

Storms in Life
United Church of Broomfield
June 20, 2021

Mark 4:35-41 CEB

³⁵ Later that day, when evening came, Jesus said to them, "Let's cross over to the other side of the lake." ³⁶ They left the crowd and took him in the boat just as he was. Other boats followed along.

³⁷ Gale-force winds arose, and waves crashed against the boat so that the boat was swamped. ³⁸ But Jesus was in the rear of the boat, sleeping on a pillow. They woke him up and said, "Teacher, don't you care that we're drowning?"

³⁹ He got up and gave orders to the wind, and he said to the lake, "Silence! Be still!" The wind settled down and there was a great calm. ⁴⁰ Jesus asked them, "Why are you frightened? Don't you have faith yet?"

⁴¹ Overcome with awe, they said to each other, "Who then is this? Even the wind and the sea obey him!"

Psalm 9:9-20 CEB

9 The Lord is a safe place for the oppressed—
a safe place in difficult times.

10 Those who know your name trust you
because you have not abandoned
any who seek you, Lord.

11 Sing praises to the Lord, who lives in Zion!
Proclaim his mighty acts among all people!

12 Because the one who avenges bloodshed
remembers those who suffer;
the Lord hasn't forgotten their cries for help.

13 Have mercy on me, Lord!

Just look how I suffer
because of those who hate me.

But you are the one who brings me back
from the very gates of death

14 so I can declare all your praises,
so I can rejoice in your salvation
in the gates of Daughter Zion.

15 The nations have fallen
into the hole they themselves made!
Their feet are caught
in the very net they themselves hid!

16 The Lord is famous for the justice he has done;
it's his own doing that the wicked are trapped.

17 Let the wicked go straight to the grave,
the same for every nation that forgets God.

18 Because the poor won't be forgotten forever,
the hope of those who suffer won't be lost for all time.

19 Get up, Lord! Don't let people prevail!
Let the nations be judged before you.

20 Strike them with fear, Lord.
Let the nations know they are only human.

Suppose for a few minutes that you are one of them. One of the disciples. There is no indication in scripture that you or any of your compatriots have any inkling as you set out in your boats that there might be anything amiss. It's a calm day; sunny, maybe a light breeze. To be sure though, since several of you fish professionally, you are aware that storms can quickly form. After all, the Sea of Galilee is set in a deep gorge between two mountain ranges. The winds sometimes force themselves through the passes around Mount Hermon in the north and virtually explode on the quiet waters so many hundreds of feet below. Sudden squalls with waves of ten, twenty, or thirty feet or higher can come up with little or no warning. You and your friends are deathly afraid of those squalls, and with good reason — everyone of you knows friends and fellow-workers who have gone out to fish but never made it back. You have good reason to be afraid.

It has been a good day for you up to this point. The earlier hours were spent listening to Jesus teach a huge crowd there at the water's edge. But now the day is spent ... and for that matter, so is Jesus. He is worn out. He needs a break. Since he is already in a boat that he had used while preaching, he suggests that you set out for the other side of the lake. So you weigh anchor and cast off. Several other boats see what you are doing — they follow and join in what becomes a mini-flotilla. Meanwhile, Jesus is so exhausted that he falls fast asleep on a cushion in the stern.

Suddenly, without any warning, one of those dangerous squalls swoops down from the mountain passes. The sky has grown dark and threatening. The winds are beginning to whistle. The black waves are growing and beginning to pound against the sides of the little boat and washing over everyone in it. The craft is tossed to and fro as easily as a leaf is tossed in a breeze. You and everyone else begin to feel the grip of a powerful fear clutching at your gut. Your heart begins to pound as hard as the waves. Your breathing becomes short and labored. Suddenly, you remember your very special passenger in the stern of the boat, you look back at him ... and he's still asleep! How in the world?

People have had the same reaction for centuries in facing the storms that buffet their lives. A young mother dies and leaves a bereft spouse and two small children and people wonder if the Lord is sleeping through it all. A little child is hit by a car and crippled for life and the family wonders if perhaps God might have been taking a nap at the time. A home is broken by a painful separation and divorce and the wonder comes as to whether the Lord cares at all. And then there's all of the community, national and world storms; racism, poverty, global warming and war.

