

Stressful Stories

Year B, Pentecost 5

By Beth Barnett

This is a Bible engagement for Mark 4:35 – 42; 2 Cor 6:1-13
Use this resource during any gathering, specifically during Bible Reading times.

You will need:

- Chris Booth art image “Boats in the storm” on the screen or printed (Image included in the Visions and Voices Resources Zip)
- Pieces of bubble wrap, distributed around your gathering
- Sharpie markers
- (Optional – three people to give the simple summaries of the readings)

Time required:

5 minutes

Introduction

What do you find stressful? What makes you anxious?

(Welcome and affirm all suggestions)

What do you find calms you down?

(Welcome and affirm all suggestions)

You know one thing that helps a lot of people calm down is bubble-wrap. Squishing the little bubbles on bubble-wrap helps a lot of people keep calm.

In our readings today, from 1 Samuel 17 in the Old Testament, from the Gospel of Mark and from the Letter to the Corinthians, there is a lot of stress. The stress just keeps piling up and up. So to help us all stay calm there are pieces of bubble-wrap distributed around your seats today. Reach around and find them, because you’re going to need them soon.



Today's readings are some Stressful Stories:

(Optional: Ask 3 different people to prepare these brief summaries and have them stand up and deliver them at this point. If it will be appreciated by your community, ask them to include a little bit of costumery - a shield or helmet, a sailor's beanie or an oar, chains or scrolls.)

The army of Israel are being attacked by the Philistines and the Philistines have a huge giant on their side - really stressful.

In the gospel reading the disciples are crossing the sea in the dark in the middle of a storm - very very stressful.

The writers of 2 Corinthians are describing how they have been beaten up, put in prison, left hungry - it goes on and on describing stressful situations.

These are Stressful Stories, alright! So we are going to do some Bubble Wrap Bible reading! With our bubble wrap stress relief squares ready, let's read some Bible.



Read Mark 4:35-42, stopping at various points to notice the stress rising in the text

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side."

The 'other side' meant the place where a different people group lived, and it especially meant the place where the Roman armies were stationed. Some people find new situations stressful.

And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him.

A great windstorm arose... *feel the tension rise (pop pop)*

And the waves beat into the boat... *its getting more scary (poppop pop)*

So that the boat was already being swamped... *How stressful is this?!*



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But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" ... **You can hear the anxiety and desperation!**
He woke up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!"
Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. **Ok... now it's a different kind of stressful, right? It's a bit freaky!**
He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?"
And they were filled with great fear ... **absolutely out of their minds terrified (pop pop pop pop)**
And said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

We are going to switch now, over to 2 Corinthians 6:1-13.
Again, note the stress points and model the popping of the bubble wrap

As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain.
For he says,
"At an acceptable time, I have listened to you
and on a day of salvation I have helped you."
See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! **(so far so good, but watch out)**
We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry
But as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way:
Through great endurance **(things are getting hard)**
In afflictions, hardships, calamities **(oooh feel the stress)**
Beatings, imprisonments, riots **(Ok, the anxiety is off the charts, right?!)**
Labours, sleepless nights, hunger **(pop pop pop)**
By purity, knowledge, patience, kindness **(oh, hang on, things are sounding better)**
Holiness of spirit, genuine love
Truthful speech, and the power of God: **(ok, not bad, not bad)**
With the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left **(uh-oh. Back to battling)**
In honour and dishonor **(stresssss)**
In ill repute and good repute **(popppp)**
We are treated as impostors, and yet are true **(oh THAT is stressful)**
As unknown, and yet are well known **(eeeehhhh)**
As dying, and see – we are alive!
As punished, and yet not killed;
As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing;
As poor, yet making many rich;
As having nothing, and yet possessing everything **(so many problems and things to cause anxiety, but they are mixed in with thankfulness and joy and knowing the love of God.)**
We have spoken frankly to you Corinthians; our heart is wide open to you.
There is no restriction in our afflictions, but only in yours. In return – I speak as to children – open wide your hearts also.



Conclusion

It's been a stressful time reading the Bible today.

There are two things I've noticed.

First - the Bible doesn't pretend that life is always calm and manageable. Followers of Jesus, the people of God, even apostles get stressed and anxious and fearful. It's just really normal - I know it, you know it, the Bible knows it.

But secondly - in the midst of the fears and stresses there is comfort, the voice of Jesus that says 'Be still' and the loving Spirit of God, that reminds us of what is true and good and

pure - the living love of God in our hearts.

Take home your piece of bubble-wrap and let it remind you that God is with us in the stressful situation.

Art Extension

Through the remainder of your gathering time, invite participants to write on their pieces of Bubble-wrap some of the things that stress them. Invite them to add them to a large poster of the image by Chris Booth (where the waves are already a bit bubble-wrapped) or to a similar picture you have drawn yourself.



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