

A. The Stormy Sea

The day had begun **“beside the sea”** of Galilee. Mark writes that **“a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. And he was teaching them many things in parables...”** (Mark 4:1-2). Each parable was an illustration of **“the Kingdom of God,”** each in its own way.

After He dismissed the crowds, His disciples asked Him to explain the meaning of the parables to them. And He did.

“On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side. And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat.” Parables are like lessons in a classroom about how things work. But now it was time for a field trip so that His disciples might actually see – not only how the Kingdom of God works – but that it does – and that, He is the King of the Kingdom of God.

And so, back they go to that boat that He had been teaching the crowds from. He said, “Let’s go to the other side.” And they said, “Hop in, we’ll row.” Being the experienced sailors that they were, it’s always nice when the Lord calls you to do something you know how to do and that you’re good at. And as every experienced sailor knows - evenings are the calmest time to sail.

“And a great windstorm arose and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling.” Maybe it wasn’t the storm of the century, but when the waves start breaking into YOUR boat, it might as well be. When the waves are breaking into YOUR boat, it really doesn’t matter that there have been worse storms on record. I never have understood why people think it’s comforting when they tell someone who is faced with a crisis, “well, it could be worse.” I think that’s our way of saying, “that’s a real shame buddy, but I have no intention of getting in YOUR boat and sinking with you.”

Maybe you’ve never been on a sinking ship – or maybe you have. Or maybe we all are for which of us is not perishing?

B. Awakening God.

“But He was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, “teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”

Whenever the ancient pagans faced a crisis, they always figured it was because the gods were sleeping. The gods are in control of the natural elements but when they took a nap, nature got out of control. Kind of like a two year old when you’re not watching. Nothing good happens.

So an awful lot of pagan religion was all about – how do you wake a sleeping god? You do a rain dance to wake the rain god and a war dance to wake the war god, engage a prostitute to wake the god of fertility. The louder and more outlandish the ritual, the more chance of waking the gods.

We have our own ways of trying to get a sleeping God to respond. My humble, quite prayers are not nearly as effective as a prayer chain – the larger the better.

We try to rouse a sleeping God to action by provoking His pride. We question His ability to be the God we’ve created Him to be. “Don’t you care that I’m unhappy?” “Don’t you care that I’m unsuccessful?” Don’t you care that I’m being treated unfairly? Don’t you care that I’m in pain.” This is all meant to rouse a sleeping God to rise up and defend His honor and prove Himself to us that He might justify Himself before us.

And if that doesn’t get the action we’re looking for, we can take our cue from the disciples and go right for the bottom line. Right to where He Himself promises to come through. **“Don’t you care that we’re perishing.”**

And here’s the thing. Here’s the really strange thing - this God loves to be provoked by us in this way. **“Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”** (Psalm 50:15).

C. Jesus Calms The Sea

We know what happens next. Jesus sits up, rubs his eyes, surveys the situation and says, **“Peace, be still.”** Like you’d tell a dog to quit barking and go lie down. **“And the wind ceased and there was a great calm.”**

Aaaah. So the Psalmist was speaking to Jesus when he prayed, **“You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them.”** (Ps.89:9). He was talking about Jesus when he said, **“He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed.”** (Ps.107:29).

D. Their Faith Questioned

“He said to them, ‘Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?’”

Jesus rebukes the wind and the waves for MISBEHAVING. And then He rebukes His disciples for MISBELIEVING and therefore MISTRUSTING.

And before we go wagging our finger at them and saying, “oh, how could you?” Let us be reminded of how often, when the waves were breaking into OUR boat did we accuse the Lord of sleeping and not caring if we perish?

“Don’t you care if we perish?” Now listen to His answer. **“For God so loved the world that He sent His only Son, that whoever believes in Him might not perish...”** (John 3:16).

“Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?”

E. The Disciples Terrified

And now the sea is calm but an even more fearful storm breaks over the hearts and minds of the disciples.

