

Jesus Calms the Storm

June 20, 2021

Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church

Pastor David Labuhn

The Gospel reading from Mark 4 is familiar to most. Jesus is teaching in Galilee. The crowds pressed in on Him and He got in a boat. He was teaching about faith using parables. (Just before this He taught the parable of the mustard seed.) Jesus interpreted the parables for His disciples to teach them. He had been standing in the hot sun, in the boat teaching for hours. He was human and He was exhausted. He told His disciples that they needed to go to the other side of the lake where there were fewer people, most of who were Gentiles. They put out in their boat. Jesus fell asleep in exhaustion and a storm came. It started to swamp the boat and threaten their lives. The disciples were shocked and dismayed that Jesus was sleeping in the midst of the storm. They woke Him up and admonished Him saying, ***“Don’t you care about us?”*** Jesus addressed the storm like He would a little child and said, ***“Hush.”*** The storm abated and there was total calm and peace on the sea. Jesus then turned to His disciples and asked them why they were afraid. Where was their faith? And the disciples were afraid again because they realized they were in the presence of divine power in the form of their human teacher who had the power to control nature.

What is this story all about? It’s about storms. It’s about fear. It’s about faith. It’s about peace. And, of course, it’s about Jesus.

The first thing we see about Jesus is His humanity. He had been teaching all day. Ask any teacher who teaches a class or classes all day or a pastor who preaches all morning and they will tell you they were so fatigued that when they went home they collapsed on the couch and couldn't be roused. Now add the effect of the hot sun radiating on Jesus and being reflected off the water and you can imagine the exhaustion He was feeling. And thousands of people were pressing in on Him. Teaching from the boat off-shore was some relief, at least it kept the people from overwhelming Him and gave Him some space to teach, but that was not near enough to relieve His fatigue. He was done in. He needed relief physically and emotionally. He needed to get away.

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The boat Jesus was in was probably a fishing boat. We are not sure how big it was, but one from that era would have been dug up from the bottom of the lake. It was about 30 feet long (think about the length of a UPS truck) and it could hold between 15 and 20 people. According to v. 26, there were other followers of Jesus who were in boats too. Mark says that the disciples took Jesus just as He was with no preparations. Jesus meant what He said – they were going to the other side and then He fell asleep.

But then there was the Sea of Galilee (and parenthetically, it isn't a sea but a freshwater inland lake). It's a small lake about thirteen miles long and three miles wide. It is fed by some springs underneath it, but mostly from the waters of

the Jordan River that flows into it from Mount Hermon on the border with Lebanon today. The waters flow down about 10,000 feet on their way to the Dead Sea. It should have been a piece of cake to sail across the corner of it and at least seven of Jesus' disciples were experienced sailors as fishermen. But the Sea of Galilee also called the Sea of Tiberias and Genesseret (in Israel it is called Lake Kinneret because it looks like a harp and the Hebrew word for harp is kennor), is not only unique but unpredictable. The Sea of Galilee is the lowest freshwater lake in the world at 682 feet below sea level. It is surrounded by mountains. On the west and northwest they rise 1,500 feet and on the northeast and east they rise 3,000 feet to the Golan Heights. So it sits like a bowl full of water amid the mountains. The ravines that run down the sides of the mountains are like funnels for the winds. In the winter, the cold winds from the north and northwest blow down to meet the warm air on the waters of the lake, and in the summer hot winds blow from the east and when it meets the cool air on the water, violent storms occur. Bible scholars date this story to the winter of 29 A.D. Jesus and His disciples were crossing to the east side of the lake at the worst time for storms when cold winds barrel down onto the lake and collided with the warm air in the basin. The winds whip the water into tall waves on this small lake and they explode back into the lake only to collide again and again with the shoreline. St. Mark used the Greek word "lailaps" to describe the storm. It means whirlwind and can mean hurricane.

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cushion usually used by the helmsman to sit on. He was there all the time. The disciples became alarmed as the storm got worse and worse and the water started to fill the boat threatening to swamp it and drown them.

Being humans, each disciple reacted to the threatening storm differently. We have a profound picture of what their fearful responses might have been in a painting by the Dutch master painter, Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn. He completed his vision of this event in 1633. It is his only seascape. It is named “Christ in the Storm on the Sea of Galilee.”

In the painting, Rembrandt depicts how he imagined the disciples reacted. A man at the top of the painting is riding a massive wave. He is probably one of the professional fishermen and is working to manage the boat in the storm. Like him, three others are at the mast, frantically trying to fix the sail that has been torn in two. They’re trying to attach the rigging to the boom of the mast. They are trying to control things using their own power and skill in the face of this raging storm.

At the left and middle of the boat, a man is being pounded by a huge wave. He is trying to hang on for dear life to keep from being swept overboard. He’s hanging on but unable to help himself. He is desperately hanging on hoping to survive. Most of the disciples show fear, especially one man on the right side of the boat. He is crouched over in anxiety and dread as an enormous wave is swamping the boat. You can see the dread in his face. Is he resigned to his fate?

