

**Lord of the Storm**

Proper 7

June 16, 2024

Mark 4:35-41

“And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, ‘Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?’”

Dear Friends in Christ,

**I. The Sleeping Savior in the Storm**

Who is this—who is this One in the back of the boat?

It’s still pretty early on in Jesus’ public ministry, but the disciples have seen a lot already. They’ve seen Him heal a lot of people. They’ve seen Him cast demons out of a lot of people. They know He has power—divine, supernatural power. They know He’s not your everyday, ordinary rabbi. That’s been obvious for a while. But this—this takes the working of wonders up to a whole new level. Don’t misunderstand: the healings so far have been miraculous, but it’s been the healing of individual people. In fact, Jesus has already appointed these twelve disciples and given them authority to cast out demons; so while it’s all special and stems from Him, He’s not the only one doing it. Not exactly, anyway, because the 12 are enlisted as His apostles.

But this stilling of the storm is entirely different. This isn’t power over some localized disease or individual demon: this is power over nature. This is power over creation. You remember those strong winds that we’ve been having this spring here in Edmonton? You try telling the wind to stop blowing some time and see if the wind obeys you. You try telling the sea to settle down. It’s not going to happen. No one has that kind of power over creation. Only the Creator does.

Only the Creator does. And that would mean that the rabbi who just told off the wind and waves is the Creator of heaven and earth. The man who just spoke to the storm is the One who questioned Job in our Old Testament lesson: “Who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb, when I made clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band, and prescribed limits for it and set bars and doors, and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed’? (Job 38:8-11)

There’s only One who gets to tell the waves what to do: God. God, who is all-powerful and thus commands creation. God, who is eternal, the One who speaks to Job, and then much later to the disciples. Who is this in the boat that even the wind and the sea obey Him, ask the disciples? From all they know of God in Scripture, it must be the Lord Himself.

And the Lord Himself, Creator and Commander of heaven and earth, has most recently been... sleeping in the back of the boat. The mystery of the Incarnation is on full display in this Gospel lesson. The eternal Lord is exhausted from the day, so much so that He sleeps on while the boat founders. The awakened Man opens His mouth and commands the wind and the waves. This union of God and

man is beyond our ability to comprehend or explain. But there He is: the exhausted Lord of all in human flesh tells the storm to knock it off, and the storm obeys.

Unbelief looks at this story and says that the Savior can't be such a contradiction.

Faith looks at this Savior and says, "Amen."

The disciples certainly don't get it yet. When Jesus is asleep during the storm, they think that He simply doesn't care if they drown. They are so frightened by the storm. But when they wake Him up and He rebukes the storm, now they're **terrified**: His holiness and power exposes to them their sinfulness and weakness. So whether Jesus is asleep and not helping, or awake and saving, the disciples are far from pleased with who He is and what He's up to. Jesus diagnoses the problem right away when He says to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?"

You see, it's fear, not faith, that dominates the disciples. When Jesus sleeps, they're afraid He won't save them. When He acts, they're afraid He'll destroy them. No matter what Jesus does, they're afraid—afraid for themselves, afraid of the storm, afraid of Jesus Himself.

That's not what faith does. Faith looks at Jesus and says, "That's my Savior, and He's at work to save me even when I don't see it. He might be asleep in the boat, but He's in the boat; and although He is a tired man, He is still all-powerful God at work for My good. That's my Savior rebuking the storm, demonstrating His power even over creation. When He turns that power toward me, it is powerful mercy and grace. It is all for my good. When He permits the storm, the storm is for my good. When He brings peace, the peace is for my good."

That's what faith says. Whether Jesus is asleep or exercising power, faith says, "Amen. Let it be so." But the disciples aren't there yet: even as the Gospel lesson shows Jesus' power and faithfulness, it also exposes their weakness and unbelief.

It will happen again, and it will be worse. The disciples will see Jesus in weakness again—not just asleep in a boat, but bled out on a cross. And they will be afraid. Three days later, He'll stand in their midst and speak peace to them; and confronted by the One who has conquered death, at first they'll be startled and troubled and afraid again. Again, that's not what faith does: faith looks at the dead man on the cross and says, "That's My Savior, the incarnate Son of God, and His death is my salvation." Faith looks at the risen Christ three days later and says, "He is risen indeed! Alleluia! He has conquered all His enemies, and by His grace I am not one of them. He has conquered all His enemies for me, that I might be His forever. Amen!"

