to wearing button-down shirts all these years. Change just isn't easy.

But somehow if we are to be the ones to change and not Jesus then it seems to me we need to relocate ourselves. For much of the mainline church in recent history religion has become not a ship of faith to sail the troubled waters of our time but a kind of theological hotel we escape to for the weekend or at least Sunday morning; a hotel with room service and a spiritual menu du jour for every religious palate.

Rather today's Gospel calls us into the vessel of the church to sail with Jesus to the other side, the land where God reigns; the kingdom that starts in our hearts like a mustard seed and grows into a mighty plant giving shade and shelter to all.

To get there means trusting him without demanding who he should be or what he should do; trusting his reason for summoning us into this vessel called the church even when we think it is about to capsize.

Someone said 'courage is fear that has said its prayers.' If we could be that honest raising Alissa and Simon; if we could teach them and all of our children to live with courage like that and remember Jesus' words to those frightened followers on Easter morning 'do not be afraid', whatever else they face in life, they'll be just fine.

That's a worthy goal for any father or mother or mentor.

Of course, the other clue to the meaning of the story is Jesus' power to calm the storm. He did do that and does it still for troubled hearts who turn to him. Amen.

**LESS THAN ROOM SERVICE; JUNE 21, 2009, FATHER'S DAY; MARK 4:35-41; THOMAS H. YORTY, WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

One of the great refrains of the Bible are the words, "Do not be afraid." From the angels announcing Jesus' birth to Jesus himself those calming words are given by a loving God.

And yet, fear like a fungus grows on our relationships, in the dark and dank corners of our careers, in anticipation of a visit to the doctor. We harbor fears for our present and future as a church and community, as a nation and world.

Fear is seductive because wherever anything could go wrong something in us can't resist entertaining the thought of what would happen if it did. It seems almost second nature to focus on disaster: a teenager out with the car misses curfew; the days before the test results; retiring with a vastly reduced 401k.

But those words, "Do not be afraid," are offered not as a mere palliative or as something nice to say or as words spoken naively or insincerely but as a command.

For to succumb to fear is to succumb to distrust or even rejection of God's alternative to fear which is faith. But not just faith in the abstract or ethereal but faith in the biblical promises and experience of God's people over the millennia that the God who watches over will not let us fall; that this God knows our needs better than we do and that this loving God promises never to abandon us.

Note those promises say nothing of freedom from the vagaries of life's twists and turns; of life's consequences for poor judgment or self-serving decisions; nor do they contain guarantees and assurances that our lives will follow the exact course we map out for them.

So if we are to choose faith over fear at some point, at many points, on most if not on all days we face a decision to let go or not.

A decision to let go of the scenarios of disaster and destruction but also of imposing our will and way over God's will and way for our lives which, says Jesus and the Bible, is the path to our best, most fulfilled lives.

While the Bible does not promise that God's will and way for us will shelter us from the bumps and bruises of life; some of which occur to us randomly, some of which we unwittingly or wittingly bring on ourselves – the Bible does say that if we embrace God's path for our lives nothing can separate us from God and therefore from facing life's greatest difficulties with dignity and grace and calm.

Today's story from the Gospel of Mark describes the disciples experiencing a situation that takes them outside of their control and comfort zone.

The reading immediately preceding today's story is Jesus telling his followers that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed tiny at first but then it grows to become one of the greatest of plants. And the process by which it grows is in God's care and control. We simply need to trust and accept that the seed will respond.

But when the storm comes up and swamps the boat the disciples demonstrate little trust and rouse Jesus from his sleep admonishing him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

There it is: fear in control; and the fears of the disciples have them jumping to the conclusion of disaster; that they will perish. This is a wonderful metaphor Mark gives us. So many circumstances in life are like storms that swamp our boats and we cry out, like victims, “God don’t you care; where are you; we are perishing.”

Mark offers this story not to tell us that God is uncaring or that the storms of life are not real but to put us in the boat with the disciples to examine again how fear can take over our lives; or take over the life of the church – fundamentalism and McCarthyism are examples of fear in the driver’s seat of religion and politics.

Mark was written when the early Christian movement was beginning to experience rejection and persecution. The little boat of the early church was being tossed on the sea of a hostile culture. In fact, Mark cleverly uses a boat – taken from the ark, one of the first symbols for the church – to address in today’s story the question of fear and faith.

There is another interesting clue to the meaning of this story; after Jesus invites the disciples to go the other side, Mark says, “leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, *just as he was.*”

My hunch is that Mark is setting up a contrast between taking Jesus with us in life, in the life of the church “just as he is” or when the going gets tough trying to exchange that Jesus for Jesus “just as we want him to be.”

The disciples in the story and in the early church don’t want Jesus in the middle of the squall ‘just as he is’ asleep on the cushion in the stern of the boat. They want him to rescue them from their time of trial, remove the danger. They want some other Jesus than the Jesus they presently have.

And this has been a pernicious problem since the beginning of the church. Scholars and preachers today on both sides of the theological spectrum are producing a plethora of books on Jesus; not Jesus ‘as he is’ but Jesus as they wish him to be.

The historical information depicting Jesus provides only a scant outline; the Gospels themselves fill in that outline according to issues and problems facing the early church to whom they were writing. Beyond these simple portraits many if not most modern writers make Jesus into a straw man to knock down or superman to idolize depending on what ax they are grinding or culture war they are fighting.

I recently heard of one book just published that claims there was no historical Jesus at all and the figure the Gospels present was a pagan.

The impulse to abandon the God of our ancestors and make gods of our own choosing goes back to the golden calf the people of Israel fashioned in the wilderness when Moses was away on Mt. Sinai.

This impulse rears its head whenever the church is in crisis: during the first century persecutions; the Reformation; slavery and Civil War in this country; the years just preceding and during the Great Depression; Civil Rights – any time the ark of God’s people is rocked by the wind and waves of a stormy culture.

Two writers who steer admirably clear of exchanging Jesus just as he was – for Jesus as we want him to be in the midst of our crisis are Roman Catholic Garry Wills and Harvard Chaplain Peter Gomes.

I am sure there are others but Wills' *What Jesus Meant* and Gomes' *The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus* do a fine job claiming the ground between abdicating faith to reason and science on the one hand and turning Jesus into a talisman for a prosperous life on the other hand.

Maybe it is hard to take Jesus as he is because we, in North America, we of relative affluence, in a society of advanced technological devices in a consumer driven society believe that religion, even Jesus should be served to suit our palate.

But I am wondering today if this impulse to follow a Jesus of our own making or a spirituality of our own concoction rather than Jesus as he is doesn't stunt our spiritual growth and scuttle the great vessel of the church; which is on the same mission as Noah in his ark – to rescue and preserve life from the floods of our time.

The correct formula for following Jesus as I recall is not that Jesus would change but that we would change. Repent and be baptized is the Biblical phrase; that is literally, in the Greek, turn around and be made new. Conversion is another word; transformation too gets at the depth and totality of this change.

Nicodemus finds his heart after spending a lifetime in his head; Zaccheus restores to those he has fleeced double what he took; the rich young man unfortunately was unable to change, to sell what he had, give the proceeds to the poor and follow Jesus but the point is still change for those who would navigate this life in the church of Jesus Christ.

But the older I get the more difficult I realize it is to change. I amaze myself with the routines of my life from oatmeal every morning to wearing button-down shirts all these years. Change just isn't easy.

But somehow if we are to be the ones to change and not Jesus then it seems to me we need to relocate ourselves. For much of the mainline church in recent history religion has become not a ship of faith to sail the troubled waters of our time but a kind of theological hotel we escape to for the weekend or at least Sunday morning; a hotel with room service and a spiritual menu du jour for every religious palate.

Rather today's Gospel calls us into the vessel of the church to sail with Jesus to the other side, the land where God reigns; the kingdom that starts in our hearts like a mustard seed and grows into a mighty plant giving shade and shelter to all.

To get there means trusting him without demanding who he should be or what he should do; trusting his reason for summoning us into this vessel called the church even when we think it is about to capsize.

Someone said 'courage is fear that has said its prayers.' If we could be that honest raising Alissa and Simon; if we could teach them and all of our children to live with courage like that and remember Jesus' words to those frightened followers on Easter morning 'do not be afraid', whatever else they face in life, they'll be just fine.

That's a worthy goal for any father or mother or mentor.

Of course, the other clue to the meaning of the story is Jesus' power to calm the storm. He did do that and does it still for troubled hearts who turn to him. Amen.

**LESS THAN ROOM SERVICE; JUNE 21, 2009, FATHER'S DAY; MARK 4:35-41; THOMAS H. YORTY, WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

One of the great refrains of the Bible are the words, "Do not be afraid." From the angels announcing Jesus' birth to Jesus himself those calming words are given by a loving God.

And yet, fear like a fungus grows on our relationships, in the dark and dank corners of our careers, in anticipation of a visit to the doctor. We harbor fears for our present and future as a church and community, as a nation and world.

Fear is seductive because wherever anything could go wrong something in us can't resist entertaining the thought of what would happen if it did. It seems almost second nature to focus on disaster: a teenager out with the car misses curfew; the days before the test results; retiring with a vastly reduced 401k.

But those words, "Do not be afraid," are offered not as a mere palliative or as something nice to say or as words spoken naively or insincerely but as a command.

For to succumb to fear is to succumb to distrust or even rejection of God's alternative to fear which is faith. But not just faith in the abstract or ethereal but faith in the biblical promises and experience of God's people over the millennia that the God who watches over will not let us fall; that this God knows our needs better than we do and that this loving God promises never to abandon us.

Note those promises say nothing of freedom from the vagaries of life's twists and turns; of life's consequences for poor judgment or self-serving decisions; nor do they contain guarantees and assurances that our lives will follow the exact course we map out for them.

So if we are to choose faith over fear at some point, at many points, on most if not on all days we face a decision to let go or not.

A decision to let go of the scenarios of disaster and destruction but also of imposing our will and way over God's will and way for our lives which, says Jesus and the Bible, is the path to our best, most fulfilled lives.

