

Facing The Wind



Rev. Peggy Casteel-Huston
June 20, 2021
Fourth Sunday after Pentecost/Father's Day

Mark 4:35-41

Jesus Stills a Storm

³⁵ On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." ³⁶ And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. ³⁷ A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. ³⁸ 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?" ³⁹ 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. ⁴⁰ He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" ⁴¹ And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

May God bless God's word to our hearing, our understanding and help us in our believing.

How many of you would have awakened Jesus? No worries if you are one that would have – so would I. When I am riding in our car and my husband is driving – even when he knows where he is going – I am likely to be tempted to remind him (or wake him up)

on how to get there. I totally would have awakened Jesus. For heaven's sake there is a storm! Perhaps my husband needs to begin saying to me, "Have you still no faith?"

This gospel story seems to be asking 3 questions.

- Who is really asleep in the boat?
- Who needs to wake up?
- If those closest to Jesus cannot understand, then who can?

While it appears that the disciples do not fully understand Jesus, there is one thing these disciples do understand – they understand the sea.

The Sea of Galilee offered fishermen a livelihood for many generations. Perhaps that is why at least seven of the disciples were fishermen. Much of a fisherman's day was spent mending or washing his nets. Andrew was doing just that when Jesus called him as a disciple (Luke 5:2). His brother, Peter, watched Jesus climb into their boat, then preach to the people. James and his brother, John, were mending nets with their father when Jesus called them. These two "sons of Zebedee" were not just fishermen, as business owners, they hired other men to work for them. They knew the sea.

Anyone who has spent time on the sea, who has ever been on a cruise for example gets some understanding of the sea. What is one of the first things the management of a cruise line do as you take off? They prepare you for an emergency on the sea. They want you to know where to find your life vest and your lifeboat. The cruise line people prepare you for the unknown that could happen on the sea. Cruise line people know the sea.

The Psalmists obviously knew about the sea as they used the sea for a metaphor for the danger that they see such as:

- Psalm 69, "Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck."
- Psalm 89, "You are mighty, O Lord and your faithfulness surrounds you. You rule over the surging sea; when its water mount up, you still them."
- Psalm 93, "The seas have lifted up, O Lord, the seas have lifted up their voice; the seas have lifted up their pounding waves. Mightier than the thunder of the great waters, mightier than the breakers of the sea – the Lord on high is mighty."

You and I also know about these types of sea. Likely, every one of us can describe a time in our lives or have a story when we experienced what Psalm 46 describes as a state where "the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam".

I have a bible that was given to me as a gift after serving for several years as a Sunday School Superintendent. My own personal sea was rolling quite a bit during those years. In that bible alongside of Psalm 46 I wrote a line about my own great waters that felt that they were up to my neck. That page in my bible reminds me of what it was like to be in a boat where the storm was raging, and it felt like Jesus was sleeping. I wanted to yell at God. Truth be told there were times when I did.

This church knows about the sea. You have said goodbye to two pastors and staff members whom you love as this transition to a new called and installed pastor takes place. The church can be a place where people feel adrift to say nothing about continuing to

be church during a pandemic. Perhaps you can relate to the psalmist who refers to his own personal situation as feeling like the pounding waves of the sea.

The reformer Martin Luther felt the pounding of the waves. After his appearance at the Diet of Worms in 1521 where he is deemed a heretic that should be killed, he is rescued by Frederick III and taken to Wartburg Castle for his protection. Martin Luther knew the sea for all sorts of reasons and pens these words to his song "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" based on Psalm 46:

"And though this world, with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed
His truth to triumph through us:
The Prince of Darkness grim,
We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
For lo! his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him."

As we return to those 3 questions that this story of Mark's seems to be asking, Mark wants us to understand that it wasn't Jesus who was asleep but rather the disciples. Mark is asking each one of us if we are asleep to the power and majesty of God who reigns every single moment of every day? Are we asleep to the truths of the gospel that Jesus is still trying to awaken us to?

Mark wants us to be awakened from our apathy or half-hearted beliefs to trust that God is there walking alongside of us and as near to us as Jesus was in that boat with those disciples – so near that we can touch him and feel his presence. Alfred Lord Tennyson put it this way in his poem, The Higher Pantheism:

“Speak to him, thou, for He heareth
And spirit with spirit can meet.
Closer is He than breathing.
And nearer than hands and feet”.

Finally, and most importantly, we may have asked the 3rd question that Mark himself seems to be asking, which is, if those closest to Jesus cannot understand, then who can? Mark reminds us that our journey with Jesus depends not on our understanding or knowing everything about God and God’s ways but rather to being open to face new and uncertain seas that this journey of following Jesus will inevitably take us on. Following Jesus, being in relationship with him, climbing in the boat of faith may take us beyond those places of calm that we really love.

For the people of Mark’s Day, finding out that following Jesus meant being inclusive of Gentiles at a time when ethnic passions were really high – or discovering that God intended that Gentiles would become full participants in God’s expansive coming reign had to feel to those early disciples like waters rising up to their necks.

While our issue isn’t the inclusion of Gentiles (thank goodness) we may question why some believe that they in an exclusive relationship with God yet do not see the other as their neighbor? We may wonder why those who believe that they are in an exclusive relationship with God do not understand God in the same way as we do or see and understand neighbor as we do? This makes the gospel of Mark relevant in our time. We live in a time where ethnic passions remain high. We live in a time where we hear people say the words that God calls us to love our neighbor and yet we do not see actions that should follow perhaps because doing so would remove them from the calm they prefer. Perhaps doing so feels scary as scary as any storm for who knows where this would lead. Mark knew and was trying to tell all of Jesus’ followers that climbing into the boat with Jesus means crossing over and carrying others with us regardless of how uncomfortable or frightening it feels.

Grasping the message of Jesus and living into his message will rock our boats. At times it may lead us to places and situations that are as uncertain as the sea. Hopefully as each one of us says yes to getting into the boat with Jesus, we are reminded that this is what it means to be a disciple and follower of Jesus;

to know about a life in Christ in which the sea no longer holds the fear, anxiety, or trouble for us. To be the ones that realize that at times we have been the ones who were asleep.

Let us pray: Holy God, today we are reminded that you want to awaken each one of us to the reality of what you were calling all people to – a reality of inclusion, a reality that you are for all of us and that every person is to be seen as a precious child of God. For many of us this feels scary for how can I love someone who feels so different from me? How can I see someone as your child when they do not speak the same language or in the same ways that I do? Forgive us when we have not been awake to your calling. Forgive us for loving the calm so much that we fear what it truly would mean if we were to climb in that boat with you.

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen