

-There's a great story I love to share about one of the most prolific and respected theologians of the 20th century. Karl Barth, a Swiss reform pastor, was one of the founding members, along with several other rogue German Lutheran pastors like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, of the *Confessing Church*. This group of churches actively resisted Nazi Germany's efforts in creating a "national German church" and Karl Barth became an active writer of theology at this time period. His pinnacle theological work is titled *Church Dogmatics*, one of the longest and most important written works of the church in the 20th century. It encompasses 14 volumes and over 6 million words. Later in his life, Barth was asked to travel around the world and give lectures. In one of these lectures, a student famously raised their hand and asked: "what is the main point, if there is one, to your entire theological position?" It was a brave question that took many other people in the room aback. Barth however, stopped his lecture, and thought a moment. He cleared his throat and in a very raspy, unrefined voice he began to sing: *Jesus loves me this I know, for the bible tells me so, little ones to him be long, they are weak but he is strong. Yes Jesus loves me. Yes Jesus loves me. Yes Jesus loves me, the bible tells me so.* (If you were planning to read Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, I apologize for giving it all away)

-This story resonates with me a lot as I try to make sense of my faith in a very complex and changing world. Sometimes we need to get back to the basics.

-Our gospel story this morning, on this Refugee Sunday, is all about getting back to the basics. I've mentioned before that our Sunday morning bible study has been reading through the Gospel of Mark in its entirety and in doing so we've been able to pick up a lot of literary themes that the author uses. One of the largest themes that Mark comes back to again and again for the rest of the gospel is first asked by the disciples in this story: "who is this man?" Who is Jesus?

-Who is Jesus? Such a simple but incredibly hard question. It's one of those questions that forces you to think about: if you took the entire New Testament, all of the gospels and letters by Paul and others, how would you shrink it down to a basic answer?

-I'm no Karl Barth, but maybe I can (with the Gospel of Mark's help), begin to explore an answer.

-My attempt at an answer to the question that the disciples pose in this story is three parts.

-Jesus is three things: 1. God with us, 2. New life/New Hope, and 3. Boundary Buster

-Let me start with number one: "Jesus is God with us". (Immanu-el) Notice here how Jesus never leaves his disciples in the midst of the storm. He never leaves them high and dry or "up a creek without a paddle". The gospel of Matthew picks up this theme quite literally with Jesus' statement at the very end of the gospel: "For lo I am with you always, even until the end of the age." In Mark, perhaps this is shown even more clearly when Jesus appears to the disciples once again in the boat within a great storm walking on the water. Once again the disciples are horrified and at the end of the story what does Jesus do? He doesn't fly away, or disappear, or turn around. *He gets into the boat with them.* Even when, in our story today, he falls asleep in the boat and after he calms the storm, he doesn't say: "there's no need to be afraid." (what a terrible statement) But instead asks: WHY are you afraid? That's a different question entirely. One, in my opinion, that is based upon God's presence. God is with you even when you are (legitimately) afraid which at the very least gives us the power to look more deeply at our fears. Jesus is God with us.

-Jesus is also new life. You know what two symbols of Jesus are actually OLDER than the symbol of the cross? In Confirmation, we talked about the early Christian Catacombs, or places of worship that Christians would gather during times of the Roman Empire persecution in the 2nd century AD (you can still tour them today). These are some of the oldest known places of worship for Christians and if you go inside, you will actually be hard pressed to find the symbol of the cross, Christians did not use that yet. Instead you find two things usually: a boat and a fish. When early Christians thought of Jesus, these are the two symbols that came to mind. Why?

-Well, it has to do with this story. Who else gets caught in a storm and falls asleep in a boat while others are freaking out? The prophet Jonah. What does Jonah finally say? Throw me in so you can live. Kill me and save yourselves. Jesus does something different. In verse 39, our translation reads: "He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" "He woke up" is a little bit of a wimpy translation because that greek statement is actually used by someone else: the angel who answers Mary's question on "where they have taken her Lord". He is raised. It's the same statement. Jesus "raised up" is another way to read it. In other words, new life has come to the boat. A new hope has raised up that even the mighty winds cannot squash. No wonder early Christians saw this story as a re-interpretation of Jonah: Christ is the savior, a new hope in chaotic times.

-Jesus is also the boundary buster. Notice another literary theme unique to the gospel of Mark: "On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." *The other side*. What is Jesus referring to? The other side of the lake, sure. But who is there on the other side of the lake? The demonic man with unclean spirits, pagan worshipers, immigrants, and children.

-Dr. Matthew Skinner, professor of New Testament at Luther Seminary writes: "Jesus likes to show up on "the other side" in Mark -- sites of transition or risk. He chooses to go to marginal spaces, away from life's regular patterns: near a graveyard (Mark 5:2-3), at a deathbed (Mark 5:40), or hoisted atop Golgotha. He situates himself at geographical boundary-lands, like the wilderness (Mark 1:4-9, 35), mountaintops (Mark 3:13; 6:46; 9:2), Tyre (Mark 7:24), and Caesarea Philippi (Mark 8:27).....it is "on the other side" where Jesus conducts ministry, opens minds to new possibilities, and sets people free to enter into a new future in freedom and wholeness. He meddles with borders, not because he has a penchant for chaos, but because the reign of God extends divine holiness and a commitment to well-being to places that we might have thought were beyond the limits. To Christ, no place is desolate. No one is abandoned."

-Jesus is: God with us, New life/New Hope, and Boundary Buster. In reflection of these things, there is another aspect to this question. Now that the disciples ask it, they spend the whole time in the rest of Mark not only figuring out who Jesus is.....but who they are in relation to Jesus too. If we know who this man Jesus is then who are we?

-Who are we as citizens, as human beings, as followers of Christ? This has been a rough time for our country and I know I personally have really wrestled with the images of crying children being separated from their parents at the United States southern border. It is the most ironic thing I have seen in years that this Sunday officially is named by the United Nations across the globe as "Refugee Sunday": a Sunday that this year sits in the midst of a terrible national

struggle. Who are we? If Jesus is God with us, new life/new hope, and boundary buster, than aren't we as his followers called to proclaim this to the world? Is it proclaiming "God with us" to separate children from their parents and house them in abandoned Walmarts? Is it proclaiming a new life and a new hope to build enormous tent cities to house refugees and create "fast track" trials not meant to listen fairly to why a person is fleeing their country but instead get them through the system and sent home as quickly as possible? Is it proclaiming the "breaking down of boundaries" to treat immigrants like animals and foreign invaders? While some like to cite bible verses taken completely out of context and twisted in order to say this behavior is somehow "Christian", I would argue that our story today tells something completely different. To be a follower of Christ one must, I believe, proclaim the gospel that Christ has lived out. To do otherwise and proclaim oneself as Christian is a lie. Sometimes it requires us to go back to the basics in order to realize this.

-Woman in the video: what if it were me? What if it was my child? That's the basic point isn't it? *Jesus loves me (and you, and you, and you) this I know for the bible tells me so.* Why are you afraid to love one another as I have loved you? God, grant us the courage to live out your radical presence, new life, and tearing down of boundaries for a world so desperately afraid. Amen.