While the Bible does not promise that God's will and way for us will shelter us from the bumps and bruises of life; some of which occur to us randomly, some of which we unwittingly or wittingly bring on ourselves – the Bible does say that if we embrace God's path for our lives nothing can separate us from God and therefore from facing life's greatest difficulties with dignity and grace and calm.

Today's story from the Gospel of Mark describes the disciples experiencing a situation that takes them outside of their control and comfort zone.

The reading immediately preceding today's story is Jesus telling his followers that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed tiny at first but then it grows to become one of the greatest of plants. And the process by which it grows is in God's care and control. We simply need to trust and accept that the seed will respond.

But when the storm comes up and swamps the boat the disciples demonstrate little trust and rouse Jesus from his sleep admonishing him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

There it is: fear in control; and the fears of the disciples have them jumping to the conclusion of disaster; that they will perish. This is a wonderful metaphor Mark gives us. So many circumstances in life are like storms that swamp our boats and we cry out, like victims, “God don’t you care; where are you; we are perishing.”

Mark offers this story not to tell us that God is uncaring or that the storms of life are not real but to put us in the boat with the disciples to examine again how fear can take over our lives; or take over the life of the church – fundamentalism and McCarthyism are examples of fear in the driver’s seat of religion and politics.

Mark was written when the early Christian movement was beginning to experience rejection and persecution. The little boat of the early church was being tossed on the sea of a hostile culture. In fact, Mark cleverly uses a boat – taken from the ark, one of the first symbols for the church – to address in today’s story the question of fear and faith.

There is another interesting clue to the meaning of this story; after Jesus invites the disciples to go the other side, Mark says, “leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, *just as he was.*”

My hunch is that Mark is setting up a contrast between taking Jesus with us in life, in the life of the church “just as he is” or when the going gets tough trying to exchange that Jesus for Jesus “just as we want him to be.”

The disciples in the story and in the early church don’t want Jesus in the middle of the squall ‘just as he is’ asleep on the cushion in the stern of the boat. They want him to rescue them from their time of trial, remove the danger. They want some other Jesus than the Jesus they presently have.

And this has been a pernicious problem since the beginning of the church. Scholars and preachers today on both sides of the theological spectrum are producing a plethora of books on Jesus; not Jesus ‘as he is’ but Jesus as they wish him to be.

The historical information depicting Jesus provides only a scant outline; the Gospels themselves fill in that outline according to issues and problems facing the early church to whom they were writing. Beyond these simple portraits many if not most modern writers make Jesus into a straw man to knock down or superman to idolize depending on what ax they are grinding or culture war they are fighting.

I recently heard of one book just published that claims there was no historical Jesus at all and the figure the Gospels present was a pagan.

The impulse to abandon the God of our ancestors and make gods of our own choosing goes back to the golden calf the people of Israel fashioned in the wilderness when Moses was away on Mt. Sinai.

This impulse rears its head whenever the church is in crisis: during the first century persecutions; the Reformation; slavery and Civil War in this country; the years just preceding and during the Great Depression; Civil Rights – any time the ark of God’s people is rocked by the wind and waves of a stormy culture.

Two writers who steer admirably clear of exchanging Jesus just as he was – for Jesus as we want him to be in the midst of our crisis are Roman Catholic Garry Wills and Harvard Chaplain Peter Gomes.

I am sure there are others but Wills' *What Jesus Meant* and Gomes' *The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus* do a fine job claiming the ground between abdicating faith to reason and science on the one hand and turning Jesus into a talisman for a prosperous life on the other hand.

Maybe it is hard to take Jesus as he is because we, in North America, we of relative affluence, in a society of advanced technological devices in a consumer driven society believe that religion, even Jesus should be served to suit our palate.

But I am wondering today if this impulse to follow a Jesus of our own making or a spirituality of our own concoction rather than Jesus as he is doesn't stunt our spiritual growth and scuttle the great vessel of the church; which is on the same mission as Noah in his ark – to rescue and preserve life from the floods of our time.

The correct formula for following Jesus as I recall is not that Jesus would change but that we would change. Repent and be baptized is the Biblical phrase; that is literally, in the Greek, turn around and be made new. Conversion is another word; transformation too gets at the depth and totality of this change.

Nicodemus finds his heart after spending a lifetime in his head; Zaccheus restores to those he has fleeced double what he took; the rich young man unfortunately was unable to change, to sell what he had, give the proceeds to the poor and follow Jesus but the point is still change for those who would navigate this life in the church of Jesus Christ.

But the older I get the more difficult I realize it is to change. I amaze myself with the routines of my life from oatmeal every morning to wearing button-down shirts all these years. Change just isn't easy.

But somehow if we are to be the ones to change and not Jesus then it seems to me we need to relocate ourselves. For much of the mainline church in recent history religion has become not a ship of faith to sail the troubled waters of our time but a kind of theological hotel we escape to for the weekend or at least Sunday morning; a hotel with room service and a spiritual menu du jour for every religious palate.

Rather today's Gospel calls us into the vessel of the church to sail with Jesus to the other side, the land where God reigns; the kingdom that starts in our hearts like a mustard seed and grows into a mighty plant giving shade and shelter to all.

To get there means trusting him without demanding who he should be or what he should do; trusting his reason for summoning us into this vessel called the church even when we think it is about to capsize.

Someone said 'courage is fear that has said its prayers.' If we could be that honest raising Alissa and Simon; if we could teach them and all of our children to live with courage like that and remember Jesus' words to those frightened followers on Easter morning 'do not be afraid', whatever else they face in life, they'll be just fine.

That's a worthy goal for any father or mother or mentor.

Of course, the other clue to the meaning of the story is Jesus' power to calm the storm. He did do that and does it still for troubled hearts who turn to him. Amen.

**LESS THAN ROOM SERVICE; JUNE 21, 2009, FATHER'S DAY; MARK 4:35-41; THOMAS H. YORTY, WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

One of the great refrains of the Bible are the words, "Do not be afraid." From the angels announcing Jesus' birth to Jesus himself those calming words are given by a loving God.

And yet, fear like a fungus grows on our relationships, in the dark and dank corners of our careers, in anticipation of a visit to the doctor. We harbor fears for our present and future as a church and community, as a nation and world.

Fear is seductive because wherever anything could go wrong something in us can't resist entertaining the thought of what would happen if it did. It seems almost second nature to focus on disaster: a teenager out with the car misses curfew; the days before the test results; retiring with a vastly reduced 401k.

But those words, "Do not be afraid," are offered not as a mere palliative or as something nice to say or as words spoken naively or insincerely but as a command.

For to succumb to fear is to succumb to distrust or even rejection of God's alternative to fear which is faith. But not just faith in the abstract or ethereal but faith in the biblical promises and experience of God's people over the millennia that the God who watches over will not let us fall; that this God knows our needs better than we do and that this loving God promises never to abandon us.

Note those promises say nothing of freedom from the vagaries of life's twists and turns; of life's consequences for poor judgment or self-serving decisions; nor do they contain guarantees and assurances that our lives will follow the exact course we map out for them.

So if we are to choose faith over fear at some point, at many points, on most if not on all days we face a decision to let go or not.

A decision to let go of the scenarios of disaster and destruction but also of imposing our will and way over God's will and way for our lives which, says Jesus and the Bible, is the path to our best, most fulfilled lives.

While the Bible does not promise that God's will and way for us will shelter us from the bumps and bruises of life; some of which occur to us randomly, some of which we unwittingly or wittingly bring on ourselves – the Bible does say that if we embrace God's path for our lives nothing can separate us from God and therefore from facing life's greatest difficulties with dignity and grace and calm.

Today's story from the Gospel of Mark describes the disciples experiencing a situation that takes them outside of their control and comfort zone.

The reading immediately preceding today's story is Jesus telling his followers that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed tiny at first but then it grows to become one of the greatest of plants. And the process by which it grows is in God's care and control. We simply need to trust and accept that the seed will respond.

But when the storm comes up and swamps the boat the disciples demonstrate little trust and rouse Jesus from his sleep admonishing him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

There it is: fear in control; and the fears of the disciples have them jumping to the conclusion of disaster; that they will perish. This is a wonderful metaphor Mark gives us. So many circumstances in life are like storms that swamp our boats and we cry out, like victims, “God don’t you care; where are you; we are perishing.”

Mark offers this story not to tell us that God is uncaring or that the storms of life are not real but to put us in the boat with the disciples to examine again how fear can take over our lives; or take over the life of the church – fundamentalism and McCarthyism are examples of fear in the driver’s seat of religion and politics.

Mark was written when the early Christian movement was beginning to experience rejection and persecution. The little boat of the early church was being tossed on the sea of a hostile culture. In fact, Mark cleverly uses a boat – taken from the ark, one of the first symbols for the church – to address in today’s story the question of fear and faith.

There is another interesting clue to the meaning of this story; after Jesus invites the disciples to go the other side, Mark says, “leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, *just as he was.*”

My hunch is that Mark is setting up a contrast between taking Jesus with us in life, in the life of the church “just as he is” or when the going gets tough trying to exchange that Jesus for Jesus “just as we want him to be.”

The disciples in the story and in the early church don’t want Jesus in the middle of the squall ‘just as he is’ asleep on the cushion in the stern of the boat. They want him to rescue them from their time of trial, remove the danger. They want some other Jesus than the Jesus they presently have.

And this has been a pernicious problem since the beginning of the church. Scholars and preachers today on both sides of the theological spectrum are producing a plethora of books on Jesus; not Jesus ‘as he is’ but Jesus as they wish him to be.

The historical information depicting Jesus provides only a scant outline; the Gospels themselves fill in that outline according to issues and problems facing the early church to whom they were writing. Beyond these simple portraits many if not most modern writers make Jesus into a straw man to knock down or superman to idolize depending on what ax they are grinding or culture war they are fighting.

I recently heard of one book just published that claims there was no historical Jesus at all and the figure the Gospels present was a pagan.

The impulse to abandon the God of our ancestors and make gods of our own choosing goes back to the golden calf the people of Israel fashioned in the wilderness when Moses was away on Mt. Sinai.

This impulse rears its head whenever the church is in crisis: during the first century persecutions; the Reformation; slavery and Civil War in this country; the years just preceding and during the Great Depression; Civil Rights – any time the ark of God’s people is rocked by the wind and waves of a stormy culture.

