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## THE LENTEN MEDITATIONS 2023 – WEEK 2

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### HOPE IN THE STORM AT SEA

BY TARA LUDWIG

Somewhere along the road, our culture’s understanding of the concept of “hope” has gotten badly muddled. If you do a Google search of the word “hope” you’ll find many inspirational sayings and quotes that are operating on a definition of hope that sounds something like this one, from the Oxford English dictionary: “Hope: a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen.” This makes me very grouchy. Because this narrow and inadequate definition of hope is one that we’ll outgrow too quickly. When we are little, we hope that Santa will bring us a new teddy bear and remarkably, he does; but as we get older, we’ll inevitably see that it doesn’t always work this way: the person we’d hoped to marry dumps us, the job we’d hoped for falls through, the friend we hoped would be healed doesn’t get better. This is the way of things. So, if our Christian hope is limited to the expectation or desire for a certain outcome, and that outcome never comes to fruition, well, what then?

Any hope that’s actually going to serve us or keep us afloat in this lifetime cannot be so flimsy and fragile as to be toppled when things don’t go the way we want them to, because that happens way too often. So, can we reach for a hope that is deeper, meatier, than an overly simplistic optimism?

To help us wonder about this, we’ll visit Jesus and his disciples today in The Gospel of Mark, as they encounter a storm on the sea of Galilee:

*That day when evening came, Jesus said to his disciples, “let us go over to the other side.” leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “teacher, don't you care if we drown?” He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “quiet! Be*



*still!” then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, “why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” they were terrified and asked each other, “who is this then, that even the wind and the sea obey him!” (Mark 4:35-41)*

This is a comforting passage to hearts that are in distress, and I’ve often seen it used as an example of how Jesus will calm the storms of our lives, and never let us drown. Well, I don’t know about you, but I’ve drowned (metaphorically), many times in my life; my boat has filled with water and been dashed against the rocks until the whole ship sank down to the depths and took me with it. Jesus doesn’t always save the day in the way we’d like him to.

The disciples, here in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of Mark’s Gospel, have already seen many miracles; have heard Jesus preach in numerous cities, watched him heal lepers and paralytics and seen him cast out demons. They were with the Messiah; and so it’s understandable that maybe they thought their days of struggle and peril were over. So, when the wind picks up and the waves start crashing over the side of the boat, they panic- this isn’t how they thought things would go. They’re in danger, and they’re afraid.

And oh, how quickly their fear causes them to turn on Jesus: “Teacher, don’t you care that we are drowning?” Much more terrifying than even the storm itself is the idea that Jesus, their friend and Lord who they love and believe in, would so easily discard them. And it’s here that we see how fear can conjure in us the most dangerous kind of hopelessness- the belief that love, even Love itself in the 2<sup>nd</sup> divine person, is not trustworthy. Hopelessness gets its hooks in us when we forget who God is.

Let’s return for a moment to the Oxford English Dictionary, even though I got cranky with it before. The dictionary’s *second* entry listed under the word hope says this: “*Hope: a feeling of trust.*” Now, even though this definition for hope is labeled as “ARCHAIC” in big bold capital letters, I have a feeling that it is tracking something closer to what we actually mean when we in the Christian faith talk about hope. Our hope is rooted in our trust of He who is trustworthy; not just in the achievement of a specific outcome or result. Christian hope points us towards a *who*, not a *what*.

So, the important question, then, that Mark’s Gospel invites us to ponder as we contemplate the storms in our own lives is not, “what happens to my boat in the storm?” but rather, “WHO is in the boat with me?” Which is exactly what the disciples find



themselves asking: “who is this then, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” It is the Christ, the Son of God himself; and we have hope not because Jesus promised to calm all the storms but because no matter how bad the storm gets, he stays next to us in the boat.

So my invitation to you, as I send you off into your life in this second week of Lent, is to experience hope as a relationship and not as a transaction. Can we have hope just because Jesus is Jesus, and not have our hope dependent upon whether he fixes things for us or not? Now there is nothing wrong with having preferences, or desires, obviously all of us prefer safety over danger, health over sickness, etc. But how might we grow in faith this Lent if we just let the phrase, “I hope” be a complete sentence in itself, with no contingencies?

I’ll close today with a story from Brennon Manning’s book, “Ruthless Trust:

*When John Kavanaugh, the noted and famous ethicist, went to Calcutta, he was seeking Mother Teresa ... and more. He went for three months to work at “the house of the dying” to find out how best he could spend the rest of his life.*

*When he met Mother Teresa, he asked her to pray for him. “What do you want me to pray for?” she replied. He then uttered the request he had carried thousands of miles: “Clarity. Pray that I have clarity.”*

*“No,” Mother Teresa answered, “I will not do that.” When he asked her why, she said, “Clarity is the last thing you are clinging to and must let go of.” When Kavanaugh said that she always seemed to have clarity, the very kind of clarity he was looking for, Mother Teresa laughed and said: “I have never had clarity; what I have always had is trust. So I will pray that you trust God.”*

May the hope of Christ fill you and enfold you in this first week of Lent. Amen.