

Laura Fitzpatrick-Nager
 The First Congregational Church of Old Lyme
 Texts: Mark 4:35-41
 October 9, 2022

Love Is Its Own Rescue: Finding Strength and Shelter in the Storm

I'm usually not an early riser. But staying with my mother in Guilford after her cataract surgery for a few nights this past week, I was up early watching the sky lighten over the horizon. I, like many of you, are weathering several storms at once, and I couldn't sleep.

The waters off Long Island Sound were like glass; a fishing boat with its blinking green lights let me know I wasn't the only one awake with the birds. As the sun rose, bands of dark blue clouds were interspersed with widening streaks of pink light.

Breathing in this peaceful scene, I gave thanks that this storm had passed and that morning had come.

How is it possible for those picking up the pieces in Cuba, Puerto Rico, Florida to do so after so much recent flooding, fear, and destruction?

The litany of storms we face is too much to hold sometimes let alone name out loud... the many national and global "storm surges" we are facing are often the backdrop to our own personal griefs and challenges.

What is something you are carrying right now?

I know each of you has wisdom on navigating treacherous waters—and I think it's crucial that we invite one another to share those stories with compassion.

As I was writing this, there were and are many people on my mind and heart:

A neighbor learning how to live again after her husband's death two months ago,

A sister of my heart experiencing a complicated birth in Texas and we are trying to remain calm while awaiting news...

A friend juggling caregiving of her father with increasing work demands,

And a college student is trying to remain in school in spite of debilitating anxiety...

In addition, I'm remembering the stranger from Orlando whose story I watched on the news the other day. He carried a nurse on his back to safety through the raging flood waters so she could get to the hospital on time to do her shift—while her car drifted away in the background.

How do you handle the storms that come your way? What has helped you endure and be brave? And where does the strength and the courage come from to continue on as we face the daily headlines?

As the author, Mark Nepo, wrote recently, "storms are everywhere. And like every generation before us, like every soul's journey on Earth, we must learn the art of surviving storms, so we can endure and build a better world."

His new book is called, *Surviving Storms: Finding the Strength to Meet Adversity*.

Oh good, I thought when I saw the title, a manual, yes, that's just what I need to keep it together/find some answers. A blueprint for the art of surviving the hard stuff!

So how do we ride them, and not close off from each other? It's tempting to stay in the harbor and not go back out into deep water...

There is no blueprint, of course, for easing in and out of the worst fears of our lives, but as Jesus taught the disciples on that stormy afternoon in the Galilee, there's a Presence that can

still the raging waters. There's a wisdom that teaches that while there's no easy way through... rescue is possible with love and courage in the mix.

"Do you not care?" Jesus' companions in the boat cried out, awakening him from his deep sleep.

"Do you not care that we are perishing?"

Tempest-tossed, the followers in the swamped boat with Jesus were terrified. We can picture the weather given Mark's detail.

Those in the boat were being asked to change, to push beyond their fear to something More. In this very moment he is drawing them from the familiar territory of Capernaum to the strange and foreign land of the other side of the lake (to another community, the Gerasenes). And he is moving them from being fisherfolk to disciples. And he is preparing them to welcome a kingdom so very different from the one they'd known or expected. The change they are facing is real, and hard, and inevitable, and all of this becomes crystal clear as they realize the One who is asking them can still the wind.

In many ways, this time that we're living in is a time for being terrified and a time for waking up; waking up to the realities we face and the opportunities to console, enliven and heal one another through them.

As a church community, we know how to walk with one another through the most trying of times...and to adjust to the changes we need to make in order to expand our worldview, grow and thrive as a community.

In August, I stood transfixed as I walked through the Winslow Homer (1836–1910) exhibit at the MET.¹ It showed the 88 oil paintings, many of them watercolors that told the story of Homer's life's work. One of which, called *Nor'Easter*, is printed on the front of your bulletin today. I thought Homer was just a painter of beautiful ocean scenes but I soon discovered that Homer gave voice to the storms and despair of his time.

Painting in the 19th century, Homer was an illustrator first and a visual storyteller. Using his gifts with a brush, he depicted the stories of conflict he witnessed, showing the human cost of war, along with the magnified storms of racism and injustice taking place all around him. ...not only on the battlefields of the Civil War, but in the aftermath of Reconstruction.

Homer wasn't afraid to paint the suffering he saw on the worn faces of soldiers and on the formerly enslaved people he encountered in his travels. (Journeys that took him from Virginia fields and battlelines to later, the coastlines of Bermuda and the Caribbean and eventually to the rocky shoals of Maine.) His powerful response was to respond to suffering and be a witness, portraying the struggle.

As people of faith, what is our response to the storms around us? What gives you courage and strength in the face of these storms? Some of you, as elders in our church, have a wisdom that can help the rest of us.

What are those cushions of community and faith that do help us to not only buttress against the wind, but go into the storm where the needs are greatest...somehow while keeping our hearts open to aliveness and the uncertainty even when they might break?

We cannot, of course, still the storms that others face, or take away the pain that comes in wave upon wave sometimes in our own lives, but as Jesus taught, we can wade into the waters with each other.

We can stand in the storm with one another,

We can listen to Jesus saying, "Peace" to the winds, "Do not be afraid."

¹ <https://www.metmuseum.org/events/programs/met-tours/conversations-with/insider-homer>

We can be peace bearers, too, bringing a moment of calm to another we can reach out and say, “I’ll carry you on my back for a while.”

Whatever Nor’Easters may be in the forecast, I know this much is true. We share a faith that we can count on. We have each other. We can trust in each other and trust in the God of Love who is present in this very moment and in the next (through you and through me).

We are safe harbor to each other.

As the poet, Emily Dickinson, wrote in a flurry of letters to a friend, “*Love is its own rescue*” ...²



Bulletin cover by Winslow Homer

Rev. Laura Fitzpatrick-Nager

Living with Uncertainty at FCCOL: The Over-75 Crowd
 (Emily Snow, Bob McCracken, Diana Blair, Judy Simmons, Sally D.
 Counter cultural...
 Joan Chittister (new book) *The Gift of Years: Growing Older Gracefully*

(END)

² <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1891/10/emily-dickinsons-letters/306524/>