Two writers who steer admirably clear of exchanging Jesus just as he was – for Jesus as we want him to be in the midst of our crisis are Roman Catholic Garry Wills and Harvard Chaplain Peter Gomes.

I am sure there are others but Wills' *What Jesus Meant* and Gomes' *The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus* do a fine job claiming the ground between abdicating faith to reason and science on the one hand and turning Jesus into a talisman for a prosperous life on the other hand.

Maybe it is hard to take Jesus as he is because we, in North America, we of relative affluence, in a society of advanced technological devices in a consumer driven society believe that religion, even Jesus should be served to suit our palate.

But I am wondering today if this impulse to follow a Jesus of our own making or a spirituality of our own concoction rather than Jesus as he is doesn't stunt our spiritual growth and scuttle the great vessel of the church; which is on the same mission as Noah in his ark – to rescue and preserve life from the floods of our time.

The correct formula for following Jesus as I recall is not that Jesus would change but that we would change. Repent and be baptized is the Biblical phrase; that is literally, in the Greek, turn around and be made new. Conversion is another word; transformation too gets at the depth and totality of this change.

Nicodemus finds his heart after spending a lifetime in his head; Zaccheus restores to those he has fleeced double what he took; the rich young man unfortunately was unable to change, to sell what he had, give the proceeds to the poor and follow Jesus but the point is still change for those who would navigate this life in the church of Jesus Christ.

But the older I get the more difficult I realize it is to change. I amaze myself with the routines of my life from oatmeal every morning to wearing button-down shirts all these years. Change just isn't easy.

But somehow if we are to be the ones to change and not Jesus then it seems to me we need to relocate ourselves. For much of the mainline church in recent history religion has become not a ship of faith to sail the troubled waters of our time but a kind of theological hotel we escape to for the weekend or at least Sunday morning; a hotel with room service and a spiritual menu du jour for every religious palate.

Rather today's Gospel calls us into the vessel of the church to sail with Jesus to the other side, the land where God reigns; the kingdom that starts in our hearts like a mustard seed and grows into a mighty plant giving shade and shelter to all.

To get there means trusting him without demanding who he should be or what he should do; trusting his reason for summoning us into this vessel called the church even when we think it is about to capsize.

Someone said 'courage is fear that has said its prayers.' If we could be that honest raising Alissa and Simon; if we could teach them and all of our children to live with courage like that and remember Jesus' words to those frightened followers on Easter morning 'do not be afraid', whatever else they face in life, they'll be just fine.

That's a worthy goal for any father or mother or mentor.

Of course, the other clue to the meaning of the story is Jesus' power to calm the storm. He did do that and does it still for troubled hearts who turn to him. Amen.

**LESS THAN ROOM SERVICE; JUNE 21, 2009, FATHER'S DAY; MARK 4:35-41; THOMAS H. YORTY, WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

One of the great refrains of the Bible are the words, "Do not be afraid." From the angels announcing Jesus' birth to Jesus himself those calming words are given by a loving God.

And yet, fear like a fungus grows on our relationships, in the dark and dank corners of our careers, in anticipation of a visit to the doctor. We harbor fears for our present and future as a church and community, as a nation and world.

Fear is seductive because wherever anything could go wrong something in us can't resist entertaining the thought of what would happen if it did. It seems almost second nature to focus on disaster: a teenager out with the car misses curfew; the days before the test results; retiring with a vastly reduced 401k.

But those words, "Do not be afraid," are offered not as a mere palliative or as something nice to say or as words spoken naively or insincerely but as a command.

For to succumb to fear is to succumb to distrust or even rejection of God's alternative to fear which is faith. But not just faith in the abstract or ethereal but faith in the biblical promises and experience of God's people over the millennia that the God who watches over will not let us fall; that this God knows our needs better than we do and that this loving God promises never to abandon us.

Note those promises say nothing of freedom from the vagaries of life's twists and turns; of life's consequences for poor judgment or self-serving decisions; nor do they contain guarantees and assurances that our lives will follow the exact course we map out for them.

So if we are to choose faith over fear at some point, at many points, on most if not on all days we face a decision to let go or not.

A decision to let go of the scenarios of disaster and destruction but also of imposing our will and way over God's will and way for our lives which, says Jesus and the Bible, is the path to our best, most fulfilled lives.

While the Bible does not promise that God's will and way for us will shelter us from the bumps and bruises of life; some of which occur to us randomly, some of which we unwittingly or wittingly bring on ourselves – the Bible does say that if we embrace God's path for our lives nothing can separate us from God and therefore from facing life's greatest difficulties with dignity and grace and calm.

Today's story from the Gospel of Mark describes the disciples experiencing a situation that takes them outside of their control and comfort zone.

The reading immediately preceding today's story is Jesus telling his followers that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed tiny at first but then it grows to become one of the greatest of plants. And the process by which it grows is in God's care and control. We simply need to trust and accept that the seed will respond.

But when the storm comes up and swamps the boat the disciples demonstrate little trust and rouse Jesus from his sleep admonishing him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

There it is: fear in control; and the fears of the disciples have them jumping to the conclusion of disaster; that they will perish. This is a wonderful metaphor Mark gives us. So many circumstances in life are like storms that swamp our boats and we cry out, like victims, “God don’t you care; where are you; we are perishing.”

Mark offers this story not to tell us that God is uncaring or that the storms of life are not real but to put us in the boat with the disciples to examine again how fear can take over our lives; or take over the life of the church – fundamentalism and McCarthyism are examples of fear in the driver’s seat of religion and politics.

Mark was written when the early Christian movement was beginning to experience rejection and persecution. The little boat of the early church was being tossed on the sea of a hostile culture. In fact, Mark cleverly uses a boat – taken from the ark, one of the first symbols for the church – to address in today’s story the question of fear and faith.

There is another interesting clue to the meaning of this story; after Jesus invites the disciples to go the other side, Mark says, “leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, *just as he was.*”

My hunch is that Mark is setting up a contrast between taking Jesus with us in life, in the life of the church “just as he is” or when the going gets tough trying to exchange that Jesus for Jesus “just as we want him to be.”

The disciples in the story and in the early church don’t want Jesus in the middle of the squall ‘just as he is’ asleep on the cushion in the stern of the boat. They want him to rescue them from their time of trial, remove the danger. They want some other Jesus than the Jesus they presently have.

And this has been a pernicious problem since the beginning of the church. Scholars and preachers today on both sides of the theological spectrum are producing a plethora of books on Jesus; not Jesus ‘as he is’ but Jesus as they wish him to be.

The historical information depicting Jesus provides only a scant outline; the Gospels themselves fill in that outline according to issues and problems facing the early church to whom they were writing. Beyond these simple portraits many if not most modern writers make Jesus into a straw man to knock down or superman to idolize depending on what ax they are grinding or culture war they are fighting.

I recently heard of one book just published that claims there was no historical Jesus at all and the figure the Gospels present was a pagan.

The impulse to abandon the God of our ancestors and make gods of our own choosing goes back to the golden calf the people of Israel fashioned in the wilderness when Moses was away on Mt. Sinai.

This impulse rears its head whenever the church is in crisis: during the first century persecutions; the Reformation; slavery and Civil War in this country; the years just preceding and during the Great Depression; Civil Rights – any time the ark of God’s people is rocked by the wind and waves of a stormy culture.

Two writers who steer admirably clear of exchanging Jesus just as he was – for Jesus as we want him to be in the midst of our crisis are Roman Catholic Garry Wills and Harvard Chaplain Peter Gomes.

I am sure there are others but Wills' *What Jesus Meant* and Gomes' *The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus* do a fine job claiming the ground between abdicating faith to reason and science on the one hand and turning Jesus into a talisman for a prosperous life on the other hand.

Maybe it is hard to take Jesus as he is because we, in North America, we of relative affluence, in a society of advanced technological devices in a consumer driven society believe that religion, even Jesus should be served to suit our palate.

But I am wondering today if this impulse to follow a Jesus of our own making or a spirituality of our own concoction rather than Jesus as he is doesn't stunt our spiritual growth and scuttle the great vessel of the church; which is on the same mission as Noah in his ark – to rescue and preserve life from the floods of our time.

The correct formula for following Jesus as I recall is not that Jesus would change but that we would change. Repent and be baptized is the Biblical phrase; that is literally, in the Greek, turn around and be made new. Conversion is another word; transformation too gets at the depth and totality of this change.

Nicodemus finds his heart after spending a lifetime in his head; Zaccheus restores to those he has fleeced double what he took; the rich young man unfortunately was unable to change, to sell what he had, give the proceeds to the poor and follow Jesus but the point is still change for those who would navigate this life in the church of Jesus Christ.

But the older I get the more difficult I realize it is to change. I amaze myself with the routines of my life from oatmeal every morning to wearing button-down shirts all these years. Change just isn't easy.

But somehow if we are to be the ones to change and not Jesus then it seems to me we need to relocate ourselves. For much of the mainline church in recent history religion has become not a ship of faith to sail the troubled waters of our time but a kind of theological hotel we escape to for the weekend or at least Sunday morning; a hotel with room service and a spiritual menu du jour for every religious palate.

Rather today's Gospel calls us into the vessel of the church to sail with Jesus to the other side, the land where God reigns; the kingdom that starts in our hearts like a mustard seed and grows into a mighty plant giving shade and shelter to all.

To get there means trusting him without demanding who he should be or what he should do; trusting his reason for summoning us into this vessel called the church even when we think it is about to capsize.

Someone said 'courage is fear that has said its prayers.' If we could be that honest raising Alissa and Simon; if we could teach them and all of our children to live with courage like that and remember Jesus' words to those frightened followers on Easter morning 'do not be afraid', whatever else they face in life, they'll be just fine.

That's a worthy goal for any father or mother or mentor.

Of course, the other clue to the meaning of the story is Jesus' power to calm the storm. He did do that and does it still for troubled hearts who turn to him. Amen.

**LESS THAN ROOM SERVICE; JUNE 21, 2009, FATHER'S DAY; MARK 4:35-41; THOMAS H. YORTY, WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

One of the great refrains of the Bible are the words, "Do not be afraid." From the angels announcing Jesus' birth to Jesus himself those calming words are given by a loving God.