It was the psychiatrist, Sigmund Freud who said that MAN INVENTED GOD to help explain the unexplainable. When things move beyond our control, Freud said, we need some way to account for the unaccountable in order to find some reason behind it. The unexplainable and the unaccountable are too scary for us to deal with and so we invent God who is IN CONTROL for the sake of our comfort and sense of security.

So let's test Freud's theory. These experienced sailors are up against a raging sea that is beyond their control **AND THEY ARE PERISHING**. And Jesus says, "**Peace, be still**" and **IMMEDIATELY**, the seas obey and there is a great calm.

And the disciples rightly conclude that they are in the boat with God. How do they react? We read, "**And they were filled with GREAT FEAR!**" They're **MORE AFRAID** now than they were during the storm. The terror of the raging sea was nothing compared to the terror they now felt. "**And they said to one another, who then is this that even wind and sea obey him?**"

Lord of the universe, maker of heaven and earth was in **THEIR** boat. And they realized it. And we might think that this would be just what these men were hoping for. Their troubles were over, their fears were gone. God was with them and everything would be okay. Break out the champagne. Let's party. But instead, they're filled with **GREAT FEAR**.

What's going on here? There is no need to psychoanalyze these men. We may simply listen to the diagnosis that Jesus pronounces. "**Have you still no faith?**" "Do you **STILL** wonder if I care about you?" "Do you **STILL** think that I would let you perish?"

And He shows them their "**no faith**" with a demonstration of His power to take care of them and deliver them and save them **FROM PERISHING**. That is, He works on their "**NO FAITH**" that they would have "**NO DOUBT.**" He does just what they ask Him to do. And for some reason, this terrifies the disciples. Why?

Because they never really believed He really could. Because they never really believed He really would. Oh, they believed that everything He said was good. And they believed that everything He taught was right. They may have even enjoyed His sermons and liked His clever illustrations.

But they never really believed that He intended to get into **THEIR BOAT** and **ACTUALLY BE THEIR GOD**. And when He did, it terrified them because they realized that this Jesus is who He says He is. That in Him, all the deity of the Godhead dwells bodily and that the deity incarnate had gotten right into **THEIR** boat to do His deity to **THEM**.

Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and on earth and was using that authority to save them. And He was willing to let them sail right into a storm to prove it – that their **“no faith”** might become a **“great faith,”** a **“living faith.”**

It is much safer and less threatening to keep God at a distance. We can go through all the motions – come to church, read our bible, memorize our favorite verses, yet never believe He intends to actually do His deity to US.

It's a nice idea that that Jesus forgives sin. There's nothing threatening in that. But it's at least a bit scary when Jesus speaks to us saying, “I forgive YOU all YOUR sins.” “You mean He knows me that well?”

It's not very threatening to hear it said that Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the world. But it shouldn't be too surprising if we were to fall to our knees in fear when we hear Him say, **“take and eat – this is my body given for YOU. Take and drink - this is my blood shed for YOU.”** But that is just what He has done.

Through Holy Baptism, God has gotten into YOUR boat, into YOUR life, into very YOUR body - because He intends to save you FROM PERISHING. As the waves of baptism washed over your head, you drown in that sea. And no, God was not sleeping. He was active and at work THROUGH THE WATER – drowning you into the death of Christ and raising you up from the dead even as Christ was raised that you too may walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:4).

This does not mean that no storms will come upon us. They most certainly will. And at times, it will seem to us as if Christ our Lord is asleep doesn't care if we perish. Were He to ward off every storm before it breaks over us, we would never know how trustworthy and true He is. In fact, we would probably think that our calm and peaceful life was due to our excellent living.

But to walk in “newness of life” is to live by faith. Trusting with heart and mind that the Lord of all has gotten into MY boat; into MY life; into MY flesh – and that all the storms and trouble that this world can bring into MY life – are all subject to His authority - and obedient to His command - and that by these storms - He turns our “no faith” into a “living faith.”

It is in the storm that we learn that He is King of the Kingdom of God and the Lord over all who speaks to the raging sea saying, **“Thus far you shall come and no further. Here your proud waves shall halt.”** And to our raging fears saying, **“Peace. Be still.”**