

Who Do You Trust?

Mark 4:35-41

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

June 24, 2018 – Fifth Sunday After Pentecost



In the name of the Father, and of † the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. It was Jesus' idea to cross over the Sea of Galilee that night. No fishermen would ever have attempted such a crossing. But our Lord – tired and exhausted as He was from much preaching and healing – badly needed some rest. At least there in the boat Jesus and the Twelve would be by themselves and able to catch their breath. The quiet must have been a welcome respite as the boat gently rocked and the sun set slowly behind the mountains. But the Sea of Galilee was known for its violent wind storms – storms which were able to kick up in an instant, and without warning turn an otherwise gentle boat ride into a horrible, deadly disaster. So it shouldn't have surprised anyone when a strong wind began to scream – down the mountainside and whitecaps started forming on the surface of the water all around them as the waves buffeted their little boat, and threatened to blow the disciples overboard into the sea.

As the rolling tide and the thundering breakers crashed hard against the sides of their tiny fishing boat, the disciples all looked anxiously around at one another. Remember, these were no inexperienced landlubbers. At least four of them were well-seasoned fishermen who knew firsthand this sea and its stormy disposition – not to mention how much abuse a boat this size could endure before it went down to the bottom along with everyone on board. But meanwhile, Jesus lay soundly asleep in the back of the boat with His head on a pillow. As the Lord of heaven and Earth – the Master of wind and wave – the rising tide posed no threat to Him. Of all the boats on the sea that night, undoubtedly, this was the safest of them all.

But since boating is probably no more than a recreational activity for many of us, let's frame this situation in terms we're more likely to understand. Instead of a boat on the Sea of Galilee let's make this a twin-engine commuter jet flying at about 30,000 feet – with you being one of the twelve passengers on board. Your plane is suddenly hit by an unexpected storm front. Struck by lightening, the instrument panel goes haywire, the engines begin to shudder, and soon the plane is veering out of control. Yet, while all this is going on, Jesus is found sleeping in the pilot's seat. Get the picture? Here's the question: How far are you going to trust Jesus in this situation? Will you trust Him even when He seems completely oblivious to your plight – when your life is in mortal danger – or even when it appears to everyone concerned that He's asleep at the switch? Are you going to trust Him with your life, livelihood and eternal well-being when chaos is threatening and it seems certain you're going down for the last time?

The disciples apparently weren't willing to do that. For the Twelve, a sleeping Jesus was as good as no Jesus at all. Indeed, they appeared to trust Him only enough to grab Him by the shoulders and shake Him – enough to say, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" But they didn't trust him enough to let Him sleep through the storm. In Matthew's version of this story, Jesus calls them "Ye of little faith" – for if they had a big faith, they would've trusted Him even while He was sleeping – even though He seemed to be unaware of their predicament. They would've rested with Him in the knowledge that there probably wasn't a safer place in the world for them to be – and that even if they went down to the bottom of the Sea of Galilee with their fishing boat, Jesus would go with them to protect them.

You see, when Jesus enters a person's life through Baptism – when He forgives them, feeds them, grants them faith, and lords His saving death and resurrection over them – that's when they need to watch out, because the winds of temptation and the waves of trouble are sure to follow. That's why Jesus warned His disciples, saying: "Don't think I've come to bring peace, but a sword." He knew they would have to learn the discipline of what it means when a person prays to God, saying: "Thy will be done" – that He would still be Lord over all things even when asleep, hanging dead on a cross, or buried in a tomb. For this One is the One who alone is the Lord of heaven and earth – the One through whom everything was made – and in whom everything is held together – the One who commanded the proud waves and told them: "This far you may come, and not one inch farther!"

So Jesus sent His disciples out into a storm in a little boat with no protection but Himself – so that they might learn that neither their boat, their strength, their knowledge, their ingenuity, nor their swimming ability could save them – but only Jesus – even while appearing weak, weary, and asleep. "Don't you care?" the disciples asked Him. "If You cared, You'd do something – anything!" But of course, He had already done everything needful. Indeed, He entered into our world precisely because He does care about our desperate situation. He became a real flesh and blood Human Being precisely because He cares. He preached the Good News of God's reign because He cares. He healed the sick, cast out demons, and absolved sinners because He cares. He hung on a cross and died because He cares.

