



THE PASTOR'S PEN

(Disciples of Christ)

The First Word



May 22, 2017

Out of Control (Mark 4:34-41)

Throughout the history of the Church, many a Christian who has read and heard about God's miracles develop such an affection for these stories that it brings them pleasure for the rest of their days. That's what the story of a miracle does. It strengthens faith through the pleasure of just remembering it.

We could also say that a miracle is one of those times when things get out of control in a good way. God interrupts our orderly existence with something that doesn't fit our notions of orderliness. We need those moments in our memories for when things go out of control in a bad way. For each of us, there comes a day when we feel like our lives have been hijacked by bad news. We go along day after day doing our best. The years go by, and we begin to think that we're in control of our lives, that things will turn out okay. We just need to do our best. Then one day everything changes for the worst. Yes, one moment we feel in control of our lives and in the next we feel trapped inside a car zooming down a highway with no brakes.

There have been times when I've said, "*I think I've lost control of my life.*" I've heard others say it. But the reality is, you can't lose something you never really had. I know I was never really in control. What I have lost, when things go bad, is the illusion that I was in control. It's a hard lesson to learn. We humans come with built in limitations. We can't walk on the sea. We can't fly. We can't undo tragedy. We can't control what happens to us. What we can do is to choose how we will react when the bad times come. The Bible gives us some help with that.

For instance, in Mark's gospel, when Jesus and his disciples are out on the sea and a storm comes up, the disciples are terrified. Jesus is sleeping. They wake him up and scold him for not caring that they are about to die. Jesus gets up, stretches, and says, *"You still don't get it, do you? You don't need to be afraid. You just need faith."*

Or take the story right after that. Jairus, a leader of the synagogue, falls at Jesus feet. He too is suffering from something he can't control, the mortal illness of his daughter. *"Come and heal my girl, he begs Jesus, "so she can live."* Then the worst that can happen happens. Word comes that she is dead. Jesus says to this devastated father, *"Don't be afraid. Just have faith."*

Only two things: don't be afraid and have faith. And this isn't just a word for Jairus or for the disciples in the storm. It's a word for us. It's a word for us when we have our noses smashed up against the things in life we can't control. We want to control our lives and we'd like to control God. If we controlled God, we could get a miracle when we need one. But these miracle stories are not about control. They are stories about what God is like and how God acts.

Mark wrote the stories down so that we would know that Jesus was no ordinary man. Mark wanted people to have faith so they would have faith to function when things got out of control. Mark wanted them to know that when Jesus is gone he still has the power to still the storms of our lives and raise us out of a living death to life again. We have two choices. Either we can be afraid or we can have faith. And, of course, it's never that easy.

Frederick Buechner was right when he said, *"miracles do not cause us to believe so much as believing brings forth miracles."* Indeed, when we believe, we begin to find God in things as ordinary as each other and the world around us. That's possible even when things are bad. When we give up the illusion of control then we can better see God's out-of-control grace.

Yes dear ones, faith is strengthened through the pleasure that comes from remembering the miracle stories. But not just that. When we choose faith over control, we have a much better chance of experiencing those miracles of God's grace all around us right now.

May it be so, for you, and for me.

Peace, Passion and Purpose...Pastor Mark