

Series: "The Way: Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus"

*Calming the Storm*

**Mark 4:35-41**

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One summer when I was in college I worked as a youth director for some churches in SE Kansas. One evening we went to a cook-out at someone's farm. You probably know what it's like on the prairie to see a storm coming for miles. But I'd never seen anything quite like the storm that blew in that evening. It was interesting—and a little frightening—to stand right at the edge of the storm. Skies were clear to one side and then there was a line of clouds, strange-colored and roiling, moving toward us. It was an awesome and powerful display. The party broke up and we all got home before the worst of the storm hit.

We've all seen and felt the power and fury of storms. I've heard people tell about getting caught on a lake during a storm and how scary that is.

In this scene from Mark's Gospel, Jesus and his disciples felt first-hand the power of a violent storm at sea. This scene is part of a section (4:35-5:43) that shows Jesus' power over nature, over demons, over disease and over death. Underlying this is an emphasis on Jesus' victory over evil in all its forms and forces. These events reveal who Jesus was and *is*. He still has the power and authority he demonstrated then. And he is present now in the Holy Spirit and in the Word that tells us about him.

Jesus has been sitting in a boat at the lakeshore teaching (4:1). At the end of the day he's worn out and wants to get away with his disciples to the other side of the lake. So they take him in the boat with them and start across the Sea of Galilee. This "sea" is really a lake. It's about eight miles across by about thirteen miles north to south. It's 680 feet below sea level. The lake is surrounded by high hills. Deep ravines cut through the hills and act like huge funnels that draw violent winds down on the lake. Storms can come up very suddenly on Lake Galilee.

That's what happens while Jesus and the disciples are crossing. A furious squall, a great windstorm, gale-force winds came up. At least four of

the disciples are fishermen who have worked this lake most of their lives. They were probably used to these sudden storms. So this must have been an especially severe one to frighten them. The wind is tossing the boat. Waves are crashing over the boat, threatening to swamp it.

And Jesus is asleep in the boat's stern. This reminds us that Jesus is human. He got tired and needed to sleep. And he slept so deeply that the storm didn't wake him. Jesus' sleeping in the boat also shows the trust and confidence he had in God the Father. He was at peace because he not only trusted God's provision, but also God's care and protection.

But the peace of Jesus is in sharp contrast to the fear of the disciples. They go to Jesus, wake him, and scream, "Teacher! Don't you care if we drown?"

Have you ever been there—overwhelmed and frightened by circumstances that are beyond your control? Life brings plenty of storms that threaten to sink us and that stir fear in our hearts. Whether it's a sense of our sin and our desperation for God or a physical illness or a relationship that's messed up or a society that seems to be going crazy or the overwhelming need of many people in the world, we know what it is to be tossed around and unable to get the situation under control.

In a time like that, the disciples rush to Jesus and ask if he knows what's going on, what they need. The disciples recognize Jesus as someone who can help them in their desperate situation. That's not the last word on who Jesus is, but seeing him as someone who can help us is part of our relationship with him.

Jesus gets up, rebukes the wind and speaks to the waves, "Peace! Be still!" The word for "peace" here is not the word that's often used for calm and stillness. The word here can mean, "Quiet" as in "Quiet down!" or "Silence!" or, "Be muzzled!" This gives the idea of the sea as a kind of animal or perhaps a demonic force that Jesus subdues.

The Jews saw the sea as a symbol of chaos and evil. The Old Testament, especially the Psalms, depicts God as overcoming the chaotic ocean that is sometimes pictured as a sea monster. God's control of the waters of the Red Sea when he delivered Israel out of Egypt is celebrated throughout the OT.

In this scene in the gospel, Jesus is acting like God. He's doing the kinds of things God does. He not only has power over nature, but he overcomes evil which the raging sea represents.

The kingdom of God is often in hidden form in Jesus' ministry. But in this brief moment, it shines out in open display. Jesus' true nature was a secret to most people. But here he's revealed.

The early Christians who first read Mark's Gospel would have seen a special meaning for their situation. For them, the boat was a symbol of the church. The design of many church buildings still reflects that thinking. Architects call the central part of the sanctuary, where the congregation sits, the "nave." That word comes from *navis*/ship. We are all crew members and Jesus is our captain (Adam Hamilton, *The Way* 110). A storm of persecution was battering the church that Mark wrote for. They may well have wondered, "Is the church going to make it? Will we survive?" And this story held the assurance that the Lord of the church has power to bring evil into submission and that he was with them in their storm.

And he is with us. The church will make it, the church will prevail as long as the Lord of sea and storm is in the boat with us.

We can experience this reality in our own lives as well. In your storms, remember who Jesus is and that he is with you.