And yet, fear like a fungus grows on our relationships, in the dark and dank corners of our careers, in anticipation of a visit to the doctor. We harbor fears for our present and future as a church and community, as a nation and world.

Fear is seductive because wherever anything could go wrong something in us can't resist entertaining the thought of what would happen if it did. It seems almost second nature to focus on disaster: a teenager out with the car misses curfew; the days before the test results; retiring with a vastly reduced 401k.

But those words, "Do not be afraid," are offered not as a mere palliative or as something nice to say or as words spoken naively or insincerely but as a command.

For to succumb to fear is to succumb to distrust or even rejection of God's alternative to fear which is faith. But not just faith in the abstract or ethereal but faith in the biblical promises and experience of God's people over the millennia that the God who watches over will not let us fall; that this God knows our needs better than we do and that this loving God promises never to abandon us.

Note those promises say nothing of freedom from the vagaries of life's twists and turns; of life's consequences for poor judgment or self-serving decisions; nor do they contain guarantees and assurances that our lives will follow the exact course we map out for them.

So if we are to choose faith over fear at some point, at many points, on most if not on all days we face a decision to let go or not.

A decision to let go of the scenarios of disaster and destruction but also of imposing our will and way over God's will and way for our lives which, says Jesus and the Bible, is the path to our best, most fulfilled lives.

While the Bible does not promise that God's will and way for us will shelter us from the bumps and bruises of life; some of which occur to us randomly, some of which we unwittingly or wittingly bring on ourselves – the Bible does say that if we embrace God's path for our lives nothing can separate us from God and therefore from facing life's greatest difficulties with dignity and grace and calm.

Today's story from the Gospel of Mark describes the disciples experiencing a situation that takes them outside of their control and comfort zone.

The reading immediately preceding today's story is Jesus telling his followers that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed tiny at first but then it grows to become one of the greatest of plants. And the process by which it grows is in God's care and control. We simply need to trust and accept that the seed will respond.

But when the storm comes up and swamps the boat the disciples demonstrate little trust and rouse Jesus from his sleep admonishing him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

There it is: fear in control; and the fears of the disciples have them jumping to the conclusion of disaster; that they will perish. This is a wonderful metaphor Mark gives us. So many circumstances in life are like storms that swamp our boats and we cry out, like victims, “God don’t you care; where are you; we are perishing.”

Mark offers this story not to tell us that God is uncaring or that the storms of life are not real but to put us in the boat with the disciples to examine again how fear can take over our lives; or take over the life of the church – fundamentalism and McCarthyism are examples of fear in the driver’s seat of religion and politics.

Mark was written when the early Christian movement was beginning to experience rejection and persecution. The little boat of the early church was being tossed on the sea of a hostile culture. In fact, Mark cleverly uses a boat – taken from the ark, one of the first symbols for the church – to address in today’s story the question of fear and faith.

There is another interesting clue to the meaning of this story; after Jesus invites the disciples to go the other side, Mark says, “leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, *just as he was.*”

My hunch is that Mark is setting up a contrast between taking Jesus with us in life, in the life of the church “just as he is” or when the going gets tough trying to exchange that Jesus for Jesus “just as we want him to be.”

The disciples in the story and in the early church don’t want Jesus in the middle of the squall ‘just as he is’ asleep on the cushion in the stern of the boat. They want him to rescue them from their time of trial, remove the danger. They want some other Jesus than the Jesus they presently have.

And this has been a pernicious problem since the beginning of the church. Scholars and preachers today on both sides of the theological spectrum are producing a plethora of books on Jesus; not Jesus ‘as he is’ but Jesus as they wish him to be.

The historical information depicting Jesus provides only a scant outline; the Gospels themselves fill in that outline according to issues and problems facing the early church to whom they were writing. Beyond these simple portraits many if not most modern writers make Jesus into a straw man to knock down or superman to idolize depending on what ax they are grinding or culture war they are fighting.

I recently heard of one book just published that claims there was no historical Jesus at all and the figure the Gospels present was a pagan.

The impulse to abandon the God of our ancestors and make gods of our own choosing goes back to the golden calf the people of Israel fashioned in the wilderness when Moses was away on Mt. Sinai.

This impulse rears its head whenever the church is in crisis: during the first century persecutions; the Reformation; slavery and Civil War in this country; the years just preceding and during the Great Depression; Civil Rights – any time the ark of God’s people is rocked by the wind and waves of a stormy culture.

Two writers who steer admirably clear of exchanging Jesus just as he was – for Jesus as we want him to be in the midst of our crisis are Roman Catholic Garry Wills and Harvard Chaplain Peter Gomes.

I am sure there are others but Wills' *What Jesus Meant* and Gomes' *The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus* do a fine job claiming the ground between abdicating faith to reason and science on the one hand and turning Jesus into a talisman for a prosperous life on the other hand.

Maybe it is hard to take Jesus as he is because we, in North America, we of relative affluence, in a society of advanced technological devices in a consumer driven society believe that religion, even Jesus should be served to suit our palate.

But I am wondering today if this impulse to follow a Jesus of our own making or a spirituality of our own concoction rather than Jesus as he is doesn't stunt our spiritual growth and scuttle the great vessel of the church; which is on the same mission as Noah in his ark – to rescue and preserve life from the floods of our time.

The correct formula for following Jesus as I recall is not that Jesus would change but that we would change. Repent and be baptized is the Biblical phrase; that is literally, in the Greek, turn around and be made new. Conversion is another word; transformation too gets at the depth and totality of this change.

Nicodemus finds his heart after spending a lifetime in his head; Zaccheus restores to those he has fleeced double what he took; the rich young man unfortunately was unable to change, to sell what he had, give the proceeds to the poor and follow Jesus but the point is still change for those who would navigate this life in the church of Jesus Christ.

But the older I get the more difficult I realize it is to change. I amaze myself with the routines of my life from oatmeal every morning to wearing button-down shirts all these years. Change just isn't easy.

But somehow if we are to be the ones to change and not Jesus then it seems to me we need to relocate ourselves. For much of the mainline church in recent history religion has become not a ship of faith to sail the troubled waters of our time but a kind of theological hotel we escape to for the weekend or at least Sunday morning; a hotel with room service and a spiritual menu du jour for every religious palate.

Rather today's Gospel calls us into the vessel of the church to sail with Jesus to the other side, the land where God reigns; the kingdom that starts in our hearts like a mustard seed and grows into a mighty plant giving shade and shelter to all.

To get there means trusting him without demanding who he should be or what he should do; trusting his reason for summoning us into this vessel called the church even when we think it is about to capsize.

Someone said 'courage is fear that has said its prayers.' If we could be that honest raising Alissa and Simon; if we could teach them and all of our children to live with courage like that and remember Jesus' words to those frightened followers on Easter morning 'do not be afraid', whatever else they face in life, they'll be just fine.

That's a worthy goal for any father or mother or mentor.

Of course, the other clue to the meaning of the story is Jesus' power to calm the storm. He did do that and does it still for troubled hearts who turn to him. Amen.

**LESS THAN ROOM SERVICE; JUNE 21, 2009, FATHER'S DAY; MARK 4:35-41; THOMAS H. YORTY, WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

One of the great refrains of the Bible are the words, "Do not be afraid." From the angels announcing Jesus' birth to Jesus himself those calming words are given by a loving God.

And yet, fear like a fungus grows on our relationships, in the dark and dank corners of our careers, in anticipation of a visit to the doctor. We harbor fears for our present and future as a church and community, as a nation and world.

Fear is seductive because wherever anything could go wrong something in us can't resist entertaining the thought of what would happen if it did. It seems almost second nature to focus on disaster: a teenager out with the car misses curfew; the days before the test results; retiring with a vastly reduced 401k.

But those words, "Do not be afraid," are offered not as a mere palliative or as something nice to say or as words spoken naively or insincerely but as a command.

For to succumb to fear is to succumb to distrust or even rejection of God's alternative to fear which is faith. But not just faith in the abstract or ethereal but faith in the biblical promises and experience of God's people over the millennia that the God who watches over will not let us fall; that this God knows our needs better than we do and that this loving God promises never to abandon us.

Note those promises say nothing of freedom from the vagaries of life's twists and turns; of life's consequences for poor judgment or self-serving decisions; nor do they contain guarantees and assurances that our lives will follow the exact course we map out for them.

So if we are to choose faith over fear at some point, at many points, on most if not on all days we face a decision to let go or not.

A decision to let go of the scenarios of disaster and destruction but also of imposing our will and way over God's will and way for our lives which, says Jesus and the Bible, is the path to our best, most fulfilled lives.

While the Bible does not promise that God's will and way for us will shelter us from the bumps and bruises of life; some of which occur to us randomly, some of which we unwittingly or wittingly bring on ourselves – the Bible does say that if we embrace God's path for our lives nothing can separate us from God and therefore from facing life's greatest difficulties with dignity and grace and calm.

Today's story from the Gospel of Mark describes the disciples experiencing a situation that takes them outside of their control and comfort zone.

The reading immediately preceding today's story is Jesus telling his followers that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed tiny at first but then it grows to become one of the greatest of plants. And the process by which it grows is in God's care and control. We simply need to trust and accept that the seed will respond.

But when the storm comes up and swamps the boat the disciples demonstrate little trust and rouse Jesus from his sleep admonishing him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

There it is: fear in control; and the fears of the disciples have them jumping to the conclusion of disaster; that they will perish. This is a wonderful metaphor Mark gives us. So many circumstances in life are like storms that swamp our boats and we cry out, like victims, “God don’t you care; where are you; we are perishing.”

Mark offers this story not to tell us that God is uncaring or that the storms of life are not real but to put us in the boat with the disciples to examine again how fear can take over our lives; or take over the life of the church – fundamentalism and McCarthyism are examples of fear in the driver’s seat of religion and politics.

Mark was written when the early Christian movement was beginning to experience rejection and persecution. The little boat of the early church was being tossed on the sea of a hostile culture. In fact, Mark cleverly uses a boat – taken from the ark, one of the first symbols for the church – to address in today’s story the question of fear and faith.

