

Mark 4:35-41
"Calming the Storms"
Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

June 20, 2021
First Ev. Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Intro]

As a ship is nearing a coast, or just entering a harbor, oftentimes a maritime pilot is ready if that ship's captain is in need of assistance. Although ship captains have a lot of sea experience, they don't always know the local hazards just off a coast or in a harbor when a sudden storm emerges.

In the event of a sudden storm, a maritime pilot comes on board via a small boat or is lowered from a helicopter and takes over the ship with the captain's permission. What makes these pilots so skilled is that they know the immense details of the local waterways, such as the depth, the currents, the hazards, as well as the expertise in handling ships of all types and sizes.

They know what to do to get the ship to safe harbor when the weather suddenly changes.

Today on this Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, Jesus and His disciples find themselves aboard a boat during a great windstorm with waves breaking into the boat as it begins to fill with water. But by His powerful Word, Jesus calms not just the storm brought on by the sea, but also the storm in the disciples' hearts.

[God Rested]

"On that day, when evening had come, [Jesus] said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side' (of the Sea of Galilee). And leaving the crowd (as He continued to teach), (the disciples) took Him with them in the boat" (Mark 4:35).

Now, this day was a long day for Jesus. Jesus was exhausted. Earlier in the day, He healed a leper, He healed a centurion's servant, He healed Peter's mother-in-law, He cured demon-possessed people, and He healed many from various diseases and illnesses (Matthew 8:1-22). Although Jesus is fully God, He is still fully human, and He needed His rest.

This tired condition is what caused Jesus to say: ***“Let us go across to the other side (of the sea)”*** (Mark 4:35). In time, Jesus began to rest and He soon fell asleep on a cushion.

Now, Jesus was familiar to rest. You see, even before He took upon Himself our human flesh, He rested. He rested on the seventh day (Genesis 2:1-3) after He – *with the Father and the Holy Spirit* – had created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them: the waters, the dry land, the plants, the stars, the angels, the water creatures, the land creatures (Genesis 1:1-31).

In fact, in our Old Testament reading, this is what the triune God spoke to Job about. You see, when Job was experiencing his personal storm – *his doubts* – as he questioned the Creator of the heavens and the earth, God comforted him and said to Job, ***“Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Who determined its measurements – surely you know! Who laid its cornerstone? Who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb, when I made the clouds its garment? Who prescribed limits for it and said, ‘Thus far you come, and no farther’?”*** (Job 38:1-11)

Like Job, we fail to understand the known and unknown, the seen and unseen, but God is always there to comfort us in our good times and bad times as we turn to His Word as revealed in the Scriptures and in the Sacrament.

[The Storm]

For the disciples, this boat trip upon the Sea of Galilee was about to go from calm to stormy.

Suddenly, ***“a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling”*** (Mark 4:37).

Now, storms are entirely in keeping with the topography. Since the Sea of Galilee is about 700 feet below sea level and lies between high hills, so sudden squalls would often come roaring through and would churn up waves to a height like those in much larger bodies of water. But some may wonder, could there be something more going on here? After all, Jesus is resting from a long day of healings. So, this might indicate that the storm and the raging seas constitute an attack by spiritual forces opposed to God. We don't know this for a fact, but it may cause us to wonder: is there something more going on here?

As the storm was raging, Jesus was fast asleep. So, in this hour of danger the disciples woke Him saying, **“Save us, Lord!”** (Matthew 8:25b) **“Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”** (Mark 4:38c)

Some questions may arise: Weren't some of these disciples expert fishermen who must have gone through similar furious storms on the lake? And: wasn't Jesus inexperienced in handling a boat? Why, then, did they come to Jesus?

Though their faith was not perfect, they did reveal faith in this hour. They do seem to think that Jesus is special and that He can help. Although at this time, they do not fully understand who He is, what He is truly like, and what He is all about, but they turn to Jesus and rely on His power to help.

Immediately, Jesus arose from His cushion and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, **“Peace! Be still! And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm”** (Mark 4:39). Just as it was in this morning's Introit from Psalm 107, as those men were crying to the Lord, Jesus delivered them by calming the storm and the waves. As was declared by the Psalmist and as He spoke to Job, it is only God who is able to control nature, including the wind and the sea. It is the Lord Himself, Jesus Christ, who has the power to command the wind and calm the waves.