So, because Jesus cares, He stood up in the sinking boat midst these men of little faith, and began to rebuke the wind and the waves. "Be quiet! Be still!" And then, obeying Him, the elements immediately died down and

there was great calm. All Jesus has to do is speak His Word and things happen! Out of the chaos, God creates. Out of the storm, God speaks. Through testing and trouble He forges faith the way steel is forged in fire and great heat. We tend to think things are going well with God when everything is quiet and peaceful – when our lives are in order, our health is good, our marriages are strong, and our families are at peace. But the Spirit's faith-work goes on in the eye of the storm – in the chaos of suffering, testing, temptation, and in the unexpected hurricanes and tornados of life – all those times when we suddenly realize we have no control over anything. "Why were you so afraid," Jesus asked His disciples. "Why do you let wind and waves scare you when I'm with you? Do you still have no faith?"

Good question. Why are we afraid when our safety's threatened – when our health fails – when the doctor brings bad news – when our lives are thrown into chaos and disorder – or when the winds howl and the waves threaten? It's because we don't believe. It's because we don't really trust Jesus – at least not completely – not with our whole heart, soul, and strength. We always like to reserve a bit of control for ourselves, don't we? We always have to keep one hand on the rudder just in case God doesn't know where He's going. We're afraid because we think we're in control. We think we can save ourselves. We think God needs a wake-up-call to get Him moving. We think it all hangs on us. But the Good News is: we aren't in control – Jesus is!

We weren't there when the foundations of the world were laid – but Jesus was. We weren't there when the sea and dry land were separated – but Jesus was. We didn't set the boundaries for the sea, or tell the waves where to break – but Jesus did. We dare never forgot the fact that none of us are God. We aren't qualified for the job anyway – in spite of the way we sometimes behave. God alone is God – and Jesus alone is God in human flesh who hung on a cross to save us. Think of that. The very Lord of heaven and earth – the One who tamed the wind and quiets the waves with His Word – is the very same One who also died for you. He commands the wind of His Spirit to breathe life into you, and commands the water of Baptism to save you. He's invested heavily in you – and Your life is precious to Him.

He's with us, and we're with Him in His Little Boat, His Church. In Christian art, the Church is often pictured as a boat riding precariously on top of the waves – always on the verge of sinking. But in spite of how it looks, the truth is things couldn't be better – for Jesus is there in the back of the Boat, guiding us through the storms of life. What's left to fear with Jesus at the helm – wind and water, flood, famine, fire, earthquake, disease, death, or the devil? St. Paul says that "in all these things we more than conquerors through Him who loved us."

You know, it takes a lifetime to learn that lesson and to live in that freedom. Job learned it through great suffering and loss. The disciples learned it in a boat in a storm. St. Paul learned it through failure and frustration. And, each of us must learn it through the unexpected storms of life – those times when we feel like we're losing control and are going under. Recall the little boat, the wind and the waves, and Jesus asleep at the helm. There's no need for fear or panic when God causes the wind to blow and the waters to rage and foam. Jesus is in it with us. He's in charge in His own quiet, humble, hidden way. Don't be fooled by what you see. His strength may look like weakness – but the power of God is hidden behind the exhausted Man asleep in the boat – and in the broken Man hanging dead on a cross. That powerful Word of Jesus which once quieted the storm is still there to save us – submerged in Baptismal water, spoken in the comforting words of forgiveness, given in the bread of His body, and in the wine of His blood.

After the storm, the disciples were still afraid. Even though the wind was quiet and the waves were calm, Mark says they "feared a great fear" – in other words, they were terrified. "Who is this – this Man who speaks to the wind and the sea and they obey Him?" Now they feared the One who had been asleep in the back of the boat. But it's better to fear the Lord than the wind or the waves, for "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." The fear of the Lord is the beginning of faith. Jesus said: "Do not fear those who can harm the body but cannot harm the soul. But rather, fear the One who can destroy both body and soul in hell." What He was saying is this: If you fear God, there's nothing left for you to fear – for the fear of the Lord means an end to all fear.

Jesus, you see, wants our fears, our deepest dreads, and whatever troubles us, terrifies us, keeps us up at night, or causes us to panic. He's already absorbed all these things into His death. He nailed them to His cross. He buried them in His tomb. He spoke an ordering, creative Word into the chaos, into the death, and into the darkness of our lives – "Be still, be quiet." Who is this, then, that even the wind and the sea obey Him? It's Jesus Christ, the Son of Mary, the Son of the Living God, the Lord life, the Lord of creation, our Savior, and our Redeemer. Trust Him when it looks as if your boat is about to go under. Trust Him even when He seems to be asleep. Trust Him with your life and with your death. He cares for you. He died for you. He rose and reigns for you. He's strong to save you – stronger than your sin – stronger than your death – and stronger than the wind and waves that do His bidding. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.