



Remaining Calm in the Midst of a Storm

It's not always easy to remain calm in the midst of a storm. Recently I found myself in a small boat on a stormy sea. The captain of the boat stopped our travel abruptly and instructed each of the eight persons on board to grab the life vests from beneath our seats and securely fasten them around our necks and body. He then told us not to make any sudden movements on the boat and under no circumstances should we change seating positions or stand up. What seemingly was a leisurely slow-paced cruise through calm waters turned dangerous in a matter of minutes. The reassuring directness of the captain along with his calm but informed instruction gave us all confidence we would arrive safely in our designated harbor. This was not his first rodeo and we sensed it.

This experience reminds me of the story from Matthew 8:23-27. While Jesus is asleep in the back of a small boat in the midst of a blustering storm the friends of Jesus wake him and exclaim, "Do you not care we are going to drown?" Jesus rebukes the winds and the waves and then asks a most perplexing question, "Why are you so afraid? Where is your faith?"

It's natural to be afraid in the midst of perceived danger. Jesus's rebuke had to be tempered with compassion. But His question does confront us with more questions; in whom do we finally place our trust? How much do we really believe God has our back? If the storm rages on, how can we trust we will be safe?

Every interim in a congregation's timeline creates a certain degree of anxiety and concern. Will we be ok? How will this interim time affect our membership? How fast can we move?

Now, add to this concern a world-wide pandemic! When we began this interim process together back in January, no one, and I do mean not one of us, could have imagined we would be in this situation. Church, by definition, necessitates people being together in corporate worship, fellowship, and ministry. Remember, "Where two or three are gathered in my name there I will be also" (Matthew 18:20). Our togetherness has been altered and certainly the way we "do church" has changed drastically. I have been impressed and inspired by the way First Baptist Wilmington has been "church" in these trying days. We are learning that "church" can happen over Zoom, Google Hangouts, FaceTime, through the telephone, emails, texts and videos. These formats are not the ideal; however, the necessity for such forms of communication is teaching us that we can reach out and touch even in the worst of circumstances.

We will continue to do transition ministry work even in uncertain times. Your Leadership Team has ongoing assignments related to "next steps" which can be completed without face-to-face meetings. We will be talking in the next few weeks about the schedule for the next two large congregational meetings. Of course, the timing of the meetings will be dictated by what is prudent and responsible. Obviously, we can all pray for this process amidst the storm.

It is my plan to call together the Pastor Selection Team by Zoom in the next couple of weeks for introductions and team-building conversations. I'm sure we will be surprised by what can be accomplished without face-to-face meetings! My prayer and hope is that we will be back to our normal way of operation soon. Meanwhile, Zoom is the word!

In the book *Sailboat Church* by Joan Gray we are reminded that "the early church was a God-powered, God-led, God-resourced adventure" (Chapter 1).

This is a welcome reminder to all of us as we "sail" through this uncertain time in the life of First Baptist Wilmington and our world. We are on solid ground when we trust the Holy Spirit to fill our sails with favorable winds propelling our little boat through these uncharted waters. We will get through this! My belief is that the church and the work of the church in the world will be stronger on the other side.

Sailing with you, Randy Ashcraft, Facilitator