We all feel it. With ebbs and flows, we go from calm to tempest in minutes, daily. Everyone in your little boat feels it now, and all eyes have gone back to that figure sleeping on the cushion. Suddenly, almost with one voice, you begin to yell back to Jesus: "Teacher, wake up! Look what's happening here. We're going to die. Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" We continue to cry out, "Lord, don't you care?!?!?!"

That call is the beginning of our deliverance. The Lord has not been worried about your fate. God has known all along that whatever storm might come up, will pass. As much as you might not have thought so, God has been with you all along the journey, throughout the calm AND the storm. But now you have called on Jesus.

You have taken the advice of the psalmist when he wrote, "In the day of my trouble I will call to you, for you will answer me" (Psalm 86:7).

Interesting, isn't it, that here you are a professional fisher, and in the company of other fishermen, in the place where your expertise might be most prominently displayed — out on the water? As special as your passenger happens to be, one would not think that you would call on him to deal with a situation that would be found in your bailiwick. After all, Jesus was a carpenter, not a boatman. His experience is with hammer and nails, not with rudder and sails. Why should anyone expect that he could help at a time like this?

But, of course, you do think he can help. You might not be sure why you feel that way, but something deep inside you and everyone else in the boat knows that here is someone who has a power unlike anyone you have ever encountered. These rumors and these miracles might just be legit. You have already seen him restore sanity to a deranged man; you have seen him cleanse the scaly skin of a leper; you have even seen him help a paralytic to walk. No question, this passenger of yours, this Jesus, has power far beyond the power of mere mortals. Yes, you know he is special ... special enough to be called upon for aid in what should be your field of expertise.

Deliverance ... and did you notice how it came? Just his word. He calmly stood up in that storm-tossed boat as you and your friends looked on in wonder. He spoke to the winds and waves with as much familiarity as one would speak to their own unruly children. "Quiet! Be still!" (v. 39). And that was all there was to it. As suddenly as it had come up, the storm was gone. You sit there now in that boat as it gently rocks to and fro in the midst of the lake. You look at your traveling companions with eyes full of wonder. What kind of man is this Jesus to be able to do such a thing? And you know without saying so that this friend of yours is more than just a man.

Then he speaks again, to each of you in the little boat. He asks, "Why are you frightened? Don't you have faith yet?" (v. 40).

You sit there thinking silently for a moment, your eyes cast down toward your feet, watching the little water that is still in the boat after the storm wash back and forth between your toes. How should you respond to his question?

You do have faith, but you have never had it tested to the limit like this before.

You have wanted to believe that he is Lord of all, but just how much you have wanted to believe it has never been called into question. Now, out in the middle of the silence after the storm, you are forced to look at that faith and wonder why you ever worried in the first place.

For whatever consolation it might provide, you are not alone in your thoughts. Your companions there in the boat have also been sitting with eyes cast down. They have the same questions going through their minds and they too are not quite sure how to deal with them. For that matter, down through the centuries, Christians have struggled with precisely the same thing — we say we have faith, but when times of crisis come, we have this deep, dark fear that we have been left alone. And you know — it's normal. And...it's okay.

The storms — extreme, frightening and painful - can be calmed again by his word. He may not be standing visibly in the stern of our little boat saying, "Peace, be still," but he continues to speak if we but hear his word. Jesus affirms to us that even when we think he might be unaware of our trouble, we need not fear. The psalmist wrote, "God won't let your foot slip. Your protector won't fall asleep on the job" (Psalm 121:3 CEB). God affirms that God's presence will be with us even in the midst of our most dire crisis when we read, "Yea,

though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me" (Psalm 23:4 KJV). Even when we fear that our situation would prevent God's presence and help ... or we fear that we're not worthy of God's love and mercy, we hear Paul's words, "Who will separate us from Christ's love? ... I'm convinced that nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things or future things, not powers or height or depth, or any other thing that is created (Romans 8:35, 38-39 CEB). Even when we wonder why the storms should come at all, we can be comforted by the calm of words like, "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28 KJV). Yes, the Lord's word is still capable of calming storms.

What storms are we facing? And I know that we ALL are facing some form of storm. Whatever it might be, it can be calmed in the same way you and your friends in that boat saw the winds and the waves become quiet. First, call on God for help; then trust that God can deliver; and finally listen for the word God speaks.

AMEN