There is another interesting clue to the meaning of this story; after Jesus invites the disciples to go the other side, Mark says, “leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, *just as he was.*”

My hunch is that Mark is setting up a contrast between taking Jesus with us in life, in the life of the church “just as he is” or when the going gets tough trying to exchange that Jesus for Jesus “just as we want him to be.”

The disciples in the story and in the early church don’t want Jesus in the middle of the squall ‘just as he is’ asleep on the cushion in the stern of the boat. They want him to rescue them from their time of trial, remove the danger. They want some other Jesus than the Jesus they presently have.

And this has been a pernicious problem since the beginning of the church. Scholars and preachers today on both sides of the theological spectrum are producing a plethora of books on Jesus; not Jesus ‘as he is’ but Jesus as they wish him to be.

The historical information depicting Jesus provides only a scant outline; the Gospels themselves fill in that outline according to issues and problems facing the early church to whom they were writing. Beyond these simple portraits many if not most modern writers make Jesus into a straw man to knock down or superman to idolize depending on what ax they are grinding or culture war they are fighting.

I recently heard of one book just published that claims there was no historical Jesus at all and the figure the Gospels present was a pagan.

The impulse to abandon the God of our ancestors and make gods of our own choosing goes back to the golden calf the people of Israel fashioned in the wilderness when Moses was away on Mt. Sinai.

This impulse rears its head whenever the church is in crisis: during the first century persecutions; the Reformation; slavery and Civil War in this country; the years just preceding and during the Great Depression; Civil Rights – any time the ark of God’s people is rocked by the wind and waves of a stormy culture.

Two writers who steer admirably clear of exchanging Jesus just as he was – for Jesus as we want him to be in the midst of our crisis are Roman Catholic Garry Wills and Harvard Chaplain Peter Gomes.

I am sure there are others but Wills' *What Jesus Meant* and Gomes' *The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus* do a fine job claiming the ground between abdicating faith to reason and science on the one hand and turning Jesus into a talisman for a prosperous life on the other hand.

Maybe it is hard to take Jesus as he is because we, in North America, we of relative affluence, in a society of advanced technological devices in a consumer driven society believe that religion, even Jesus should be served to suit our palate.

But I am wondering today if this impulse to follow a Jesus of our own making or a spirituality of our own concoction rather than Jesus as he is doesn't stunt our spiritual growth and scuttle the great vessel of the church; which is on the same mission as Noah in his ark – to rescue and preserve life from the floods of our time.

The correct formula for following Jesus as I recall is not that Jesus would change but that we would change. Repent and be baptized is the Biblical phrase; that is literally, in the Greek, turn around and be made new. Conversion is another word; transformation too gets at the depth and totality of this change.

Nicodemus finds his heart after spending a lifetime in his head; Zaccheus restores to those he has fleeced double what he took; the rich young man unfortunately was unable to change, to sell what he had, give the proceeds to the poor and follow Jesus but the point is still change for those who would navigate this life in the church of Jesus Christ.

But the older I get the more difficult I realize it is to change. I amaze myself with the routines of my life from oatmeal every morning to wearing button-down shirts all these years. Change just isn't easy.

But somehow if we are to be the ones to change and not Jesus then it seems to me we need to relocate ourselves. For much of the mainline church in recent history religion has become not a ship of faith to sail the troubled waters of our time but a kind of theological hotel we escape to for the weekend or at least Sunday morning; a hotel with room service and a spiritual menu du jour for every religious palate.

Rather today's Gospel calls us into the vessel of the church to sail with Jesus to the other side, the land where God reigns; the kingdom that starts in our hearts like a mustard seed and grows into a mighty plant giving shade and shelter to all.

To get there means trusting him without demanding who he should be or what he should do; trusting his reason for summoning us into this vessel called the church even when we think it is about to capsize.

Someone said 'courage is fear that has said its prayers.' If we could be that honest raising Alissa and Simon; if we could teach them and all of our children to live with courage like that and remember Jesus' words to those frightened followers on Easter morning 'do not be afraid', whatever else they face in life, they'll be just fine.

That's a worthy goal for any father or mother or mentor.

Of course, the other clue to the meaning of the story is Jesus' power to calm the storm. He did do that and does it still for troubled hearts who turn to him. Amen.

**LESS THAN ROOM SERVICE; JUNE 21, 2009, FATHER'S DAY; MARK 4:35-41; THOMAS H. YORTY, WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

One of the great refrains of the Bible are the words, "Do not be afraid." From the angels announcing Jesus' birth to Jesus himself those calming words are given by a loving God.

And yet, fear like a fungus grows on our relationships, in the dark and dank corners of our careers, in anticipation of a visit to the doctor. We harbor fears for our present and future as a church and community, as a nation and world.

Fear is seductive because wherever anything could go wrong something in us can't resist entertaining the thought of what would happen if it did. It seems almost second nature to focus on disaster: a teenager out with the car misses curfew; the days before the test results; retiring with a vastly reduced 401k.

But those words, "Do not be afraid," are offered not as a mere palliative or as something nice to say or as words spoken naively or insincerely but as a command.

For to succumb to fear is to succumb to distrust or even rejection of God's alternative to fear which is faith. But not just faith in the abstract or ethereal but faith in the biblical promises and experience of God's people over the millennia that the God who watches over will not let us fall; that this God knows our needs better than we do and that this loving God promises never to abandon us.

Note those promises say nothing of freedom from the vagaries of life's twists and turns; of life's consequences for poor judgment or self-serving decisions; nor do they contain guarantees and assurances that our lives will follow the exact course we map out for them.

So if we are to choose faith over fear at some point, at many points, on most if not on all days we face a decision to let go or not.

A decision to let go of the scenarios of disaster and destruction but also of imposing our will and way over God's will and way for our lives which, says Jesus and the Bible, is the path to our best, most fulfilled lives.

While the Bible does not promise that God's will and way for us will shelter us from the bumps and bruises of life; some of which occur to us randomly, some of which we unwittingly or wittingly bring on ourselves – the Bible does say that if we embrace God's path for our lives nothing can separate us from God and therefore from facing life's greatest difficulties with dignity and grace and calm.

Today's story from the Gospel of Mark describes the disciples experiencing a situation that takes them outside of their control and comfort zone.

The reading immediately preceding today's story is Jesus telling his followers that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed tiny at first but then it grows to become one of the greatest of plants. And the process by which it grows is in God's care and control. We simply need to trust and accept that the seed will respond.

But when the storm comes up and swamps the boat the disciples demonstrate little trust and rouse Jesus from his sleep admonishing him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

There it is: fear in control; and the fears of the disciples have them jumping to the conclusion of disaster; that they will perish. This is a wonderful metaphor Mark gives us. So many circumstances in life are like storms that swamp our boats and we cry out, like victims, “God don’t you care; where are you; we are perishing.”

Mark offers this story not to tell us that God is uncaring or that the storms of life are not real but to put us in the boat with the disciples to examine again how fear can take over our lives; or take over the life of the church – fundamentalism and McCarthyism are examples of fear in the driver’s seat of religion and politics.

Mark was written when the early Christian movement was beginning to experience rejection and persecution. The little boat of the early church was being tossed on the sea of a hostile culture. In fact, Mark cleverly uses a boat – taken from the ark, one of the first symbols for the church – to address in today’s story the question of fear and faith.

There is another interesting clue to the meaning of this story; after Jesus invites the disciples to go the other side, Mark says, “leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, *just as he was.*”

My hunch is that Mark is setting up a contrast between taking Jesus with us in life, in the life of the church “just as he is” or when the going gets tough trying to exchange that Jesus for Jesus “just as we want him to be.”

The disciples in the story and in the early church don’t want Jesus in the middle of the squall ‘just as he is’ asleep on the cushion in the stern of the boat. They want him to rescue them from their time of trial, remove the danger. They want some other Jesus than the Jesus they presently have.

And this has been a pernicious problem since the beginning of the church. Scholars and preachers today on both sides of the theological spectrum are producing a plethora of books on Jesus; not Jesus ‘as he is’ but Jesus as they wish him to be.

The historical information depicting Jesus provides only a scant outline; the Gospels themselves fill in that outline according to issues and problems facing the early church to whom they were writing. Beyond these simple portraits many if not most modern writers make Jesus into a straw man to knock down or superman to idolize depending on what ax they are grinding or culture war they are fighting.

I recently heard of one book just published that claims there was no historical Jesus at all and the figure the Gospels present was a pagan.

The impulse to abandon the God of our ancestors and make gods of our own choosing goes back to the golden calf the people of Israel fashioned in the wilderness when Moses was away on Mt. Sinai.

This impulse rears its head whenever the church is in crisis: during the first century persecutions; the Reformation; slavery and Civil War in this country; the years just preceding and during the Great Depression; Civil Rights – any time the ark of God’s people is rocked by the wind and waves of a stormy culture.

Two writers who steer admirably clear of exchanging Jesus just as he was – for Jesus as we want him to be in the midst of our crisis are Roman Catholic Garry Wills and Harvard Chaplain Peter Gomes.

I am sure there are others but Wills' *What Jesus Meant* and Gomes' *The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus* do a fine job claiming the ground between abdicating faith to reason and science on the one hand and turning Jesus into a talisman for a prosperous life on the other hand.

Maybe it is hard to take Jesus as he is because we, in North America, we of relative affluence, in a society of advanced technological devices in a consumer driven society believe that religion, even Jesus should be served to suit our palate.

But I am wondering today if this impulse to follow a Jesus of our own making or a spirituality of our own concoction rather than Jesus as he is doesn't stunt our spiritual growth and scuttle the great vessel of the church; which is on the same mission as Noah in his ark – to rescue and preserve life from the floods of our time.

The correct formula for following Jesus as I recall is not that Jesus would change but that we would change. Repent and be baptized is the Biblical phrase; that is literally, in the Greek, turn around and be made new. Conversion is another word; transformation too gets at the depth and totality of this change.

Nicodemus finds his heart after spending a lifetime in his head; Zaccheus restores to those he has fleeced double what he took; the rich young man unfortunately was unable to change, to sell what he had, give the proceeds to the poor and follow Jesus but the point is still change for those who would navigate this life in the church of Jesus Christ.

