

“In the Midst of the Storm”

Introduction: From early days, Christian artists and poets have depicted the church as a kind of ship, a community made up of those who are on it. Jesus is often seen teaching near or from a boat. A number of disciples were fishermen, who worked from boats. And boats sometimes run into storms, which is where our Gospel reading takes us today. I’m going to make a few observations to help flesh out the background of this text and then lead us in a little exercise to help us see where Jesus might be meeting each of us, in whatever storms may be before us. this morning.

1. The Storm. This particular storm, recorded by Mark, is a big one. The Sea of Galilee often has them. Even today parking lots on the western shore of the sea have high wind warning signs, as the waters can become very rough and waves from a storm can quickly swamp a car that is parked on what looked like a safe beach. In this case, while they didn’t yet have cars, the seasoned fishermen find themselves in the midst of such a storm, and are afraid for their lives.

Importantly, the disciples have done nothing to cause this storm to happen. It simply happened “when evening came.” This is a reminder that the storms of life come on the just and unjust alike. Bad things can happen to good disciples. Remember the parable of the wise and foolish builders? One built on rock, the other on sand, but on both builders the rains came, the streams rose and the winds blew and beat against their houses (Ma. 7:24-27). There is no place one can build, the parable reveals, that is storm free.

Storms come in all shapes and sizes, from the onset of a pandemic, to the illness or death of a loved one, to the loss of a job, to the breakdown of a relationship, to a fire in our apartment building, the list is endless! Storms, it is important to recognize, can even come when you’re doing exactly what Jesus has instructed, which was the case here: “Let us go over to the other side.” And that’s what they were doing. So, when the storms of life come, we can be the cause, someone or something else can be the cause, and maybe we just don’t, and won’t, ever know for sure. As one writer quipped, one moment all can be well, and then in an instant all can be hell.

2. The Sea. Not only was the storm life-threatening, but the sea, in ancient days, symbolized the dark power of evil. The uncontrollable forces of chaos, it seemed, were on the loose. Worse, Jesus didn’t seem to care. He had been teaching all day long. It started on the beach but he then had to move to a boat as the crowds began to swell, pushing him out into deeper water. When he instructed them to head over to the other side, they took him along, “just as he was.” How was that? Probably very tired!

So, as the boat made it’s way out of the cove, Jesus made his way to the stern where his head found a cushion and he promptly fell asleep. I can imagine this, just like my daughters used to fall asleep when they were little to the rocking of our sailboat. But stay asleep when the wind and waters are raging – who can do that? Apparently, Jesus can and so the disciples went to wake him up, thinking that he didn’t care about them, or their dire situation: “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” they asked.

3. Jesus. Apparently, he did. He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be Still!” And all was completely calm. No wild incantations, no magic words. Jesus simply spoke and in doing so, revealed that he is God’s agent in dealing with the forces of chaos, that he is the ruler over the surging sea, as our psalm of approach describes him (89:9). It’s worth noting here that throughout the biblical record, when God’s people find themselves in a tight spot, in the midst of a storm of some kind, that they appeal to the Lord who has created all things.

- “I lift my eyes to the mountains,” the psalmist prays, “where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the maker of heaven and earth” (Ps. 121).

- Or as the prophet Isaiah secures his hope: “The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak” (Isa. 40:28f).

“For in him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible,” as Paul puts it to the congregation in Colossae (Co. 1:16), We’re invited to put our trust – to bring our lives, our fears, our anxiety – to this God, the One who has revealed himself in Jesus, the One who has created and thus has control over all things, because he promises to bring a peace that transcends all understanding (Phil. 4:7).

And as Jesus “gets up” here to demonstrate his mastery over creation and care for those whom he has created, we likely get an anticipation of the resurrection and new creation to come as we read that literally “he was raised.” It is the same word the angel spoke to the women who had come to his tomb. “He is not here, he was raised.” This Jesus who had been slumped on a pillow, sleeping like a dead man, and then got up, would soon find himself slumped on a cross, crucified, dead, and buried, and then, three days later, risen from his tomb and his ministry of bringing peace – making all still – beginning.

4. Disciples. And so he asks his followers, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” I don’t think they had none; I think they, like we, were having to learn how to apply what developing faith they had to the various situations that come at us in life so that we can say, along with the psalmist, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me” (Ps. 23). God never promises to eliminate the storms we face in life, but he does promise to be with us in them. Growing such a faith is a journey. It is a journey in which our fears can be stilled as we come to learn in greater measure that we have been rescued by Jesus from ultimate destruction and death, and so can walk, knowing he is with us and will never leave us or forsake us.

Read the passage a couple more times:

- What word or phrase is drawing your attention?
- Why? How might it be connecting with your life right now?
- Is there an invitation from God for you here?