



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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July 9, 2006
5th Sunday after Pentecost
Mark 4:35-41
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Job 38:1-11
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 46
Second Lesson: 2 Corinthians 5:14-21
Gospel: Mark 4:35-41

Jesus Is Our Storm-Stiller

Maybe you enjoyed history—maybe you didn't—when you studied it in school, but there is one story from history I remember studying that stuck with me a long time. It's probably because it is so different than what you would expect. It was about a king of Persia about 480 B.C., even before your time. He was about to invade Greece. His father had tried and failed. King Xerxes was going to cross through a boat bridge from Asia Minor to get over to Greece so that he could attack and bring his overwhelming army in and defeat the enemy. But as he was trying to build this boat bridge, storms kept coming up and destroying it. So he had enough. He ordered his men to take some chains and give 300 lashes to the water so that it would stop destroying his bridge so he could invade Greece and get it over with. How would you like to be one of the guys taking a chain and hitting water with it? Do you think you would feel a little bit silly?

The sea calmed, he did build his bridge, but he ended up losing over half of his ships in two different storms and he ended up losing a naval battle that caused him to go back to Asia Minor with his tail between his legs and retreat, never to conquer Greece. That whipping with the chains didn't stop the storms long enough so that he could achieve the victory that he wanted.

Trying to still storms by chains seems rather foolish to us sitting here this morning and yet the nature of storms and the danger they brought led many of the ancients to do a lot of different things or come up with different storm gods that they would turn to when they felt threatened by these storms. One of the gods in the Bible that you are very familiar with, Baal was a storm god that was supposed to stop the storms; at least that is how the Canaanites viewed him at times and also the Phoenicians. But this morning we see something in this reading from the Gospel of Mark. We have something in our lives that chains cannot do, that Baal cannot do, that other gods cannot do. We see our God, as he became man and as he lived on this world, stilling the storm. That is not just something that is there for those disciples that were in that boat on that day at that time. It is a blessing for us to consider also because what he teaches from that stilling of the storm applies to us today. We see Jesus today as our storm-stiller. He stills the storms that come to us in our lives. But more importantly, as he taught the disciples that day, he wants to teach us that those storms in our lives often bring up storms in our faith. Most importantly of all, Jesus is the one who stills the storms that come into our life of faith. Just like Job or like others before us, at times we wonder, "God, why are you letting the things happen that you are letting happen?" This Gospel today has much for us in regard to those kinds of questions.

Jesus stilling the storm is recorded in the three Gospels that record the same things—Matthew, Mark and Luke. It is in Matthew 8. It is in Luke 8. And here in Mark, it is in Chapter 4. Mark gives us the information that it was on the same day as some of the teaching and the things that he had been doing in the verses leading up to where we started our reading today. Evidently he had been teaching in the boat because they took him just as he was, in the boat. He was teaching to people gathered on the seashore. The seashore around the Sea of Galilee sloped up. It was sort of a natural amphitheater. The voice would carry over the water. It sounds like it was not only the people on the shore that were listening to him, because it says that when they decided to go to the other side, there were other boats there also. So it wasn't just a traffic jam on land. It was a traffic jam on sea it sounds like. All these other boats got out there so they could get closer to hear the great teacher, the One they had heard about.

Evidently at the end of the day Jesus said, "As true man, I am tired. Let's go over to the other side." So they started going and evidently he was so tired that he fell asleep in the stern there on the cushion it says. How tired do you have to be to sleep through a storm that has these experienced fishermen shaking in their sandals so to speak? Remember these guys weren't all land lovers. These were guys that had spent time on the Sea of Galilee. They were used to the sudden storms that would come up. The Sea was surrounded by high cliffs and the storms would all of a sudden come rolling across and drop down in there because they couldn't see them coming—even yet today. How tired do you have to be to be sound asleep as the boat is being swamped?

Jesus is true God yet he became one of us, also true man, so that he could take all of our infirmities and so that he could carry our sins to the cross as one of us. We see evidence of that here in our reading. But here are these experienced fishermen who believed "this is it. We are going to drown. Someone wake up Jesus. Maybe he will do something about it." You get the idea from the question that they asked, "*don't you care if we drown?*" (Mark 4:38) that they are almost starting to throw somewhat of an accusation against him of being unloving or uncaring because "Jesus, you are taking care of yourself by sleeping instead of saving us from drowning."

You may wonder how they could ask such a question, but then again, that is not an uncommon question in our lives, is it? When you and I face difficulty, when you and I face challenges, when you and I face things that make us wilt and make our knees shake and make our stomachs turn and churn, aren't there going to be times that you and I are going to say, "Jesus, don't you care? Why are you letting this come? If you love me, you would do this or wouldn't do that."

Storms that come in our lives can produce the same kind of reactions. In this case, Jesus stood up and just said, *Quiet! Be still!*" (Mark 4:39). That is what is recorded for us. It wasn't as though the storm subsided or the front passed over. It says it became *completely calm* (Mark 4:39). This isn't natural. This is a supernatural event. This is the power of God in action to deliver them from this difficulty.