But the older I get the more difficult I realize it is to change. I amaze myself with the routines of my life from oatmeal every morning to wearing button-down shirts all these years. Change just isn't easy.

But somehow if we are to be the ones to change and not Jesus then it seems to me we need to relocate ourselves. For much of the mainline church in recent history religion has become not a ship of faith to sail the troubled waters of our time but a kind of theological hotel we escape to for the weekend or at least Sunday morning; a hotel with room service and a spiritual menu du jour for every religious palate.

Rather today's Gospel calls us into the vessel of the church to sail with Jesus to the other side, the land where God reigns; the kingdom that starts in our hearts like a mustard seed and grows into a mighty plant giving shade and shelter to all.

To get there means trusting him without demanding who he should be or what he should do; trusting his reason for summoning us into this vessel called the church even when we think it is about to capsize.

Someone said 'courage is fear that has said its prayers.' If we could be that honest raising Alissa and Simon; if we could teach them and all of our children to live with courage like that and remember Jesus' words to those frightened followers on Easter morning 'do not be afraid', whatever else they face in life, they'll be just fine.

That's a worthy goal for any father or mother or mentor.

Of course, the other clue to the meaning of the story is Jesus' power to calm the storm. He did do that and does it still for troubled hearts who turn to him. Amen.

**LESS THAN ROOM SERVICE; JUNE 21, 2009, FATHER'S DAY; MARK 4:35-41; THOMAS H. YORTY, WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

One of the great refrains of the Bible are the words, "Do not be afraid." From the angels announcing Jesus' birth to Jesus himself those calming words are given by a loving God.

And yet, fear like a fungus grows on our relationships, in the dark and dank corners of our careers, in anticipation of a visit to the doctor. We harbor fears for our present and future as a church and community, as a nation and world.

Fear is seductive because wherever anything could go wrong something in us can't resist entertaining the thought of what would happen if it did. It seems almost second nature to focus on disaster: a teenager out with the car misses curfew; the days before the test results; retiring with a vastly reduced 401k.

But those words, "Do not be afraid," are offered not as a mere palliative or as something nice to say or as words spoken naively or insincerely but as a command.

For to succumb to fear is to succumb to distrust or even rejection of God's alternative to fear which is faith. But not just faith in the abstract or ethereal but faith in the biblical promises and experience of God's people over the millennia that the God who watches over will not let us fall; that this God knows our needs better than we do and that this loving God promises never to abandon us.

Note those promises say nothing of freedom from the vagaries of life's twists and turns; of life's consequences for poor judgment or self-serving decisions; nor do they contain guarantees and assurances that our lives will follow the exact course we map out for them.

So if we are to choose faith over fear at some point, at many points, on most if not on all days we face a decision to let go or not.

A decision to let go of the scenarios of disaster and destruction but also of imposing our will and way over God's will and way for our lives which, says Jesus and the Bible, is the path to our best, most fulfilled lives.

While the Bible does not promise that God's will and way for us will shelter us from the bumps and bruises of life; some of which occur to us randomly, some of which we unwittingly or wittingly bring on ourselves – the Bible does say that if we embrace God's path for our lives nothing can separate us from God and therefore from facing life's greatest difficulties with dignity and grace and calm.

Today's story from the Gospel of Mark describes the disciples experiencing a situation that takes them outside of their control and comfort zone.

The reading immediately preceding today's story is Jesus telling his followers that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed tiny at first but then it grows to become one of the greatest of plants. And the process by which it grows is in God's care and control. We simply need to trust and accept that the seed will respond.

But when the storm comes up and swamps the boat the disciples demonstrate little trust and rouse Jesus from his sleep admonishing him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

There it is: fear in control; and the fears of the disciples have them jumping to the conclusion of disaster; that they will perish. This is a wonderful metaphor Mark gives us. So many circumstances in life are like storms that swamp our boats and we cry out, like victims, “God don’t you care; where are you; we are perishing.”

Mark offers this story not to tell us that God is uncaring or that the storms of life are not real but to put us in the boat with the disciples to examine again how fear can take over our lives; or take over the life of the church – fundamentalism and McCarthyism are examples of fear in the driver’s seat of religion and politics.

Mark was written when the early Christian movement was beginning to experience rejection and persecution. The little boat of the early church was being tossed on the sea of a hostile culture. In fact, Mark cleverly uses a boat – taken from the ark, one of the first symbols for the church – to address in today’s story the question of fear and faith.

There is another interesting clue to the meaning of this story; after Jesus invites the disciples to go the other side, Mark says, “leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, *just as he was.*”

My hunch is that Mark is setting up a contrast between taking Jesus with us in life, in the life of the church “just as he is” or when the going gets tough trying to exchange that Jesus for Jesus “just as we want him to be.”

The disciples in the story and in the early church don’t want Jesus in the middle of the squall ‘just as he is’ asleep on the cushion in the stern of the boat. They want him to rescue them from their time of trial, remove the danger. They want some other Jesus than the Jesus they presently have.

And this has been a pernicious problem since the beginning of the church. Scholars and preachers today on both sides of the theological spectrum are producing a plethora of books on Jesus; not Jesus ‘as he is’ but Jesus as they wish him to be.

The historical information depicting Jesus provides only a scant outline; the Gospels themselves fill in that outline according to issues and problems facing the early church to whom they were writing. Beyond these simple portraits many if not most modern writers make Jesus into a straw man to knock down or superman to idolize depending on what ax they are grinding or culture war they are fighting.

I recently heard of one book just published that claims there was no historical Jesus at all and the figure the Gospels present was a pagan.

The impulse to abandon the God of our ancestors and make gods of our own choosing goes back to the golden calf the people of Israel fashioned in the wilderness when Moses was away on Mt. Sinai.

This impulse rears its head whenever the church is in crisis: during the first century persecutions; the Reformation; slavery and Civil War in this country; the years just preceding and during the Great Depression; Civil Rights – any time the ark of God’s people is rocked by the wind and waves of a stormy culture.

Two writers who steer admirably clear of exchanging Jesus just as he was – for Jesus as we want him to be in the midst of our crisis are Roman Catholic Garry Wills and Harvard Chaplain Peter Gomes.

I am sure there are others but Wills' *What Jesus Meant* and Gomes' *The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus* do a fine job claiming the ground between abdicating faith to reason and science on the one hand and turning Jesus into a talisman for a prosperous life on the other hand.

Maybe it is hard to take Jesus as he is because we, in North America, we of relative affluence, in a society of advanced technological devices in a consumer driven society believe that religion, even Jesus should be served to suit our palate.

But I am wondering today if this impulse to follow a Jesus of our own making or a spirituality of our own concoction rather than Jesus as he is doesn't stunt our spiritual growth and scuttle the great vessel of the church; which is on the same mission as Noah in his ark – to rescue and preserve life from the floods of our time.

The correct formula for following Jesus as I recall is not that Jesus would change but that we would change. Repent and be baptized is the Biblical phrase; that is literally, in the Greek, turn around and be made new. Conversion is another word; transformation too gets at the depth and totality of this change.

Nicodemus finds his heart after spending a lifetime in his head; Zaccheus restores to those he has fleeced double what he took; the rich young man unfortunately was unable to change, to sell what he had, give the proceeds to the poor and follow Jesus but the point is still change for those who would navigate this life in the church of Jesus Christ.

But the older I get the more difficult I realize it is to change. I amaze myself with the routines of my life from oatmeal every morning to wearing button-down shirts all these years. Change just isn't easy.

But somehow if we are to be the ones to change and not Jesus then it seems to me we need to relocate ourselves. For much of the mainline church in recent history religion has become not a ship of faith to sail the troubled waters of our time but a kind of theological hotel we escape to for the weekend or at least Sunday morning; a hotel with room service and a spiritual menu du jour for every religious palate.

Rather today's Gospel calls us into the vessel of the church to sail with Jesus to the other side, the land where God reigns; the kingdom that starts in our hearts like a mustard seed and grows into a mighty plant giving shade and shelter to all.

To get there means trusting him without demanding who he should be or what he should do; trusting his reason for summoning us into this vessel called the church even when we think it is about to capsize.

Someone said 'courage is fear that has said its prayers.' If we could be that honest raising Alissa and Simon; if we could teach them and all of our children to live with courage like that and remember Jesus' words to those frightened followers on Easter morning 'do not be afraid', whatever else they face in life, they'll be just fine.

That's a worthy goal for any father or mother or mentor.

Of course, the other clue to the meaning of the story is Jesus' power to calm the storm. He did do that and does it still for troubled hearts who turn to him. Amen.

**LESS THAN ROOM SERVICE; JUNE 21, 2009, FATHER'S DAY; MARK 4:35-41; THOMAS H. YORTY, WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

One of the great refrains of the Bible are the words, "Do not be afraid." From the angels announcing Jesus' birth to Jesus himself those calming words are given by a loving God.

And yet, fear like a fungus grows on our relationships, in the dark and dank corners of our careers, in anticipation of a visit to the doctor. We harbor fears for our present and future as a church and community, as a nation and world.

Fear is seductive because wherever anything could go wrong something in us can't resist entertaining the thought of what would happen if it did. It seems almost second nature to focus on disaster: a teenager out with the car misses curfew; the days before the test results; retiring with a vastly reduced 401k.

But those words, "Do not be afraid," are offered not as a mere palliative or as something nice to say or as words spoken naively or insincerely but as a command.

For to succumb to fear is to succumb to distrust or even rejection of God's alternative to fear which is faith. But not just faith in the abstract or ethereal but faith in the biblical promises and experience of God's people over the millennia that the God who watches over will not let us fall; that this God knows our needs better than we do and that this loving God promises never to abandon us.

Note those promises say nothing of freedom from the vagaries of life's twists and turns; of life's consequences for poor judgment or self-serving decisions; nor do they contain guarantees and assurances that our lives will follow the exact course we map out for them.

So if we are to choose faith over fear at some point, at many points, on most if not on all days we face a decision to let go or not.

A decision to let go of the scenarios of disaster and destruction but also of imposing our will and way over God's will and way for our lives which, says Jesus and the Bible, is the path to our best, most fulfilled lives.