Whether He's asleep in the boat or dead on the cross, or stilling the storm or rising from the dead, or coming in glory or coming in bread and wine, He is your Savior at work for your salvation. Always.

## 2. Salvation in Storms

This is how it always is for the people of God, who walk by faith and not by sight. Look at the epistle reading for this service, where Paul describes the life of an apostle.

Listen:

"As servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity,

knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything” (2 Corinthians 6:4-10).

The life of the apostle is a mixed bag at best, and one that tilts toward suffering. So how do Paul and the others endure? By faith—faith in the promises of God. That is why Paul would write, in the same passage, “now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). When the whips slashed their flesh or the stones flew at their heads, it would be easy for them to cry out, “Lord, don’t you care that we perish?” But even when the Lord permitted the suffering to continue for a while, He was still the Lord at work—for their salvation, and for the salvation of many.

The one who stills storms and conquers death is your Savior, always.

To make direct applications from this text to you, consider where we live. We’re hardly a place where natural disaster is always crouching at the door. We have the occasional windstorm and smoke from a wildfire, and there’s always the potential for a pretty strong Summer storm or Winter blizzard. But we don’t spend every spring wondering if the thunderstorm overhead will give birth to an F5 tornado, and we don’t spend every late summer watching to see if the tropical storm offshore will tighten up its eye into a hurricane. I daresay we’re safe from the threat of tsunamis. Things are pretty mild around here...thanks be to God.

When natural catastrophes do happen, here or elsewhere, God is usually indicted by the world. Either He’s accused of not caring, as the disciples accused Jesus in the boat; or perhaps He’s accused of being weak or asleep or negligent. Either that, or He’s accused of being unjustly angry, because people witness the great power of nature and they’re terrified—just like the disciples in the boat once again.

When natural disasters hit, unbelief has a field day in finding fault with God. Faith, on the other hand, trusts that the Lord is still at work to save. No matter what. Always.

What is the Lord up to in natural disasters? That’s part of His will that He doesn’t especially reveal to us. He permits such things to happen to remind us that this is a sinful, dying world. They preach a heart-stopping sermon of law in order to show you your need for salvation.

So when such a calamity hits, you are fine to call upon the Lord for deliverance from it. But that is not what you most need. What you most need is deliverance from sin and death and hell. If the Lord stills the storm or weakens the hurricane, thanks be to God; but that doesn’t get rid of your sin. But if He grants you His gifts of grace and faith, all for the sake of Jesus, then you have eternal life. And as impressive as it is that Jesus can calm a storm with just a word or two, it’s a far greater deliverance that He delivers you from sin and death and hell: with words, with water, with bread and wine. That is the salvation you most need, and He showers it upon you generously, continuously, powerfully.

It is the same with the personal, metaphorical storms. You'll have your share of tempests in the form of disease, injury, violence, setback, emotional pain, financial woe and more—these are the so-called storms of life. And when the Lord permits them to remain for a while, you'll be tempted to wonder if He cares that you are perishing. If He sweeps them away and sets your life right miraculously though, then thanks be to God. But remember: that still doesn't get your sins forgiven. Grace does—the grace that Christ has won for you by His death on the cross. And owing to our stubborn, sinful natures, it's often during the worst of those storms that we most appreciate His grace and mercy toward us.

Luther once noted in a sermon that it will often seem to Christians that, as you suffer, Jesus is asleep in the boat, and His apparent inaction does not please you. You're tempted to miss the great comforting truth that He is in the boat. Though asleep, He was present with His disciples for their good, and He would deliver them. Though unseen, He is present with you for your good, giving you grace and faith in His Word and His Sacraments. The storms will come, but the Lord is in this boat with you; and He who bought you by His own blood and made you His child by baptism will not let you be washed away. He is always your Savior. Always. And so you are forgiven for all of your sins. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.