

“Overcoming the Storm”

Liturgical Date: Proper 7 (B)

Primary Text: St. Mark 4:35-41

Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. The primary text for today, the Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, is the Gospel Lesson from St. Mark 4. The title of the sermon is “Overcoming the Storm.”

Today is Fathers Day. There are many qualities that we celebrate in good Christian fathers. They are providers, they are spiritual mentors, they are teachers of life lessons. And often times they protect us, they help us feel safe. I wanted to share a story related to that to begin today. It takes place when I was 11 years old and my father had taken me along with him on trip to England. This was a business trip, but had a good bit of time for sight seeing too. One of the places we visited was Bath, which is named thus because it has ancient bathhouses built by the Romans. We were touring this site and somehow I became separated from my father. I looked around and could not see him. I called and he did not answer. I began to search, becoming more and more panicked. My breathing became heavy and I believe tears welled in my eyes as I continued to look without finding him. What would I do? Here I am a kid in a foreign country and I lost my dad! It was obviously a traumatic experience because I remember it to this day. But then I saw him. I ran to my dad, and hugged him, sobbing but now with joy that I was with him.

In reality, I probably was never more than a few hundred feet from him during this episode. I think I was only “lost” for a few minutes. But it scared me. I wanted to be in the care of my father. As Christians, we are

thankful that we have a heavenly Father that loves and cares for us. Even when we stray, He is there. And of course, we know the Father through His Son, Jesus. We read in our text for today that the Disciples experienced a great fear. Jesus was just a few feet away, but sleeping. They feared, they did not fully trust for Jesus to rescue them. But God was still with them and in control. God could, and would, overcome the storm.

Our text for today is not very long, just 7 verses, but it packed with great things for us. When studying the Bible one of the first rules of interpretation is context, context, context. And this is especially true with this passage when we understand what was happening before and after the selected verses, as well the historical and geographic background. We will look at some of that today.

The reading began with, *“And the same day, when the even was come, he saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side.”* When we read the preceding 34 verses of Chapter 4 we learn what Jesus was doing that day. He has been teaching. To speak to the large crowds, He actually had taught them from the ship, or boat, that was floating in the water near shore. This provided some “buffer” between Him and the crowds, and his voice was amplified by the water. It had been a full day, Jesus was tired. Thus it is not surprising that He falls asleep before the storm hits. This text is a great example of the fact that Jesus is true man and true God. As true man He would become tired and require sleep. As true God, He could use His divine power to stop a storm.

What was Jesus teaching about that day? He tells four parables in the preceding verses: the sower (which Jesus said in verse 13 was essential to understand the parables He spoke), the lamp under the basket, the growing seed, and the mustard seed. Notice that three of these parables relate to

seeds, and all four relate to something that is hidden that God brings to visibility. The theme here is, not surprisingly, faith. God creates faith and we must trust in God because He can do all things, even when we don't understand them, and the results that God brings to harvest are incredible. So Jesus teaches about faith before they depart and the Master Teacher will be taking the Disciples from the classroom to the laboratory.

The Sea of Galilee is what they were passing to the other side of. Much of Jesus' ministry took place near it, it is about 12.5 miles long and 7.5 miles wide. It is also known as the Sea of Tiberius or the Lake of Gennesaret. It is very common for storms to come up suddenly in this body of water. So when they set out, everything looked fine-but that would suddenly change. The Sea of Galilee is, as Paul Kretzmann described it, "kettle like". This means that it is a low point, about 700 feet below sea level. However, part of it is surrounded by mountain gorges and the over 9,000 foot Mt. Hermon is 30 miles to the northeast. Westerly winds coming down from the mountains hit the warm air over the lake and the result is often rapidly arriving and violent storms.

So this is what hits in Mark 4. It is helpful to know a couple of other factors here. In 1986 an interesting discovery was made in mud of Galilee that is sometimes called the "Jesus Boat." It was not used by Jesus, but is called that because it has been dated to the time of Christ and gives an example of what these fishing boats were like. This boat was 27 feet long and 7.5 feet wide. So these boats, or small ships, were not huge-but pretty good sized. They were designed for commercial fishing and also featured a platform in the back, or stern, where tired fishermen could rest, which is what Jesus was doing in the text. Can't you just picture Jesus curled up here with a pillow, happily sleeping in needed rest? The other thing to remember

is that we know that 4 of the 12 Disciples were professional fishermen, and likely 6 of them were. So they had plenty of experience out on the Sea of Galilee and had been through plenty of storms. These guys were tough, experienced, and did not scare easily. You know if you fly on an airplane you might get nervous when there is a little turbulence, but you don't really need to worry until you start seeing the flight crew worry! Because they have been through this before.

