

## Sermon for Epiphany 4 – Matthew 8:23-27

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Jesus can sleep through anything. Unlike us, He has not fears, no guilt, no worries. Sometimes it seems as though He sleeps when we pray earnestly to Him. In any case, He rarely behaves the way we think He should. Why was He sleeping when the storm raged on the sea? Why wasn't He awake with His disciples, teaching or praying or comforting them? Why wasn't He helping? And why, when they came to Him seeking to have their life spared, did He rebuke them? Last week He praised a Gentile centurion for doing the same thing!

Perhaps there's no greater teaching that we can learn from Jesus calming the storm on the Sea of Galilee and Jesus calming the storms of our lives than this: God is not like us. He doesn't submit to our ideas. His ways are not our ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts. We don't live by knowledge or understanding. We live by faith.

So unlike every other man, Jesus never considers appearances. He really doesn't care what other people think. He is His own man in a way that no one else is, that no one else can be. He's not concerned with doing the nice thing. He simply does what's needed. And whatever He does, whether we understand it or not, is the right thing to do.

That idea requires faith because He doesn't seem to us to be doing the right thing very often. He seems to be sleeping. He seems to be ignoring us. Terrorism, hatred, greed, bigotry, and addiction: these things don't seem right and yet they are all around us every single day. We are plagued with crime and poverty. Families are falling apart. Babies are murdered in their mothers' wombs. American soldiers die in foreign lands. Children cheat. Friends betray us. Diseases kill our loved ones.

And then, as if we weren't already our own worst enemies, nature herself comes swooping down upon us in hurricanes, tornadoes, forest fires, frigid temperatures, ice, and snow. And all our efforts against these things, our programs for grief and debt, our counseling for marriages in distress, our engineering feats, and government money – all of it seems of little effect against the evil that lurks in the hearts of men and in the volatile elements of Mother Nature. Our labors are futile, like wrapping a piece of gauze over the top of a volcano to stop the lava.

So where do we find our rest, our peace, our salvation, our assurance that even the horrible things are for some greater purpose? In human love? Spouses and children disappoint as surely as parents and siblings, but never as completely as we disappoint ourselves. So where must we turn? We must look outside of ourselves, just as the disciples did in prayer: "Save us, Lord; we are perishing." We must turn in faith to the goodness of God, even when everything else tells us the opposite. Wait for the Lord. His mercy will be revealed in time. The storms will cease. Jesus is with us.

“And [Jesus] said to them, ‘Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?’” What if the Lord points out our panic and discontent, our desire for safety, our desperate little faith that thinks it’s perishing? Thanks be to God! Thanks be to God that we still have a smoldering wick of faith that knows where to go, that it still prays, that it still seeks salvation in Jesus’ name. Thank God we are weak, for then we are strong. He will not let us become dependent on our faith or on our works or on our visions of how the world should be, but only dependent on Jesus alone. He purifies us with holy chastisement. He prevents us from riding out the storm in false confidence. Thanks be to God, He is keeping and will keep us dependent upon Him.

And what if our conscience is plagued by guilt and regret, by fear and doubt? What if we are weary? Thank God for that as well. For this is faith, a living vibrant faith that stirs our hearts. Faith causes us to feel sorrow and shame. The pain is proof that our faith is alive. May we never lose that pain until God relieves us of it on the last day! May we never be comfortable in our sins, may we never think we’ve got Him figured out, or that we can handle the storms on our own!

“Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?” May God admonish us again and again. Let us suffer His insults. May His Law break us. Let us be empty of ourselves in order to be filled with His love. God breaks us to mend us. He kills us to revive us. For His sake we are killed all the day long! God be praised for it. We are counted as sheep for the slaughter. God be praised, His thoughts are not our thoughts.

If we stop feeling the Law, we lose the Gospel. First comes the rebuke, then comes the calming of the storm. First comes the cross, then comes the glory.

Are we of little faith? Indeed we are. We are unworthy in every way. But the Lord has made us a promise. He is our God. His name is upon us. That name is Jesus: He saves! He is our Savior. He delivers us from evil and from the evil one. Weak in faith as we are, we are numbered among that fearful group on Lake Galilee. We are God’s failing disciples, that God might show His grace in us. We have no boast, no claim upon His mercy, but we have His Word and promise. Yet, that’s enough. Jesus is our Jonah. He calmed the sea with His sacrifice. He went into the belly of the earth and came forth again on the third day. Still, He will rebuke us. He will send waves over the side of the boat. We will be desperate and full of fear. We will learn to pray. But then the Lord will give us peace according to His Word. He will give us the faith we lack. He will give us the Holy Spirit and bring us home. He will keep His promise even as we await the resurrection to come and His eternal kingdom. He saves us. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