

Calming Chaos
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Luke 8: 22-25
May 28, 2018

Two summers ago, our family traveled to Grand Marais for a vacation on the lake. We stayed in the Municipal Campground along with much of the rest of Northfield. We discovered that two families in our neighborhood were also neighbors in our campground. In August, Northfield goes north to Grand Marais.

My daughter Clara and I had decided that we wanted to take a trip to Isle Royale National Park. Isle Royale is the largest island in Lake Superior and it is the least visited of all of the National Parks in the contiguous United States because you have to take a 1 ½ hour boat ride to get there.

We purchased tickets for a Thursday. Thursday morning came and we arrived early at the dock in Grand Portage for our departure. It was cold and there was a steady gentle rain. I loved every second of our trip across the lake to the island. I had never been out on Lake Superior before. This was a big adventure for a land-locked Iowan. The surface of the lake wasn't like glass, but the lake wasn't angry. As we arrived at Isle Royale the owner operator of the boat said, "the lake was a little rough this morning, that means it's going to rough this afternoon." "Hmm," I thought.

Clara and I hiked around the park for four hours in the rain. I was hoping to see a moose, but I wasn't lucky. Completely drenched, we climbed aboard the Voyageur II for our return to Grand Portage. Once we got past the islands and headed out into the Lake Superior, the lake was rough. Large waves came at the boat one after another. I thought our boat was big, 65' with room for 46 people, but it felt like a kayak. The waves weren't hitting us straight on, but from an angle. As the wave approached, the boat would tip to the left and then as we went over the wave, the nose of the boat would suddenly dive and the boat would tip drastically to the right. This happened over and over. After twenty minutes of this the waves got bigger and as we went over each wave, I honestly thought the boat was going to tip. My hands were gripping the sharp edge of the plastic seat, and my toes were trying to grip the slippery floor. The owner operator wasn't concerned. He said, "some of you might get sick. The rule is you go out onto the deck so that you share your gift with the lake and not with one another." He told us that if we felt sick to go out on the deck so we could give our gift to lake and not to one another. I thought, "go out on the deck? I might as well walk the plank." The next wave would toss me

into the lake. The captain must have decided he didn't want to tip the boat either because as we journeyed through the center of the lake and the waves continued to get higher he turned so that we were taking the waves straight on.

Now I felt like we were in the George Clooney movie *The Perfect Storm* going up the huge wave certain the boat was going to flip over. I started remembering all of the shipwreck stories from Lake Superior I had read. It felt like the lake was angry, like it wanted to swallow us. It was completely beyond my control. There was nothing I could do. Up and down, tipping one way and another. Holding on, just trying to stay in the boat.

Like the disciples, I was afraid in the midst of the swirling waters of Lake Superior. Jesus asks us to have faith, even in the storm.

Gospel tip for Summer Fun #1 is: In the storm, place your trust in Love.

In the Bible the sea is a symbol of chaos and chaos is the ultimate threat. A state of confusion, emptiness, disorder. During the trip across Lake Superior that rainy afternoon, the swirling waves, the powers of disorder were too much for me. It was physically and mentally overwhelming. Clara closed her eyes for much of the trip because the swirling of the waves was too much. I felt small, powerless. How often do we end up in a swirling sea in life where we realize, we aren't in control of as much as we think we are?

I've felt the power of chaos, of swirling seas, in times of illness. I was in and out of the hospital five times over a six month period when I was 18 and 19 years old. I felt powerless as my body was betraying me, and all my plans for my first year of college were swallowed up by the sea. I've felt this chaos when others I love have been through health crises or when I've faced loss, or been through a life transition. Maybe you have felt almost overtaken by chaos in these times too.

A central message of the scriptures is that God has the strength to put order around chaos and keep it at bay. God creates order out of disorder. In the creation story, the wind of the Spirit hovers over the waters of chaos, and then God brings order out of chaos, by separating day from night and land from sea. In our story for today, Jesus does what God does.

Jesus stills the storm, he stills the power of chaos. The disciples are facing the ultimate threat, they are terrified. Jesus has a high bar in this story, I think. Maybe he's just grumpy because he wasn't finished with his nap. He calms the storm and then he says, "where is your faith?" The disciples are like, "what do you mean? The sea swallowed it. The swirling sea gobbled up our faith. That's what the swirling seas do, they take our trust.

The story is really about what God does. God has the power to calm the storm. Love is stronger than the swirling sea. It's there that we are invited to place our trust even in the storm.

When I spent those six months in and out of the hospital just after I had left home, I remember thinking, "I have no idea what is happening with my body. I have no choice but to trust these doctors that I don't know. I have no choice but to trust that they want to do good for me. They want my life to get back on track. They want my body to heal.

I surrendered to the presence of love in this time because I honestly didn't think there was anything else I could do. I let go, trusting that the desire of others to do good for me would catch me. I discovered that there was powerful Love in the midst of this swirling storm. The love didn't hold chaos at bay completely, the waves kept coming, I still got wet, but I felt like there was still a powerful Love in the midst of this swirling storm, mysteriously, embedded in people, all around. For part of this time I had returned home and was in and out of the hospital again and my pastor visited and he asked how I was doing and I said I felt strangely calm really, and I talked a little about why. He said, "you've had a kind of spiritual experience through this, haven't you." I thought, "Is that what this is?"

Back to the Perfect Storm in Lake Superior starring Todd and Clara. We're taking the waves head on now. We're going up and down, up and down. I look around at all the passengers, and many look concerned like I feel on the inside. Some look green, and I know they are trying to decide if they should risk their lives to be courteous to those who are on the boat with them. Then I looked at the owner operator who was in the cabin with us. He was serious now like he hadn't been in the morning. He was talking with the crew and answering questions and giving direction, but he certainly wasn't panicked. It was clear that he had many afternoons like this.

But he kept talking with us, asking how we were feeling. "Are you feeling ok? Anyone feeling sick? It wouldn't be strange for someone to be feeling sick. Are you sure? Ok."

There was something about the way he was asking that made me feel like he cared for the people on the boat. He wanted good for us. Sure he wanted good for himself and good for his business. It wouldn't look good for him if one of us flopped overboard. But I remember thinking, "this guy seems to know what he's doing, even if he is a very unusual person. He seems to want good for the people on the boat."

I surrendered again to this love embedded in people, in this good intention, because there was nothing else I could do. There's something holy in this, something sacred in it. And I

calmed down, in the midst of the biggest waves. Placing my trust in love kept chaos at bay, it kept the swirling sea from swallowing my spirit.

We made it back to the docks. Clara opened her eyes. We would have kissed the ground but we were all too wet and cold to bend down. I don't think we were ever in any danger at all, but my body didn't know that. That's often how it is, isn't it? But surrendering, trusting, love's ability to get me through, kept the storm inside me, under control. It held the storm at bay.

Gospel tip for Summer Fun #1: In the storm, place your trust in Love. Amen.