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A man on the lower left of the boat in white is easy to miss. He has his back to the viewers, He is sitting alone and very still. He is almost comatose in his fear. He is in shock and immobile. A man in a blue shirt is holding the rigging. His hand is on his forehead as he stares blankly into the dark sea. He seems to be looking at death before him and maybe has accepted his fate. It seems he is looking out at the viewers of the painting almost pleading to them for help.

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In the stern is a man who is holding the tiller at the helm. Probably another experienced fisherman. Maybe it is Peter trying to steer the ship. He feels responsible as the steersmen to control the boat. He is using all his might to grip the tiller hoping his strength will maintain control of the ship in the storm.

But Jesus is unlike all of the disciples. Freezing rain is pelting down on Him, waves are swamping the boat, the winds are whipping around Him and the boat is being tossed about violently. Amid all this, Jesus is sleeping peacefully. How can He be so relaxed in the midst of this

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Jesus will not calm every storm in our lives, but He will hear our prayers and respond to our faith with the peace that passes all understanding. We see it in the words of St. Mark and the painting of Rembrandt. Jesus wasn't just in the boat. He was in the boat serenely and calmly. He was totally at

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It was in that the same peace that He spoke to the storm much like a father speaks to a child. Jesus said ***“Hush.”*** In His divinity, He was at the creation and now He addressed that creation and commanded it to obey Him and it did. He muzzled it. And that exhibition of power frightened His disciples. They asked, ***“Who is this that even the wind and sea obey him?”*** You and I know and we can reply to them. This is Jesus, our Savior. He has all the power in heaven and on earth. And He can, and did, save us and continues to protect us. He is the one who has stilled the most threatening storm of our life – our death. He has subdued it and in our faith, we can live and die in His peace. That is the lesson of this story. Faith overcomes all fears.

All the fears we have in living and all the fears we have about dying can be overcome by our faith in Jesus. Jesus is with us. He is right in the boat of life with us and has been since our baptism. With Him we have peace and with Him, we can weather any storm. The surging waters of this life, the violent winds of this world, and the lightning and thunder of Satan cannot destroy us. We need not fear or try to trust our own abilities in our storms. We merely need to turn to Jesus and pray for His help. Our Savior, says peace

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Jesus Calms the Storm

June 20, 2021

Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church

Pastor David Labuhn

The Gospel reading from Mark 4 is familiar to most. Jesus is teaching in Galilee. The crowds pressed in on Him and He got in a boat. He was teaching about faith using parables. (Just before this He taught the parable of the mustard seed.) Jesus interpreted the parables for His disciples to teach them. He had been standing in the hot sun, in the boat teaching for hours. He was human and He was exhausted. He told His disciples that they needed to go to the other side of the lake where there were fewer people, most of who were Gentiles. They put out in their boat. Jesus fell asleep in exhaustion and a storm came. It started to swamp the boat and threaten their lives. The disciples were shocked and dismayed that Jesus was sleeping in the midst of the storm. They woke Him up and admonished Him saying, ***“Don’t you care about us?”*** Jesus addressed the storm like He would a little child and said, ***“Hush.”*** The storm abated and there was total calm and peace on the sea. Jesus then turned to His disciples and asked them why they were afraid. Where was their faith? And the disciples were afraid again because they realized they were in the presence of divine power in the form of their human teacher who had the power to control nature.

What is this story all about? It’s about storms. It’s about fear. It’s about faith. It’s about peace. And, of course, it’s about Jesus.

The first thing we see about Jesus is His humanity. He had been teaching all day. Ask any teacher who teaches a class or classes all day or a pastor who preaches all morning and they will tell you they were so fatigued that when they went home they collapsed on the couch and couldn't be roused. Now add the effect of the hot sun radiating on Jesus and being reflected off the water and you can imagine the exhaustion He was feeling. And thousands of people were pressing in on Him. Teaching from the boat off-shore was some relief, at least it kept the people from overwhelming Him and gave Him some space to teach, but that was not near enough to relieve His fatigue. He was done in. He needed relief physically and emotionally. He needed to get away.

Jesus decided that crossing over to the other side of the lake would be a refuge from the crowds. Fewer people lived there and it was a Gentile country, so He said to His disciples, ***“Let's go to the other side.”***

The boat Jesus was in was probably a fishing boat. We are not sure how big it was, but one from that era would have been dug up from the bottom of the lake. It was about 30 feet long (think about the length of a UPS truck) and it could hold between 15 and 20 people. According to v. 26, there were other followers of Jesus who were in boats too. Mark says that the disciples took Jesus just as He was with no preparations. Jesus meant what He said – they were going to the other side and then He fell asleep.

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