You see, God's spoken Word is performative, that is, when God speaks, things happen. Just as it was in the beginning, when God spoke, **“Let there be light”** (Genesis 1:3), there was light. It was through the power of His voice that God created the heavens and the earth. And, when Christ said, **“Follow Me”** to His future apostles, they never thought about it, they each immediately dropped everything and followed Him. So, when God speaks, things happen.

Now, some people these days have the idea that they have the power to control the wind and the sea. They say, **“If we only change this or that”** in our lives, the climate would improve. The thing is, only God has this power. By saying they have power to control the future of climate, they are really claiming God's authority. Now, we should care for our environment, as God said to our first parents, **“Subdue (the earth), and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth”** (Genesis 1:28), but we only have the authority to preserve the earth. We don't have the authority to save the earth. We don't have the authority to control the weather. Only God has this power. This is why the disciples asked, **“Who is this, that even wind and sea obey Him?”** (Mark 4:41)

After Jesus calmed the sea, He spoke to His disciples, ***“Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?”*** (Mark 4:40) Now, they had enough faith to wake up Jesus, but their faith was far from perfect. Yes, they woke Him up, but they do not have a faith that rests confidently in Jesus. You see, the disciples still worry very much about their welfare as they said, ***“Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”*** (Mark 4:38), even though their Lord is present with them.

Now, what if Jesus did not wake up? Or, what if Jesus had not been in the boat with them when the windstorm arrived? Would the disciples have had a right to be terrified? Remember, Jesus had taught them – as He teaches us the same – ***“Do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble”*** (Matthew 6:34). So, no matter what, Jesus teaches us that by grace through faith in Him alone, we always stand in the Father’s constant, loving care, so that we have no need to fear or to worry.

Yet, we do fear and worry. We worry as Job worried. We worry as the disciples worried. We worry about the unknown. We worry about the unseen. It seems like we are catechized and trained to worry. Causing worry is big business for some. Turn on the evening news. Read the headlines in today’s newspaper. We are catechized each and every day to worry.

But even if the disciples had drowned in that stormy water, they still would have had no cause to fear. So even in the hour of death, God the Father would not forsake them. So, with that promise comes the assurance that there is no cause for fear since we have eternal life. In Christ, we all have this same promise and assurance!

[The Calm]

As the sinful world around us tosses us all around, God the Father comes to us to bring us back to safety. This is what He accomplished for us by sending His only begotten Son Jesus Christ to bear our sins and be our Savior as He willingly suffered and died for our sins upon the cross. He did this to save us from the power of sin, eternal death, and Satan. He did this so we would receive – *by grace through faith in Christ alone* – forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation!

This is the meaning of Christ calming the storm. He calmed the storm to establish Himself as the ruler of the wind and sea. He is truly the only divine Savior, who has unlimited grace and power to save lost sinners.

By Jesus calming the storm that day may have another meaning. We may think of the church as a boat, the disciples as believers as they are navigating the sea of life, the wind and the waves as the storms of life, the pleas of the disciples as the prayers of believers for help, and Jesus as the Lord of both the church and the world. The meaning being that the Lord of the Church, though seemingly to be asleep and uncaring about what His people are enduring, will arise in due time to bring them salvation.

This is what happens here in the Divine Service! He comes to us to calm our hearts as He speaks to us His sure and certain Word and gives us forgiveness and strength for our weak faith through His Means of Grace – in Word and Sacrament.

Christ speaks to us today with the same power He spoke creation into being. He speaks to us today with the same power He calmed the stormy sea. He speaks to us today saying, ***“Your sins are forgiven.”*** He speaks to us today saying, ***“Take, eat. This is My body, which is given for you. Take, drink. This cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.”*** This is Christ speaking. He is speaking to us as He calms our personal storms.

It has been said that Jesus calmed two storms that day: the one in the disciples’ hearts and the other raging in nature. Jesus reprimanded the winds and the waves saying, ***“Peace! Be still!”*** (Mark 4:39b) Here we see Jesus exercising the same power with which He created the world and the same power with which He also saved the world. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