The point is that this storm in St. Mark 4 was a doozy. Even these Disciples were scared. Verse 37 tells us that there was wind, waves, and the ship was taking on water. This could be the end, they thought. And what is Jesus doing? Sleeping. Now I have to take comfort in that I do have this in common with Jesus, that it appears like me he was quite the sound sleeper! The disciples awaken Jesus. You can almost feel their frustration in verse 38, "*Master (or teacher, the Greek word is didaskalos), carest not that we perish?*"

Now this is interesting. First of all, what could Jesus do as a man to help them? Not much. Jesus wasn't a fisherman or sailor, but a carpenter by trade. But they had been with Jesus long enough to see some pretty incredible things already. Surely, He could do something. So the Disciples are right to ask and believe that Jesus could help them in this dire situation.

But the Disciples also fall short too. Remember, what was Jesus teaching about in the parables prior to this storm? Faith. No doubt, the Disciples smiled and nodded along as Jesus was teaching. But they are not in the "classroom" anymore. Now they are in the "lab" in the midst of a very real storm. The thing is, did Jesus have to be physically awake for God to save them? No. Just like those seeds in the ground are not visible to the human eye, they will still grow and accomplish God's purpose.

But their rabbi had an object lesson for them. When they wake up Jesus, verse 39 says that Jesus rebuked the wind and spoke to the sea. Three little words, *“Peace, be still.”* Isn’t that beautiful and powerful at the same time? And when Jesus spoke, the wind, waves, and water obeyed. The storm stopped. Not gradually, not incrementally. But all at once. It was gone. One moment it looked like the ship would be tossed under the waters, now it is floating along in a peaceful lake. How did Jesus do it? By simply speaking. The Word of God is powerful. The One that spoke creation into existence can just as easily tell that creation what to do. We think of the miracle of faith. When we think of simple elements of water, bread, wine and how God can work, we good Lutherans know the answer. We know it is by the Word of God. When God speaks, the things that He wants to happen, happen-and they happen right then and there.

The Disciples seem shell-shocked, awed, not knowing exactly what to think as this ferocious storm just stopped. Verse 41 said, *“And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”* They did not fully understand at this point, it will not be until Chapter 8 verse 29 until one of them (Peter) will confess Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. But they are beginning to see. This is a man, yes, but much more than a man. Jesus is a man that gets tired and sleeps, but God who awakens and speaks to overcome a storm. In the Psalms it speaks of God stilling storms, such as Psalm 107:29, *“He maketh the storm, a calm, so that the waves thereof are still.”* This was fulfilled right before their eyes.

Remember I said the context is important here. Jesus had taught in four parables prior to this miracle. The stilling of the storm begins four miracles which extend through Chapter 5 of Mark’s Gospel. We just heard

the ending of this storm showing Jesus' power over nature. When they reach the other side, a legion of demons will be cast out a man showing Jesus' power over evil. Thirdly, a woman with an issue of blood will be healed, Jesus' power over sickness. Finally, Chapter 5 culminates with the raising of the daughter of Jairus from the dead. Yes, this Jesus even has power over death itself. Jesus is both teaching and doing. The Master Teacher, the Savior of the world.

As I studied this text, I began to see my own Christian life paralleling it in many ways-and I believe some of you have likely done so as well. On this Fathers Day we may remember fondly times when our dad was there for us, or spoke and acted as a good father. If we are fathers we try to take the lessons we learn in the Bible and apply them as we serve as fathers and husbands. We want our children to not only know and love us, but to know and love their heavenly father.

And in a very real way we can put ourselves in the shoes, or sandals as it would be, of these Disciples. We read what God tells us in His Word, just as they had just heard Jesus teach. We nod, agree, we believe it on at least an intellectual level. But it must go deeper. Because the storms will come. You are rolling along in your life, it seems like smooth sailing. Then you get that bad medical report, a phone call that delivers bad news, a natural disaster strikes, and we could go on. Suddenly, very quickly, you are in the storm. You call out to God in prayer for help. This we should do. But we should also know that He was already there before we even called to Him. He is right there in the boat with us. And in His timing He will speak, and what He wants to accomplish will happen. We pray that our faith continues to grow in that our trust in God increases. "Peace, be still." That is really all it took for the storm to end and peace with God is really all that

matters in the end. This is through Jesus. The one that wind and sea obeys. The one that has defeated sin, death, and hell. In Him, the storm is overcome. As Erwin Kurth wrote, *“If Jesus is in your life’s boat, it will truly be a lifeboat.”*

Amen.