JESUS CALMS THE STORM

Mark 4:35–41

Key Verse: 4:39

“He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, ‘Quiet! Be still!’ Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.”

So far in Mark’s Gospel we’ve seen Jesus’ preaching, teaching and healing. But in today’s brief passage Jesus does something so unusual, it leaves his disciples in awe. It may seem like an old story with absolutely no relevance today. But this passage has a great message for each of us. May God open our hearts and speak to us through his word today.

Jesus’ ministry in Galilee has been very busy. There were so many people crowding around him that he and his disciples did not even have a chance to eat (3:20). Now, he’s been teaching all day from a boat, while people were along the shore at the water’s edge (4:1). Look at verses 35,36. We’re not exactly sure why he wants to go to the other side of the lake. But clearly, one reason is to get away from the always demanding crowd. To do that, they take Jesus away, “just as he was,” in this same boat he’d been teaching from all day long. The “other side” he’s referring to is the region of the Gerasenes (5:1), on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. As we look at this episode as a whole, we sense that this is not just a utilitarian matter of traveling by boat to get somewhere. By asking to take him to the other side of the lake, he’s taking the opportunity to focus on his disciples. In chapter 3 he had appointed the Twelve, “that they might be with him” (3:14). These twelve men had been living closely with him. They’d been watching all he was doing and saying. This time, as they are “with him” alone out on the sea, he’s going to show them something more.

Look at verse 37. Because of it’s geography, sudden storms are common on the Sea of Galilee. Surely this is not what the disciples had expected. They’d been enjoying the cool night air and sailing across calm waters, finally having a break from the demanding people and getting to be alone with Jesus. But out of nowhere came this furious squall. A squall is a sudden, violent gust of wind that brings heavy rain and a local storm. The squall is described here as “furious.” The disciples surely were getting soaking wet. After such a long day, they were tired. But instead of being able to rest, they had to struggle just to keep the boat afloat, probably frantically bailing out water. And despite all their efforts, the boat was still being “swamped.” It was becoming filled with water. Basically, they were exhausted and sinking into a stormy sea. Lovely evening they were having.

And during all this struggle, what was Jesus doing? Look at verse 38a. The “stern” is the back of the boat, where it’s steered. While everybody else was struggling so hard to stay alive, Jesus was sleeping in the back of the boat with his head on a cushion. Was he faking? How could he be sleeping at a time like this? But he really *was sleeping*! What does this tell us? It shows, first of all, how tired he was. Preaching and teaching people all day long may not seem so hard, but for Jesus it was totally exhausting because he poured his whole self into it. His sleeping during a storm shows that he was fully human. It also shows what great peace of soul Jesus had. The disciples were freaking out. But Jesus could have such peace in the midst of the storm because, deep within, he trusted in his Father God. Actually, having inner peace is what most people are seeking. But instead, life gives us anxieties, worries and fears. Many people are restless for no obvious reason. But when we learn to trust in him, God gives us the same deep inner peace Jesus had, even during a storm.

But while struggling for survival the disciples are really frustrated. Look at verse 38b. They can’t believe Jesus could be sleeping at a time like this. They wake him up so that he’ll help them. Maybe they expect him to join them in bailing water out of the boat. In their question, they wonder if he even cares. This is symbolic of what happens in our lives. So often it seems like we’re struggling all alone. Storms in our lives can come in many forms. It can be the storm of suddenly finding out we’re failing a class, the storm of a serious health problem, financial or relationship problem. It can be the storm of seeing someone we love go astray, get into big trouble, or even worse. When someone we loved dies unexpectedly, we can feel like we’ve suddenly fallen into a raging storm. Sometimes, persecution can break out against us like a storm. Sometimes, our sinful desires can rage like a storm within us. When we’re in the midst of a raging storm, we quickly realize that our abilities or willpower just can’t cut it. And like the disciples, we start wondering if God really cares about us. A part of us wants to judge the disciples for being so desperate and for talking to Jesus like this. But anyway, it was good for them to bring this crisis to Jesus honestly.

Does Jesus care? Especially when it seems he’s left us to struggle all alone? Yes, he cares. But he uses even storms in our lives for a good purpose (Ro8:28). Hebrews 12:7a says, “Endure hardship as discipline. God is treating you as his children.” And verse 11 says, “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.” Jesus was letting his disciples experience this overwhelming storm as part of their discipleship training.

When they wake him, what does Jesus do? Let’s read verse 39. What magnificent authority! He actually rebukes the winds and the waves, and they’re completely still. We’ve already seen the power of Jesus’ words several times. With his command, evil spirits came out of a man (1:25). With his command, a man’s leprosy was immediately cured (1:41,42). With his command, a man’s paralysis was healed (2:11). With his command, a man’s shriveled hand was completely restored (3:5). But this time, with his command even a raging storm is suddenly silenced. Jesus has authority not only over the body and soul, but over all creation. It reminds us of God, who created the heavens and the earth at his command (Heb11:3; 2Pe3:5). At his rebuke, the sea is stilled (Ps89:9; 104:7). He still sustains all things by his powerful word (Heb1:3). The word of Jesus can still calm any storm. His word has power to drive out all our fear, anxiety and worries. His word has power to bring peace to our souls. How does it happen? Listening to his word plants faith in our hearts (Ro10:17). His word may not change the storm raging around us, but it has power to change *us*, from within. When we’re experiencing a storm in life, we really need to hear the word of Jesus.

In this storm Jesus acts first and talks later. And when he does talk, what does he say? Read verse 40. Why should the disciples not be afraid? Well, Jesus has been with them for quite a while. And he’s still with them right now. Because he’s with them, he expects them to have faith, faith in God, even in the midst of a storm. Without faith, all our efforts are in vain. Without faith, we can’t really serve God. Growing in faith is essential in growing as a real follower of Jesus. This faith gradually drives out the fears that lie buried within us. The disciples didn’t seem fearful, not until the storm hit. Likewise, we may not think we’re fearful. But when a storm suddenly comes upon us, our fears come out.

Even though we’re fearful, Jesus is still with us. Jesus is the same yesterday and today and forever (Heb13:8). He’s actually at the right hand of God and always lives to intercede for us (Ro8:34; Heb7:25). He promised, “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Mt28:20b). Think about it. If Jesus is with us, what’s there to be afraid of? Being in a storm doesn’t mean he’s left us. He’s still right there with us. And the Bible says he’s able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine (Eph3:20). We need to be aware that Jesus is with us. We can know this only by faith. And when we know by faith that he’s with us, even the storms of life help us grow in faith. When we’re in the midst of a storm, by faith we can cry out to him to help us, instead of trying to do everything on our own, and we know that he hears us, whatever we ask (1Jn5:15). Take a moment to think about something in your life right now that’s actually making you scared. Each of us really need to hear Jesus’ words of rebuke personally: “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

How do the disciples respond? Look at verse 41. Their eyes are starting to open. They’re no longer frightened by the storm, but in awe of the one who could completely calm it, just by his command. The point of their training this time was to know better who Jesus is. Likewise, as we know better who Jesus is, we grow in real faith. We need to spend less time thinking about our storms and more time thinking about who Jesus really is and what he can really do.

Let’s read verse 39 again. May God help us realize who Jesus is. May he help us listen to his word which has power to calm any storm. And may he help us realize that Jesus is actually with us now. In this way, may God help us grow in faith, even in the midst of life’s storms.