

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church  
Shobonier, Illinois  
Pentecost 5B - Proper 7B  
June 23, 2024  
Mark 4:35-41

Wake Up, Jesus, We're Drowning

And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. (Mark 4:39)

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

God is God, and we are not, and that's good. After all, we make terrible gods. Jesus is God in human flesh, and that's the best of all. The Word became Flesh. The Son of God is also the Son of Man, and humanity never had it so good as when the Lord of creation became His foremost creature.

In today's Gospel, Jesus had been teaching a very large crowd, along the shore of the Sea of Galilee. He had been sitting in a boat, put out a little from the shore, so He could be better heard. After that, He explained to His disciples the parables He had been teaching. Now it's evening, Jesus is tired, and He wants to get away. So He says, "Let's go across to the other side of the lake." So they all get into the boat and start out.

The Sea of Galilee is actually more a big lake than a sea. But because of its location, sudden storms could pop up quickly with strong winds and great waves. It could be very tricky to navigate, and even more so in the dark.

And while many of the disciples were professional fishermen and knew about such things, this one really scared them. It's night, it's dark, and now all of a sudden, there's a powerful windstorm, and the waves are starting to beat against the boat, even starting to engulf it. The disciples are panicking. They're frightened. It looks like they might be sinking any minute now. What to do?

And in the midst of all this, Jesus is sound asleep on the cushion in the back of the boat. The disciples urgently wake Him up! We're going down if you don't do something, Jesus. Teacher, don't you care that we are perishing?

Don't you care? Of course He cares. He came because we are perishing in our sin, drowning in our death, with a heavy millstone of the Law tied around our necks, pulling us into the deep. He cares all the way to the cross, where He slept in death, bearing our sins. Make no

mistake about it, Jesus cares. Compared to His caring on the cross, a little old sinking boat is nothing. Child's play for the Lord of creation. He can stop the storm with a one-word rebuke from His mouth. He's the one who separated the waters above from the waters below, who ordered the sea and the dry land, who said to the waves, "this far and no further." He could calm the storm in His sleep with one hand tied behind His back, if He wills. Or not.

Don't you care? It's an indictment of motive. If Jesus cared, He'd do something. If Jesus cared He wouldn't be asleep in a time of crisis. You've probably said, or thought, the same thing when life got a bit "overwhelming." At least the disciples could see sleeping Jesus, and grab hold of Him to wake Him up. He isn't quite so shakeable for us, is He?

Perhaps we've said it in our prayers or held it in our hearts. Why should He care for you, for me? Who are we? What does He owe us? We want Jesus to fix it, to make the bad stuff go away - cancer, heart disease, death, and the grave, or financial setbacks, divorce, depression, disappointment, a wayward child. These are as real as those waves washing over the boat. When the doctor says, "I'm sorry, there's nothing more we can do," then we'd like to give Jesus a shake on His throne in heaven. "Where are you, Lord? You said, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver you.' So where's the deliverance? It says in the psalm, 'He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber or sleep.' It says that, but it sure looks like you're sleeping! Why are letting me go through this? Don't you care, Lord?"

Of course, He cares. He cares enough to lay down His life to save us. To die on a cross and rise from the dead. Think about it. You're not in a sinking ship at the moment. If all Jesus had ever done was die on a cross and rise from the dead, that would have been enough to save those disciples on that little boat. Oh sure, the boat would have gone down, but Jesus would have gone down with them. And that makes all the difference in the world. When your boat goes down, He goes down with you.

Now, certainly, it takes faith to say that, to trust that a sleeping Jesus can save you. He opens a sleepy eye and looks around at the wind, the waves, the water, the soggy, frightened disciples. And He says, "shhhh. Be quiet," the way you might speak to a barking dog. "Be still." That's all it takes. One little word, and the chaotic waters are calm, the storm is still. Mark says, "there was a great calm." Peace. Silence.

Jesus looks His disciples in the eye. "Why are you so afraid? Don't you trust me?" He asks us the same thing this morning. Why are you so afraid? Why do you live small and fearful lives? Why do you act as though a sleeping Jesus were a useless Jesus, or an invisible Jesus was an absent Jesus? If Jesus singlehandedly conquered sin, death, and the Law by dying on the cross, don't you think He has everything else covered as well?

Add to this what St. Paul writes, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them," (2 Cor. 5:17-19).

Reconciliation. Making peace. Stilling the storm. Calming the chaos. Setting things in order. That's what God is doing through His Son. Making things new. A new creation. Creation began with chaotic waters, and here the Lord of creation in the flesh, Jesus, sets everything in order again. He reconciles wind and waves and water and boat and disciples and they are safe because they are with Jesus.

Jesus thus redirects their fear. They once were afraid of the power of nature, of the sea and the storm. Now their fear is directed toward Him. "They feared a great fear," Mark says, "and asked each other, 'Who is this? Who is this that even the wind and sea obey Him'"

That's the question! That's the whole point of the storm and this story. Who is Jesus? You know the answer. He is the Lord, the eternal Son of God, the Christ, the Messiah of Israel, the creative Word, the Savior of the cosmos. No one else can rebuke the storm. No one else can speak to wind and waves and have them obey. There's only One like this, and He happens to be the One in whom you are baptized, in whom you believe.

He wants your fear. "We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things." What causes your heart to race; what keeps you up at night? He wants that fear. Don't fear the wind, the storm, the tumor, the bullet, the burst blood vessel, the grave. Don't fear what can only destroy the body, but cannot harm the soul. Fear God. Fear the Son of God, for He will swallow up your fear. Who is greater than the Lord?

This miracle is an exceptional image, a piece of hard evidence, but it is not the rule. There are plenty of ships that go down into the deep. Some of them with Christians aboard. Airplanes fall from the sky. Tidal waves sweep across crowded beaches without warning. Hurricanes and tornadoes cause devastation and wipe out cities. Earthquakes turn solid rock to liquid. Fires destroy lives and property. Bombs explode in crowded places. A cell turns into a cancerous monster. Where is Jesus when all this happens? Is He asleep at the wheel? Does He care?

The answer is: He is there in the middle of all of it. Reconciling all things. Making all things new. Working salvation, making good. To see that and say that calls for repentance on our part, just as it called for repentance on the part of the disciples. A change of mind. A new way of looking at things. A turning from fear to faith. The same Word that stills the storm is the Word that forgives your sin and justifies you before God. You are safe, dear baptized believer.

Safer than you could ever imagine. Safe in life and in death, when the winds and waves die down and when they don't.

Imagine that you are out there on that stormy sea in the darkness. The wind howls, the waves wash over the side of the boat. You grab on to Jesus and say, "Lord, save us. We're going to die." But instead of rebuking the wind and waves, Jesus simply wraps those crucified and risen arms of His around you and says nothing more than this, "Don't be afraid. It's finished. You're baptized into my death. You're safe. Just trust me." That's all you need to hear.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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