

# Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church

## Sermon

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Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church  
1225 Piper Boulevard, Naples, FL 34110

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### **When the Storm Winds Blow**

Mark 4:35-41

I think you'll agree that these are troubled times. Even Naples is not immune from the trouble. Something happened last Tuesday that is deeply disturbing and requires our attention. Ruth Dorfman, an elderly woman who has spoken in our church about gay and lesbian concerns, was the victim of a hate crime. Her garage door was defaced, painted with swastikas, a particularly offensive act considering that Ruth is Jewish. The attacker or attackers left a note claiming that God hates Jews, Gays and Democrats. I must say that I find the inclusion of Democrats in that list somewhat amusing. But I will neither dismiss that action as mere vandalism, nor laugh at the fear, the hate and the violence such an act displays.

Now I am quite confident that no one in this congregation considers such an action acceptable. And I assume many of you are as outraged as I am that someone would do such a thing. But I will not simply dismiss it as an act by an individual nut case or a few crazy's out there on the fringes of society. There is something going on in the world right now that is deeply threatening, a movement of intolerance and violence that cannot be condoned. I'm reminded that English philosopher Edmund Burke said, "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing." We cannot shrug our shoulders and dismiss such actions as isolated or insignificant. Neither can we simply blame Muslims or Right wing Christians as if the rest of the world were somehow innocent.

Now I know that such hateful actions are nothing new. Jim Crow and lynchings and such surely are a mark of shame on our past. But we've seen an increase in such hateful acts recently, from the attack on the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC to the murder of a Doctor in Wichita, to the gunning down of several policemen in Pennsylvania, to the murderous actions of an anti-immigration group in Arizona. And while nothing suggests those separate actions are connected, and while there is no particular group that we can point to for blame, let it be noted that such hateful actions are not independent of the fear-mongering atmosphere in our country right now. Whether you're talking about hateful letters to the editor or incendiary radio or television hosts, there seems to be an increasing atmosphere of fear and anger in our world today.

Listen, whether we support abortion rights or oppose them, the fact that someone may disagree with us does not make that person evil. Oh there is indeed evil in the world as is evidenced by the violence in our society and by the hate speech and the fear mongering. But the simple fact that people disagree with our opinions does not make them evil. Whether we support the President's economic plans or oppose them, we do not need to call those with whom we disagree, Socialists or Greedy capitalists. Whether we favor Gay rights or oppose them we do not need to paint swastikas on garage doors or claim that God hates Gays or Jews or Democrats (or Republicans either for that matter). Nor do we need to tolerate such actions under the guise of free speech. You and I need to stand firm against those who in any way encourage or endorse such behavior. Failure to do so is to let evil gain the upper hand.

But how shall we do that? Is it enough to write a letter to the editor condemning such actions? Is it enough to raise an outcry against such behavior? Or is more required of us? One message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is clear. God loves all people. God loves even the hate monger who painted swastikas on Ruth Dorfman's garage door. God loves even the leaders of Operation Rescue who held

a vigil outside Doctor Tillers' clinic this weekend. Talk about poor taste! Their website had a special "Tiller Watch" link which almost certainly inflamed the passions of the killer who shot the doctor. And they have the nerve to hold a vigil outside his closed clinic after he was killed. Christ died for all, but Christ did not die so that people could carry out evil acts in his name. People of faith need to say that loudly and clearly.

So what, you may ask, has any of this to do with Jesus stilling the storm on the lake of Galilee? Well, it seems to me that these are stormy times. Our society is threatened. Some wonder if the boat is not already sinking. The turmoil stirring up the stormy waters is not limited to economics. It runs much deeper. Not only our society, but the world is in trouble. Evil is storming all around us. It's as if we're in the middle of a lake, straining against the oars to make progress, but we're getting nowhere. In fact we seem to be taking on water. Even the churches are caught up in turmoil.

Makes you wonder where Jesus is in all this? Can't help but wonder what Jesus is doing these days. True, there is disagreement as to what Christ's will is! But that shouldn't surprise us. Some insist that Jesus is only concerned about the individual. They talk in terms of personal salvation. They want sermons to focus only on the personal troubles we face in everyday life. For them, the stress of work, the hassle of mixed priorities, the problems of personal morality - these are the stuff of faith. And they assume that if everyone in the world were Christian, society would be OK.

Others focus on society, noting that good people who would never intentionally do evil somehow are able to do evil when they are part of some groups. For them the primary focus in faith is to clean up society. Then the individuals will be OK. Have you noticed that the really nasty blog comments seem always to be anonymous? So where is Jesus when the storms hit? Does it do any good for us to talk about Jesus, to preach good news? Or are we simply crying into the wind. Makes you wonder what Jesus has to say about all this? Might even question whether or not Jesus cares. Where is Jesus anyway?

Isn't that just like God? Really now, we've been through this before. Christ tells us to get in the boat, sends us off on some great mission. And when we get into trouble, where is he? Oh, we know he's in the boat with us. But he's sound asleep. If he cared at all about us, he'd do something. Don't you think? We're not the first to experience God that way either. Remember Job? "I wish I knew where to find him," he bellowed. "I would state my case before him ... I want to know what he would say." And then there are the psalms. Psalm 44: "Wake up, Lord! Why are you asleep?" Psalm 65: "At last the Lord woke up." Like frightened disciples in a foundering boat we join the chorus: Wake up! Wake up, Jesus! Do you want us to drown? Don't you care?

Of course Jesus cares. That's why he calmed the storm with a word. Here we are in the midst of tremendous strife and one word from him dispels the fear. What's that Martin Luther wrote in the hymn A Mighty Fortress? "One little word shall fell him." And that's been our experience too. We've been through the valley of darkness. And we weren't abandoned, even though at the point of greatest fear we may have thought so. Jesus calms the storm, and sometimes quite rapidly. We get all worked up over the storm, and Christ shuts it down with a word. Sort of like a lost child in grocery store calms down when he hears his mother's voice. We've experienced that calming effect of Christ's word, only we forget that in the midst of crisis. Nevertheless, when we do cry out, Christ comes to our aid.

These may be troubled times. But Christ has given us all we need to stand up against evil in the world, in our society, even in the church. And this story reminds us that even when we feel overwhelmed by events of the day, even when we fear things are getting out of control, Jesus has power to calm the storm. Now more than ever people need to hear the good news of Jesus. Now more

than ever people must be reminded that Christ's way is not the way of violence against another. It's the way of peace, even at the risk of violence to one's self. Trust Christ, even when the storm seems too strong. We can, you know. We can work together standing firm against the evil of the day for Christ is with us to calm the storm.