While the Bible does not promise that God's will and way for us will shelter us from the bumps and bruises of life; some of which occur to us randomly, some of which we unwittingly or wittingly bring on ourselves – the Bible does say that if we embrace God's path for our lives nothing can separate us from God and therefore from facing life's greatest difficulties with dignity and grace and calm.

Today's story from the Gospel of Mark describes the disciples experiencing a situation that takes them outside of their control and comfort zone.

The reading immediately preceding today's story is Jesus telling his followers that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed tiny at first but then it grows to become one of the greatest of plants. And the process by which it grows is in God's care and control. We simply need to trust and accept that the seed will respond.

But when the storm comes up and swamps the boat the disciples demonstrate little trust and rouse Jesus from his sleep admonishing him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

There it is: fear in control; and the fears of the disciples have them jumping to the conclusion of disaster; that they will perish. This is a wonderful metaphor Mark gives us. So many circumstances in life are like storms that swamp our boats and we cry out, like victims, “God don’t you care; where are you; we are perishing.”

Mark offers this story not to tell us that God is uncaring or that the storms of life are not real but to put us in the boat with the disciples to examine again how fear can take over our lives; or take over the life of the church – fundamentalism and McCarthyism are examples of fear in the driver’s seat of religion and politics.

Mark was written when the early Christian movement was beginning to experience rejection and persecution. The little boat of the early church was being tossed on the sea of a hostile culture. In fact, Mark cleverly uses a boat – taken from the ark, one of the first symbols for the church – to address in today’s story the question of fear and faith.

There is another interesting clue to the meaning of this story; after Jesus invites the disciples to go the other side, Mark says, “leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, *just as he was.*”

My hunch is that Mark is setting up a contrast between taking Jesus with us in life, in the life of the church “just as he is” or when the going gets tough trying to exchange that Jesus for Jesus “just as we want him to be.”

The disciples in the story and in the early church don’t want Jesus in the middle of the squall ‘just as he is’ asleep on the cushion in the stern of the boat. They want him to rescue them from their time of trial, remove the danger. They want some other Jesus than the Jesus they presently have.

And this has been a pernicious problem since the beginning of the church. Scholars and preachers today on both sides of the theological spectrum are producing a plethora of books on Jesus; not Jesus ‘as he is’ but Jesus as they wish him to be.

The historical information depicting Jesus provides only a scant outline; the Gospels themselves fill in that outline according to issues and problems facing the early church to whom they were writing. Beyond these simple portraits many if not most modern writers make Jesus into a straw man to knock down or superman to idolize depending on what ax they are grinding or culture war they are fighting.

I recently heard of one book just published that claims there was no historical Jesus at all and the figure the Gospels present was a pagan.

The impulse to abandon the God of our ancestors and make gods of our own choosing goes back to the golden calf the people of Israel fashioned in the wilderness when Moses was away on Mt. Sinai.

This impulse rears its head whenever the church is in crisis: during the first century persecutions; the Reformation; slavery and Civil War in this country; the years just preceding and during the Great Depression; Civil Rights – any time the ark of God’s people is rocked by the wind and waves of a stormy culture.

Two writers who steer admirably clear of exchanging Jesus just as he was – for Jesus as we want him to be in the midst of our crisis are Roman Catholic Garry Wills and Harvard Chaplain Peter Gomes.

I am sure there are others but Wills' *What Jesus Meant* and Gomes' *The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus* do a fine job claiming the ground between abdicating faith to reason and science on the one hand and turning Jesus into a talisman for a prosperous life on the other hand.

Maybe it is hard to take Jesus as he is because we, in North America, we of relative affluence, in a society of advanced technological devices in a consumer driven society believe that religion, even Jesus should be served to suit our palate.

But I am wondering today if this impulse to follow a Jesus of our own making or a spirituality of our own concoction rather than Jesus as he is doesn't stunt our spiritual growth and scuttle the great vessel of the church; which is on the same mission as Noah in his ark – to rescue and preserve life from the floods of our time.

The correct formula for following Jesus as I recall is not that Jesus would change but that we would change. Repent and be baptized is the Biblical phrase; that is literally, in the Greek, turn around and be made new. Conversion is another word; transformation too gets at the depth and totality of this change.

Nicodemus finds his heart after spending a lifetime in his head; Zaccheus restores to those he has fleeced double what he took; the rich young man unfortunately was unable to change, to sell what he had, give the proceeds to the poor and follow Jesus but the point is still change for those who would navigate this life in the church of Jesus Christ.

But the older I get the more difficult I realize it is to change. I amaze myself with the routines of my life from oatmeal every morning to wearing button-down shirts all these years. Change just isn't easy.

But somehow if we are to be the ones to change and not Jesus then it seems to me we need to relocate ourselves. For much of the mainline church in recent history religion has become not a ship of faith to sail the troubled waters of our time but a kind of theological hotel we escape to for the weekend or at least Sunday morning; a hotel with room service and a spiritual menu du jour for every religious palate.

Rather today's Gospel calls us into the vessel of the church to sail with Jesus to the other side, the land where God reigns; the kingdom that starts in our hearts like a mustard seed and grows into a mighty plant giving shade and shelter to all.

To get there means trusting him without demanding who he should be or what he should do; trusting his reason for summoning us into this vessel called the church even when we think it is about to capsize.

Someone said 'courage is fear that has said its prayers.' If we could be that honest raising Alissa and Simon; if we could teach them and all of our children to live with courage like that and remember Jesus' words to those frightened followers on Easter morning 'do not be afraid', whatever else they face in life, they'll be just fine.

That's a worthy goal for any father or mother or mentor.

Of course, the other clue to the meaning of the story is Jesus' power to calm the storm. He did do that and does it still for troubled hearts who turn to him. Amen.

**LESS THAN ROOM SERVICE; JUNE 21, 2009, FATHER'S DAY; MARK 4:35-41; THOMAS H. YORTY, WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

One of the great refrains of the Bible are the words, "Do not be afraid." From the angels announcing Jesus' birth to Jesus himself those calming words are given by a loving God.

And yet, fear like a fungus grows on our relationships, in the dark and dank corners of our careers, in anticipation of a visit to the doctor. We harbor fears for our present and future as a church and community, as a nation and world.

Fear is seductive because wherever anything could go wrong something in us can't resist entertaining the thought of what would happen if it did. It seems almost second nature to focus on disaster: a teenager out with the car misses curfew; the days before the test results; retiring with a vastly reduced 401k.

But those words, "Do not be afraid," are offered not as a mere palliative or as something nice to say or as words spoken naively or insincerely but as a command.

For to succumb to fear is to succumb to distrust or even rejection of God's alternative to fear which is faith. But not just faith in the abstract or ethereal but faith in the biblical promises and experience of God's people over the millennia that the God who watches over will not let us fall; that this God knows our needs better than we do and that this loving God promises never to abandon us.

Note those promises say nothing of freedom from the vagaries of life's twists and turns; of life's consequences for poor judgment or self-serving decisions; nor do they contain guarantees and assurances that our lives will follow the exact course we map out for them.

So if we are to choose faith over fear at some point, at many points, on most if not on all days we face a decision to let go or not.

A decision to let go of the scenarios of disaster and destruction but also of imposing our will and way over God's will and way for our lives which, says Jesus and the Bible, is the path to our best, most fulfilled lives.

While the Bible does not promise that God's will and way for us will shelter us from the bumps and bruises of life; some of which occur to us randomly, some of which we unwittingly or wittingly bring on ourselves – the Bible does say that if we embrace God's path for our lives nothing can separate us from God and therefore from facing life's greatest difficulties with dignity and grace and calm.

Today's story from the Gospel of Mark describes the disciples experiencing a situation that takes them outside of their control and comfort zone.

The reading immediately preceding today's story is Jesus telling his followers that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed tiny at first but then it grows to become one of the greatest of plants. And the process by which it grows is in God's care and control. We simply need to trust and accept that the seed will respond.

But when the storm comes up and swamps the boat the disciples demonstrate little trust and rouse Jesus from his sleep admonishing him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

There it is: fear in control; and the fears of the disciples have them jumping to the conclusion of disaster; that they will perish. This is a wonderful metaphor Mark gives us. So many circumstances in life are like storms that swamp our boats and we cry out, like victims, “God don’t you care; where are you; we are perishing.”

Mark offers this story not to tell us that God is uncaring or that the storms of life are not real but to put us in the boat with the disciples to examine again how fear can take over our lives; or take over the life of the church – fundamentalism and McCarthyism are examples of fear in the driver’s seat of religion and politics.

Mark was written when the early Christian movement was beginning to experience rejection and persecution. The little boat of the early church was being tossed on the sea of a hostile culture. In fact, Mark cleverly uses a boat – taken from the ark, one of the first symbols for the church – to address in today’s story the question of fear and faith.

There is another interesting clue to the meaning of this story; after Jesus invites the disciples to go the other side, Mark says, “leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, *just as he was.*”

My hunch is that Mark is setting up a contrast between taking Jesus with us in life, in the life of the church “just as he is” or when the going gets tough trying to exchange that Jesus for Jesus “just as we want him to be.”

The disciples in the story and in the early church don’t want Jesus in the middle of the squall ‘just as he is’ asleep on the cushion in the stern of the boat. They want him to rescue them from their time of trial, remove the danger. They want some other Jesus than the Jesus they presently have.

And this has been a pernicious problem since the beginning of the church. Scholars and preachers today on both sides of the theological spectrum are producing a plethora of books on Jesus; not Jesus ‘as he is’ but Jesus as they wish him to be.

The historical information depicting Jesus provides only a scant outline; the Gospels themselves fill in that outline according to issues and problems facing the early church to whom they were writing. Beyond these simple portraits many if not most modern writers make Jesus into a straw man to knock down or superman to idolize depending on what ax they are grinding or culture war they are fighting.

I recently heard of one book just published that claims there was no historical Jesus at all and the figure the Gospels present was a pagan.

The impulse to abandon the God of our ancestors and make gods of our own choosing goes back to the golden calf the people of Israel fashioned in the wilderness when Moses was away on Mt. Sinai.

