

## **“Calming the Storm”**

We can have some fairly severe thunderstorms in our area. Even with modern technology to warn us, they can develop quickly. Beginning in the spring time, we can also experience tornadoes as well. On Monday morning around 3:20 am on April 13, 2020, an EF-3 tornado tore through Oconee County in South Carolina. The tornado had estimated winds of 160 miles per hour. One person was killed and two missing after the storm. There was extensive property damage. Homes were damaged or destroyed. A manufacturing plant, Borg-Warner, suffered massive damage. A large United Methodist Church in Seneca, St. Mark, had serious damage to its property. This carnage took place at a time when the community and the church had recently begun to deal with safety protocols and changes due to the onset of COVID-19.

In our scripture passage today from Mark 4:35-41, Jesus and the disciples are in a boat on the Sea of Galilee when a storm comes up. The lake of Galilee was notorious for its storms. They literally came out of the blue with shattering and terrifying suddenness. The storms could be immediate, without much warning. Calm waters could become suddenly dangerous. At least four of the disciples were fishermen. They had to know about the weather on the sea. For them to become frightened meant this storm was bad. We must appreciate that just as the sea

monster in ancient mythology represents the power of evil, so also the raging storms here represent and reflect all the powers of chaos and evil.

It is interesting to note that the words that Jesus addressed to the wind and the waves are exactly the same words he addressed to the demon-possessed man in Mark 1:15. Just as an evil demon possessed that man, so was the destructive power of the storm, as people in Palestine believed in those days the evil power of the demons were at work in the realm of nature.

Jesus' exorcism of the storm is evidence that he is the stronger one, able to break up Satan's kingdom. Others at that time performed miracles and appeared to cast out demons, but only Jesus could still the raging storm.

We do this story far less than justice if we merely take it in a literalistic sense. If this tale simply describes a physical miracle in which an actual storm was stilled, it is a very wonderful story, and is something about which we marvel. It shows the power of God. But if we read it in a symbolic sense, it is far more valuable to us. We are all going to face storms of life. We need to have help in facing those symbolic storms.

When the disciples realized the presence of Jesus with them the storm became a calm. To voyage with Jesus was to voyage in peace even in a storm. In the presence of Jesus, we can have peace even in the wildest storms of life.

There are three things we learn about Jesus' presence. First, he gives us peace in the storm of *sorrow*. When sorrow comes to us, as come it must, He tells us of the glory of the life to come. There are times when we will face the unexpected or unexplained death of a loved one or friend. Jesus tells us of the love of God. With Jesus we will have the certainty that we shall meet again with those whom we have loved and lost for a while.

Second, Jesus gives us peace when life's problems involve us in a tempest of doubt and tension and uncertainty. There are times we do not know what to do. To submit to his will is the way to have peace at such a time.

Third, Jesus gives us peace in the storms of anxiety which we face in this life. The enemy of peace is worry, worry for ourselves, worry about the unknown future, worry about those we love, But Jesus speaks to us as a parent whose hand will never leave the care of his child and whose love will never go away. In the storms of anxiety, He brings us the peace of the love of God.

In March 2020 I faced the storms of life. Following my stomach reduction surgery, my bladder had stopped working. I could not urinate on my own. I had to have a catheter in me. When I tried to self-catheter, I had problems with bleeding. I had to be hospitalized twice in the midst of the COVID-19 outbreak. But I kept my faith in Jesus. I knew Jesus would bring me through the storms of life. I relied on my prayers and your prayers to get me through it. There was finally a breakthrough in June 2020, but I will admit I was worried at times whether I would ever have a functioning bladder again.

What are the lessons for you today from this passage? Do not think that Jesus is asleep at the wheelhouse of your life. When the disciples find Jesus asleep and accuse him of not caring, you and I and all Christians are challenged to examine our own faith. Do we accuse God of not caring just because things are not going as we want them to go?

A suspicion that God does not really care about what happens to us will override our faith journey if we are not careful. Human relationships die when we sense that others do not care what happens to us. Doubts about God emerge in times of crisis. The disciples' panic separates them from Jesus.

We often act like the disciples. We expect others to share our panic or distress. We may get upset with them. If they seem detached from the situation, we

accuse them of not caring about our suffering. Panic reactions can divide us from others who might help us just as they can cause us to doubt God's love for us.

Jesus does not react to their panic. He speaks first to the raging elements, the wind and the sea. He then chides the disciples for their fear and their lack of faith. Please understand the disciples had a natural tendency to fear such a terrible storm. Jesus is not chiding them for this fear. We often have legitimate fears as well. What Jesus is chiding them for is having continued fear even when he is present. What we learn is that as our faith grows stronger, our fears will subside when we acknowledge the presence and power of what Jesus can do in our lives.

The story today reassures believers that Jesus has the power to save believers even in the worst circumstances. St. Mark church could have given up but they relied on their faith in Jesus. They rebuilt and even started a task force which aided 37 families in their area who had been adversely affected by the tornado. Like you and many other churches, they have dealt with the dangers of COVID-19 and the changes they had to make for safety reasons.

In closing, let us always remember how mighty God is. Let us take from this passage today that Jesus was no mere human being. He had God's power to still to storm. He has power today to still the storms of your life. The disciples ask, "Who can this be, because the wind and the sea obey Him?" The answer is Jesus, the Son

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of God, the one who gives us peace at all times, through all things. Let us continue to have that faith in him.