

"The Lord in the Storm"
Mark 4:35-41

Dear Friends in Christ,

Let us consider today's Gospel lesson from two different perspectives – from the perspective of sin and from the perspective of faith.

First, the perspective of sin. Sin, of course, rejects faith and embraces doubt. Exhaustion makes doubt that much easier. This is the end of a long day – especially for Jesus. And as the disciples set out in a boat across the sea Jesus finds a comfortable spot on a cushion in the aft of the boat. Suddenly, as they are crossing the lake, a storm strikes with fierce winds and beating waves, and the disciples can see the boat filling up with water. Doubt doesn't believe in what it cannot see; it goes only with what the eyes take in. The disciples see the storm, and they know they are no match; they're going down.

Furthermore, they see the Lord asleep in the stern of the boat, and their sinful nature whispers that He must not care enough to save them. They see indifference, not assistance, and conclude He has no concern for their welfare. They wake Him up and shout out, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"

It is simple enough for the Lord to remedy. He declares, "Peace, be still!" to the wind and brings a great calm. One would think that the disciples would delight, but doubt makes them even more afraid. Why? Because while they see His power, they doubt His mercy. They have seen the killing storm, and know they were no match. They have seen that Jesus is more powerful than the storm-He silences the gale by speaking a few words! If the disciples were no match for the storm, there is no way that they are a match for this Jesus. If He should use His power against them, they don't have a chance. They doubt His promise that He will use His power for their good. Why? Because they are well aware of their sin, that there is no reason for God to love them or help them with His power. They believe He is powerful, but they doubt that He will be powerful for their good. Why should He help out poor, miserable sinners?

This lurks behind all who doubt the mercy of God but believe in His might: They may not doubt His power, but cannot believe that He will freely use His power for their good. Therefore, they will attempt to make peace with Him by their works, believing that He will be good to them only if they are good for Him. This is a life of fear and doubt. Or, finding honestly that they cannot please God by their works because of their sin, they may despair and hate God because He is far too powerful for their liking. They may go so far as to assert that He doesn't exist; atheism is a denial born out of fear.

How terrible it would be if God were only powerful and not merciful. How terrible it would be if we lived only lives of sin and doubt in His mercy. But so that we might trust in His mercy, the Lord gives us the gift of faith.

So, consider the story one more time through the eyes of the faith God has given you. It is the end of a long day, and Jesus is very tired because He is very human. However, by faith you know that He is more than very human; He is also very God in human flesh. He sleeps in the boat and the storm whips up: It is indeed powerful and visibly terrifying and potentially killing; but faith trusts

in what it does not see. It trusts in the promises of God, even-and especially-in spite of what it sees.

To faith, that terrifying, deadly storm serves a good purpose: It teaches that man is no match for death and cannot save himself. It teaches the disciples to abandon all hope in their sailing skills, and to cry out to the only One who can save them.

Faith also trusts this: Although the sleeping Lord looks passive, He is still present; and although He seems uncaring in His sleep, He is present in that boat for the sake of the doubting disciples. They are His people, and He will use all things for their good. He silences the storm for them, but He does not want to leave them afraid of Him because of His power. His power is only half the story, for His power is made perfect in weakness. If His power is terrifying, how awesome is it that the One who can rebuke the wind will submit Himself to the cross and suffer death to redeem them? His power is astonishing; His willingness to sacrifice Himself for the world is even more so.

Sin and faith look at the same story and arrive at two different conclusions. What do the disciples, both sinner and saint-conclude? Panicked by the storm, it is easy to lapse into sin and weakness and doubt. Nevertheless, the Lord is present in the boat, and He is present for their good. The disciples must endure the storm for a while, and, for that while, the storm seems so much more powerful than the Savior. But the Savior is more powerful, as powerful as the Word He speaks. He speaks, and the storm is stilled. He speaks and rebukes them for their lack of faith, and His Law convicts them of their sin.

And when He speaks to them His powerful Word of Absolution, the same Word that drove away the storm also drives away their sin. They are His disciples. He is present with them. He is present for them, to rescue them from the storm-and from sin, death and the devil.

II. The Lord in the Storm for You

Dear friends in Christ, rejoice! From the Word of the Lord, you know the following to be true.

It is true that Jesus Christ, conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary, is both God and man. It is true that He was crucified for your sins, that He rose again on the third day, that He ascended into heaven. It is true that He is still omnipotent (all-powerful); by simply speaking His Word, He can still silence storms or melt the earth (Ps. 46:6). It is true that such power is terrifying to those who do not know that the Lord is merciful, who do not believe in the forgiveness won by Christ.