This impulse rears its head whenever the church is in crisis: during the first century persecutions; the Reformation; slavery and Civil War in this country; the years just preceding and during the Great Depression; Civil Rights – any time the ark of God’s people is rocked by the wind and waves of a stormy culture.

Two writers who steer admirably clear of exchanging Jesus just as he was – for Jesus as we want him to be in the midst of our crisis are Roman Catholic Garry Wills and Harvard Chaplain Peter Gomes.

I am sure there are others but Wills' *What Jesus Meant* and Gomes' *The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus* do a fine job claiming the ground between abdicating faith to reason and science on the one hand and turning Jesus into a talisman for a prosperous life on the other hand.

Maybe it is hard to take Jesus as he is because we, in North America, we of relative affluence, in a society of advanced technological devices in a consumer driven society believe that religion, even Jesus should be served to suit our palate.

But I am wondering today if this impulse to follow a Jesus of our own making or a spirituality of our own concoction rather than Jesus as he is doesn't stunt our spiritual growth and scuttle the great vessel of the church; which is on the same mission as Noah in his ark – to rescue and preserve life from the floods of our time.

The correct formula for following Jesus as I recall is not that Jesus would change but that we would change. Repent and be baptized is the Biblical phrase; that is literally, in the Greek, turn around and be made new. Conversion is another word; transformation too gets at the depth and totality of this change.

Nicodemus finds his heart after spending a lifetime in his head; Zaccheus restores to those he has fleeced double what he took; the rich young man unfortunately was unable to change, to sell what he had, give the proceeds to the poor and follow Jesus but the point is still change for those who would navigate this life in the church of Jesus Christ.

But the older I get the more difficult I realize it is to change. I amaze myself with the routines of my life from oatmeal every morning to wearing button-down shirts all these years. Change just isn't easy.

But somehow if we are to be the ones to change and not Jesus then it seems to me we need to relocate ourselves. For much of the mainline church in recent history religion has become not a ship of faith to sail the troubled waters of our time but a kind of theological hotel we escape to for the weekend or at least Sunday morning; a hotel with room service and a spiritual menu du jour for every religious palate.

Rather today's Gospel calls us into the vessel of the church to sail with Jesus to the other side, the land where God reigns; the kingdom that starts in our hearts like a mustard seed and grows into a mighty plant giving shade and shelter to all.

To get there means trusting him without demanding who he should be or what he should do; trusting his reason for summoning us into this vessel called the church even when we think it is about to capsize.

Someone said 'courage is fear that has said its prayers.' If we could be that honest raising Alissa and Simon; if we could teach them and all of our children to live with courage like that and remember Jesus' words to those frightened followers on Easter morning 'do not be afraid', whatever else they face in life, they'll be just fine.

That's a worthy goal for any father or mother or mentor.

Of course, the other clue to the meaning of the story is Jesus' power to calm the storm. He did do that and does it still for troubled hearts who turn to him. Amen.

**LESS THAN ROOM SERVICE; JUNE 21, 2009, FATHER'S DAY; MARK 4:35-41; THOMAS H. YORTY, WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

One of the great refrains of the Bible are the words, "Do not be afraid." From the angels announcing Jesus' birth to Jesus himself those calming words are given by a loving God.

And yet, fear like a fungus grows on our relationships, in the dark and dank corners of our careers, in anticipation of a visit to the doctor. We harbor fears for our present and future as a church and community, as a nation and world.

Fear is seductive because wherever anything could go wrong something in us can't resist entertaining the thought of what would happen if it did. It seems almost second nature to focus on disaster: a teenager out with the car misses curfew; the days before the test results; retiring with a vastly reduced 401k.

But those words, "Do not be afraid," are offered not as a mere palliative or as something nice to say or as words spoken naively or insincerely but as a command.

For to succumb to fear is to succumb to distrust or even rejection of God's alternative to fear which is faith. But not just faith in the abstract or ethereal but faith in the biblical promises and experience of God's people over the millennia that the God who watches over will not let us fall; that this God knows our needs better than we do and that this loving God promises never to abandon us.

Note those promises say nothing of freedom from the vagaries of life's twists and turns; of life's consequences for poor judgment or self-serving decisions; nor do they contain guarantees and assurances that our lives will follow the exact course we map out for them.

So if we are to choose faith over fear at some point, at many points, on most if not on all days we face a decision to let go or not.

A decision to let go of the scenarios of disaster and destruction but also of imposing our will and way over God's will and way for our lives which, says Jesus and the Bible, is the path to our best, most fulfilled lives.

While the Bible does not promise that God's will and way for us will shelter us from the bumps and bruises of life; some of which occur to us randomly, some of which we unwittingly or wittingly bring on ourselves – the Bible does say that if we embrace God's path for our lives nothing can separate us from God and therefore from facing life's greatest difficulties with dignity and grace and calm.

Today's story from the Gospel of Mark describes the disciples experiencing a situation that takes them outside of their control and comfort zone.

The reading immediately preceding today's story is Jesus telling his followers that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed tiny at first but then it grows to become one of the greatest of plants. And the process by which it grows is in God's care and control. We simply need to trust and accept that the seed will respond.

But when the storm comes up and swamps the boat the disciples demonstrate little trust and rouse Jesus from his sleep admonishing him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

There it is: fear in control; and the fears of the disciples have them jumping to the conclusion of disaster; that they will perish. This is a wonderful metaphor Mark gives us. So many circumstances in life are like storms that swamp our boats and we cry out, like victims, “God don’t you care; where are you; we are perishing.”

Mark offers this story not to tell us that God is uncaring or that the storms of life are not real but to put us in the boat with the disciples to examine again how fear can take over our lives; or take over the life of the church – fundamentalism and McCarthyism are examples of fear in the driver’s seat of religion and politics.

Mark was written when the early Christian movement was beginning to experience rejection and persecution. The little boat of the early church was being tossed on the sea of a hostile culture. In fact, Mark cleverly uses a boat – taken from the ark, one of the first symbols for the church – to address in today’s story the question of fear and faith.

There is another interesting clue to the meaning of this story; after Jesus invites the disciples to go the other side, Mark says, “leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, *just as he was.*”

My hunch is that Mark is setting up a contrast between taking Jesus with us in life, in the life of the church “just as he is” or when the going gets tough trying to exchange that Jesus for Jesus “just as we want him to be.”

The disciples in the story and in the early church don’t want Jesus in the middle of the squall ‘just as he is’ asleep on the cushion in the stern of the boat. They want him to rescue them from their time of trial, remove the danger. They want some other Jesus than the Jesus they presently have.

And this has been a pernicious problem since the beginning of the church. Scholars and preachers today on both sides of the theological spectrum are producing a plethora of books on Jesus; not Jesus ‘as he is’ but Jesus as they wish him to be.

The historical information depicting Jesus provides only a scant outline; the Gospels themselves fill in that outline according to issues and problems facing the early church to whom they were writing. Beyond these simple portraits many if not most modern writers make Jesus into a straw man to knock down or superman to idolize depending on what ax they are grinding or culture war they are fighting.

I recently heard of one book just published that claims there was no historical Jesus at all and the figure the Gospels present was a pagan.

The impulse to abandon the God of our ancestors and make gods of our own choosing goes back to the golden calf the people of Israel fashioned in the wilderness when Moses was away on Mt. Sinai.

This impulse rears its head whenever the church is in crisis: during the first century persecutions; the Reformation; slavery and Civil War in this country; the years just preceding and during the Great Depression; Civil Rights – any time the ark of God’s people is rocked by the wind and waves of a stormy culture.

Two writers who steer admirably clear of exchanging Jesus just as he was – for Jesus as we want him to be in the midst of our crisis are Roman Catholic Garry Wills and Harvard Chaplain Peter Gomes.

I am sure there are others but Wills' *What Jesus Meant* and Gomes' *The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus* do a fine job claiming the ground between abdicating faith to reason and science on the one hand and turning Jesus into a talisman for a prosperous life on the other hand.

Maybe it is hard to take Jesus as he is because we, in North America, we of relative affluence, in a society of advanced technological devices in a consumer driven society believe that religion, even Jesus should be served to suit our palate.

But I am wondering today if this impulse to follow a Jesus of our own making or a spirituality of our own concoction rather than Jesus as he is doesn't stunt our spiritual growth and scuttle the great vessel of the church; which is on the same mission as Noah in his ark – to rescue and preserve life from the floods of our time.

The correct formula for following Jesus as I recall is not that Jesus would change but that we would change. Repent and be baptized is the Biblical phrase; that is literally, in the Greek, turn around and be made new. Conversion is another word; transformation too gets at the depth and totality of this change.

Nicodemus finds his heart after spending a lifetime in his head; Zaccheus restores to those he has fleeced double what he took; the rich young man unfortunately was unable to change, to sell what he had, give the proceeds to the poor and follow Jesus but the point is still change for those who would navigate this life in the church of Jesus Christ.

But the older I get the more difficult I realize it is to change. I amaze myself with the routines of my life from oatmeal every morning to wearing button-down shirts all these years. Change just isn't easy.

But somehow if we are to be the ones to change and not Jesus then it seems to me we need to relocate ourselves. For much of the mainline church in recent history religion has become not a ship of faith to sail the troubled waters of our time but a kind of theological hotel we escape to for the weekend or at least Sunday morning; a hotel with room service and a spiritual menu du jour for every religious palate.

Rather today's Gospel calls us into the vessel of the church to sail with Jesus to the other side, the land where God reigns; the kingdom that starts in our hearts like a mustard seed and grows into a mighty plant giving shade and shelter to all.

To get there means trusting him without demanding who he should be or what he should do; trusting his reason for summoning us into this vessel called the church even when we think it is about to capsize.

Someone said 'courage is fear that has said its prayers.' If we could be that honest raising Alissa and Simon; if we could teach them and all of our children to live with courage like that and remember Jesus' words to those frightened followers on Easter morning 'do not be afraid', whatever else they face in life, they'll be just fine.

That's a worthy goal for any father or mother or mentor.

Of course, the other clue to the meaning of the story is Jesus' power to calm the storm. He did do that and does it still for troubled hearts who turn to him. Amen.