Jesus stilled the storm that was in their lives at that point at that time. What has he promised to do for us? The one thing that we do know for certain is that he has not promised to still every storm that comes into our lives. He says through much difficulty

we will go through this life until he takes us to our heavenly home. He is quite clear in Scripture. That Psalm we sang this morning, doesn't that just picture what we go through at times? Though the mountains fall into the sea and the sea churns with its quaking, isn't that what we feel like at times as we face the storms of our lives, the difficulties, the challenges that come because we live in a world that is not perfect, that is affected by sin and we are sinners and we are going to face mountains falling into the sea. God tells us it is going to happen.

How is he going to help us deal with it? He tells us sometimes he will take it away from us. He will grant our healing, our wishes, our prayers, when it is in our best eternal interest. But he also tells us at times that those things are going to come so that they may refine our faith and so they lead us to look, not to ourselves, not to the things of this world, but to teach us at times through great pain, great anxiety, and great worry, that we aren't all powerful. We can't handle everything on our own. We need to lean on his everlasting arms. The eternal God who is beneath us with his everlasting arms—we need to lean on him because he can handle things that we cannot. He can help us through things that we could not get through on our own.

Think about it—the disciples had Jesus' promise that they would not die until they became fishers of men, but in the middle of that worry and anxiety about that storm, they forgot it, didn't they? Isn't that what happens to us at times? We know God's promises. *"I am with you always, to the very end of the age"* (Matthew 28:20). "I will not let anything happen that will separate you from my love as long as you keep looking to me" (Romans 8:38-40). And he tells us that all things will work out for the good of those who love God, for their eternal good (Romans 8:38). He tells us even if it results in death, you will be brought to your heavenly home because you are in Christ. You are that new creation that Paul spoke of in 2 Corinthians 5. Hell tells us all of that, but when we are in the middle of difficulty, the storms in our lives at times become so large in our field of vision that it keeps us from seeing those promises. That is why when we are facing these storms, the best thing that you and I can do is to focus on what we know to be true. What we know to be true is God's love for us in Christ Jesus; God's promises to us in Christ Jesus. That is why Word and Sacrament, going back to our Baptism where we were given the righteousness of God as 2 Corinthians said, coming to his Supper and receiving his very body and blood to assure us that he loved us that much that he was willing to die for us and take away our sins—that is what is so important because it keeps us focused on where our help and our strength is. It is in the name of the Lord.

The devil wants us to look in every other direction and all too often the devil succeeds in having us look at other things besides Christ. The devil has us doubt God's love for us in Christ or God's purposes for us. But my friends, the greatest thing that you and I can do is encourage one another to keep focused on Jesus and the love he has for us. He will still the storms in our lives. It might not always be the way we want it to be stilled, but he will do it in the way that is best for you and me. That is his promise for us, and as we learned last week, we walk by faith, not by sight. That is the nature of faith—to believe what you can't see even when things look so desperate.

These storms in our lives, God allows them at times for that very purpose of drawing us closer to him so that even if we are to lose everything in this world, we still have eternity with God. We have his promise to be at our side and his promise to be with us. He uses that storm in the disciples' lives to really get them to focus on the right question. You notice when he says, "*Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?*" (Mark 4:40) he is not rebuking them for the question. Here these guys came and implied that "you don't love us Jesus." He didn't rebuke them for that. He didn't admonish them for that. Instead he speaks to what was in their hearts right then and there—*are you*—present tense—"*Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?*" He was talking about the storms of faith that was in their lives right then and there. They didn't know what to think. They had their own ideas about a Messiah. They had the hope that Jesus was the Messiah, but Jesus was using this opportunity to teach them that being a Messiah was not about getting rid of Romans. Being a Messiah is not about things of this world. Being a Messiah is things of eternity, of life with God, an eternity with God, with the One who takes away our sins through the shedding of blood.

Can I understand why these guys are terrified? Sure I can understand it. If someone would stand up when my children are fighting and say, "Quiet. Be still" and they would listen, I would be in awe and be terrified at what kind of amazing power this person must have let alone the storms that are raging over a sea. I would wonder what was going on and there would be a part of me that would be afraid.

But God deals with us in love. He tells us to focus on him and find in him the answer and to find in him even the forgiveness for those times that we doubt his love, forgiveness for those times that we accuse God like Job did, to find forgiveness for all of the things that our minds can't grasp that we try to explain and fall far short of who God is and how he loves us. Then as he leads us by the hand to this forgiveness that comes in Word and Sacrament, he strengthens our faith. He says, "Just trust me. I am your refuge. I am your strength. Know that eternity is yours and know that I will never leave you alone for an instant until you are in my presence in heaven." Then God enables us to do more than we think we ever could. God enables us through the power of the Holy Spirit to face things that we think we could never face, like Abraham offering Isaac. When Abraham was focused on the promise that the Savior would come through Isaac, he was willing to sacrifice him because he believed God would raise him from the dead and keep his promises. Does human reason understand that? No. But does faith believe what God says? Yes. When faith is forefront in our vision, who God is and what he has done for us, then as we face the storms of our faith, God stills them and makes our faith stronger.

No chain can do that. Nothing else in all creation can do that, but you and I have in our hands what does it—God's Word, God's Sacraments, and as we encourage one another with the Word and the Sacraments, Jesus is our storm-stiller.