Jim Buskirk's dad was a pastor who entered the ministry later in life. He went back to school—high school. He was a high school student at the same time he was the Methodist pastor in town. Not only was Jim's dad a high school student while Jim was in grade school, but a lot of boys thought that preachers' kids were sissies. Jim says he felt called to correct that misunderstanding, so he got into a lot of fights. One day, a gang of boys came after him. With his back to a tree, he fought them as best he could, but there were just too many of them. Then he saw his father wade into the crowd and pull those boys off one at a time. He set them down and they froze. Then he came and stood by Jim and said, "You can take him one at a time—and I'll be here."

Jim says that gives an image of the heavenly Father. Can you picture God walking into your situation, pulling your attackers off you, and promising to be with you so you can take them on? Jesus is Lord even in—

maybe especially in—life’s storms. When devastating illness or loss or grief or pain or—you name the storm in your life—comes to us or people we love, Jesus is with us. He is calm, powerful, in charge. He speaks peace and brings deliverance.

In the quiet following the storm on Galilee, Jesus says to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

With eyes open wide and jaws dropping, the disciples look at each other and ask, “*Who is this?* Even the wind and the waves obey him.” They still haven’t caught on to Jesus’ true significance. And Mark intends to emphasize that question: “Who is this Jesus?”

Who is this one who speaks to the wind and sea as if they can understand him? The wind and sea knew his voice—and grew calm. I like the line from a hymn that says,

Be still, my soul: the waves and winds still know  
the Christ who ruled them while he dwelt below  
*(The United Methodist Hymnal #534)*

Jesus wants us to trust God to provide what we need (Matthew 6:25-34) and to protect us. God may not protect us from all earthly ills, but he will always do what’s best for us. If God doesn’t deliver us from trouble, he’ll give us strength and take us through it. And when we trust God, we will be amazed at how he is with us and all that he does to help us.

The disciples were terrified when Jesus stilled the storm. In overwhelming circumstances, they were overwhelmed by the power of Jesus. They asked, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!” If the disciples had thought the boat would sink with Jesus aboard, it was because they didn’t understand who he was. His power over the sea and the storm forces them to wrestle with the question of his identity. In the OT, God was the one who commanded the seas and they obeyed. The disciples are beginning to realize that Jesus is more than they had imagined. No wonder they were scared.

What are our beginning or elementary ideas about Jesus? How does he challenge those ideas? We keep discovering that Jesus is greater than we realized.

Encounters the disciples had with Jesus on the Sea of Galilee show a progression in their understanding of who he is. When Jesus borrowed Simon Peter's boat, taught from it and then provided Simon with a huge catch of fish, Simon said, "Leave me, Lord! I'm a sinful man!" (Luke 5:1-11).

Then there's this scene during the storm on the lake when the disciples ask, "Who is this?"

Later, Jesus again stills the raging sea. Matthew's version of that account is probably the most familiar (14:22-33). After feeding a huge crowd by multiplying five loaves of bread and two fish, Jesus sends the disciples across the lake in a boat while he stays and prays. Late in the night, between three and six in the morning, the disciples are still in the boat, not making headway because the wind and the waves are against them. Jesus comes walking on the water toward them. Seeing him, the disciples cry out in fear. But Jesus says, "I Am! Fear not!" The Lord himself, God with us, comes to them in their struggle and their need—just like he still comes to us.

Peter says, "Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water." Often we commend Peter for being the only one to get out of the boat and walk with Jesus. And, maybe he is just a disciple trying to be like his master. But it does seem that he doubts that it really is Jesus. He wants Jesus to prove himself by making him walk on the water too. Jesus allows that and calls Peter out of the boat. Peter takes a few steps, but then he sees the wind and is afraid. And down he goes. He just has time to yelp, "Lord, save me!" And Jesus does. Jesus says again, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Now notice how the disciples react this time when Jesus calms the storm. "And when they had climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'" Their understanding of Jesus' identity has grown. They have a better grasp of who he is. This declaration prepares for Peter's great confession in chapter 16. They still don't know just what it means for Jesus

to be the Son of God or all that following him means. But they've grown a lot. Their faith, their perception of Jesus is increasing. They are not simply dumbfounded, but they worship him.

How do you react when you see what Jesus does in the Gospels? Do you see him at work in the world around us and in the Church? Do you recognize his presence and action in your life? How do you respond? Are you still puzzling over who he is and what he's about? Or are you coming to a better understanding of him and his ways? Are you willing to acknowledge him as God's Son and the Savior and then honor him with your life? He wants to bring us to that place of recognition and trust and commitment. Will we follow him? Will we call on him? Will we experience his power in the midst of our storms?