But it is also true that the Lord is merciful, and that His mercy for you is as astonishingly great as His power. Furthermore, it is true that the Lord is present with you by His means of grace. In Baptism, Absolution, and the Lord's Supper, He is just as present with you as He was with those disciples in the boat.

It is also true that you will encounter your share of storms in this life. They may be in the form of sickness and injury, broken relationships and disagreements with others, the suffering of loved ones, financial woes, etc. Storms will strike, and they will be menacing and overwhelming and powerful and terrifying in their appearance. Your sinful nature will shriek at such times, "Where is God now, and how is He helping you?!" Indeed, it may seem that the Lord is asleep or uncaring

about you. But you don't go by appearances. You trust in His promises; and He has already promised that He will work all things to your good.

He already has: He has already saved you from sin, death and the devil. Listen to a verse that comes just before the epistle lesson for today: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:19). The Son of God, able to rebuke a hurricane with a word, submitted Himself to death on the cross for your salvation. So merciful is your Father in heaven that He poured out His righteous judgment for your sin upon His righteous Son -- so that you might be reconciled to Him. You know this by faith, not by sight: If you think that the Lord Jesus looks helpless sleeping in a boat, He looks far more powerless when He hangs bloodied and dead on the cross. But the Lord saves you by His mercy, and Christ's death is the victory over sin for you. In Christ and His death, God reconciled you to Himself.

Furthermore, God continues to reconcile you, lest you be lost once again. The same verse declares that God has "committed to us the word of reconciliation." As we repeat God's Word to you, it remains God's powerful Word. Therefore, at your Baptism, the pastor spoke God's Word and said, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The devil has nothing to fear from a pastor's flesh and bone; but that Word of God silenced him and sent him scurrying that day. But the devil remains a sore loser, and returns to tempt you back into doubt and unbelief.

Therefore, the Lord continues to speak His Word to you, and He absolves you with the words, "I forgive you all of your sins." Again, by His Word, He is present with you in His Holy Supper, for the forgiveness of sins and to strengthen and preserve you in the one true faith unto life everlasting.

It is during the liturgy of the Lord's Supper that the pastor declares "The peace of the Lord be with you always." Between you and God there is peace, not a storm. There is peace between you and God for the sake of Jesus. Once you faced an eternal hurricane of hellish fire and outer darkness; but the Lord continually rebukes that storm and rescues you by speaking simple, powerful words: "I forgive you."

This is your comfort as you face all sorts of other storms in this life. The Lord Jesus has already shed His blood to make you His, and He will not fail you now.

You will face personal storms and tribulations; as we said before, it may be personal suffering or the suffering of those you love. At times, the Lord will allow you to be pitched about and thrown around until you despair and say, "There is nothing I can do to save myself from this." For the sinful nature, this is a humiliating admission of vulnerability. For you, however, this is an honest confession of your helplessness apart from God; it is indeed a blessing when we abandon all hope in ourselves and trust only in the Lord Jesus Christ. And even though the storm may throw you violently, the Lord is with you. He may appear to be asleep, but He is with you. "Lord, do you not care that we are perishing?"; like the disciples, you will be tempted to cry out the same. The answer, of course, is that He does care if you perish -- so much that He has perished on the cross to give you life. Oh my friends, when battered by personal storms, confess your desire to trust in yourself and your lack of trust in Him; and rejoice, for He has died to forgive such sins.

If there is a time when the Lord may seem especially asleep, it is when we must face death. This is truly an enemy greater than we, and there is nothing that we can do to keep from sinking into the grave. But the Lord is not asleep, nor is He weak: He has defeated His enemy death, but has not yet destroyed him; instead, the Lord uses His enemy as He pleases, to deliver His people out of this sinful, stormy world to the world of everlasting life. The silence that follows man's last breath may sound like the devil's triumph. But the devil's boast is empty, because the Lord who silenced the storm with a word also says, "I say to you, arise."

This is a world of storms, and you will encounter perhaps more than your fair share. Life isn't fair. But it is also a world in which you live as both saint and sinner; thus you will view each storm through eyes of doubt and eyes of faith, and so you will be tossed back and forth. At all times, however, you rejoice in this: Storms will pass, but the Lord remains the same in His power and mercy. He is not far away, but with you by His means of grace. And to deliver you from all such storms, He speaks to you those powerful words today: "You are forgiven for all of your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Amen