

Terrifyingly Wonder-ful

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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Year B: Pent 5: Mark 4:35-41

³⁵On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." ³⁶And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. ³⁷A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. ³⁸But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" ³⁹He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. ⁴⁰He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" ⁴¹And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

What would it take for you and me to trust God even more?

We've all likely seen the photos or videos of storm chasers. People who think it's fun to be on the tail of – or in the center of – a tornado, a hurricane, a volcano. But for the rest of us normal people, being in the center of a real whopper of a storm, can be pretty darn scary.

So it was for the disciples in the boat with Jesus. Most people in Ancient Israel didn't swim well. And everyone knew the Hebrew mythology that the chaos monsters lived under the watery deep. Therefore, the sea when riled up was the cosmic force of danger and chaos. Evening storms could whip up fairly quickly across the freshwater Sea of Galilee. But never-the-less, the disciples took Jesus, 'just as he was' and headed out into the oncoming darkness.

Ever been on a boat that makes your stomach turn? Ever been on a flight when even the flight attendants look scared? Ever been on an interstate when the raining hail turns the blacktop into a skating rink for cars?

Ever whisper a desperate prayer...God, if you can just save me right now, oh, Lord...oh, God! We white-knuckle the boat rail, tighten our seatbelts, grip the steering wheel.

There were no life-jackets for the disciples. They had oars. Perhaps a bucket. Their hands. Bailing water like no tomorrow, getting more drenched with every passing second.

“Jesus, don’t you care that we are going to die?!”

Isn’t that interesting? They’ve already made up their minds that their deaths are imminent. Their faith in their ‘Teacher’ left them when the rain began. They don’t say, “Hey Jesus, we could use a little help.” Or “Jesus, have you ever gotten seasick?” Or even, “Jesus, wake up, would you?!”

No! Jesus, don’t you care that we are going to die?!

I’ve said that. Have you said that? Bible stories tell us about ourselves. When the going gets rough, the rough whimper. Faith dissipates into fear. The waves are huge, we’re up-chucking over the side and what we manage to grumble to God Almighty is, “Don’t you care?”

Faith is not like water in the pitcher of life. We don’t have more or less of faith. God gives us the ability to trust. God gives us the ability to believe in the trustworthiness of God. That’s faith.

But faith is not like a water pitcher. Faith is not like a target to hit while axe-throwing. One of my friends says, ‘Faith is an oscillating fan: veering from one extreme to another, caught for a time by weak mortals before slipping from their grasp, in need of Jesus’ reassurance.’ⁱ

Thus in the moments of our greatest stress, we say things like this to God. “Where are you?” “Don’t you care?”

Jesus, fully awake now, says to the wind and the sea. “Shut-up!” “Be still” is “shut-up” in Greek. Jesus uses the same phrase when muzzling an unclean spirit in the first chapter.

Bible stories not only tell us about ourselves. They tell us who God is. Rev. Dr. Matt Skinner says the answer is more terrifying than the question. The answer is, “Shut-up!” This God can conquer chaos and evil forces that threaten human life. This Jesus, whoever He truly is, is terrifying. He speaks and creation responds. Like a master telling a dog to sit or lay down. Except its not a dog, its chaos itself. Who is this God?

The disciples knew that about God. They'd heard the story of Job when the Lord addresses Job by saying, "who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb? – when I made the clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band, and prescribed bounds for it, and set bars and doors, and said, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stopped'?"

They knew the God of all creation could stop the wind and the waves. They knew that in the very, very beginning, God spoke and creation came into being. They knew it here (tapping heads). But drenching wet, in that moment, they experienced the truth, here. (Tapping heart) And it's pretty darn normal for fear to have a word with us when our trust is at the intersection of real life and chaos.

But the disciples don't get a pass from Jesus on this one. Read this story in Matthew and Luke for a softer Jesus. For Mark, his Jesus gets right to the point.

"Have you still no faith?"

Or in other words, "What will it take for you to trust me?"

Some of us go through life sleeping. Sleeping is the ultimate position of trust. We have faith that God has 'got this' and everything will be just fine, come clouds or clear skies.

Others of us go through life rowing our hearts out. We're not asleep, we're self-sufficient, don't you know, in control, with an answer for everything, and what we can't control, we find a way to think we're in control. God offers to sit and row with us, and we politely say, "I've got it, thank you."

Most of us are somewhere in between.

What will it take in life for you and me (us) to depend more and more on God's unfailing love that can calm every storm and lead us to safe harbors? Are we like little children that have to stub their toes just one more time before we learn? Are we like that oscillating fan with seemingly no ability to turn the oscillating button off and simply feel God fanning our faith? Maybe, we need to simply sit in fear and faith asking the second question of the disciples. "Who is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him? Who is this?" Amen

ⁱ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-12-2/commentary-on-mark-435-41-6>