

SAFE IN THE STORM

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I read a passage from the gospel that talks about storms, Mark 4:35-41. I recall reading a book as a child. A sea adventure. It was a fiction book but I gathered it might be true what was said. That in a hurricane that the safest place to be, the eye, the vortex, there is calm while all outside there is the spinning of the wind. If that's true it's a very beautiful physical truth to apply on a spiritual level. There is a place in the storm in which there is security.

“On that day,” - that phrase in verse 35 relates to the totality of what had happened as described in all of Mark 4. It was a day in which the Lord had been teaching. He was teaching the parables of the kingdom, describing the essence of what his reign would be like. In fact, in the parallel passage of Matthew 13 we find some seven major parables in all, which he taught, describing the nature of his work. So “On that day [an exhaustive day of teaching] when evening had come he said to them [to the disciples] ‘Let us go across to the other side.’ And leaving the crowd they took him with them just as he was in the boat.”

I wonder if that phrase “just as he was” may not be an indication that he took no special spiritual paraphernalia along with him to combat the storm that was coming. But just as he was. The tired out teacher who was so exhausted his clothes no doubt reflecting the sweat and the soil of the day. Just as he was – into the boat.

“... and other folk were with him. And a great storm of wind arose and the waves beat into the boat so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern asleep on the cushion. They woke him and said to him, ‘Teacher! Do you not care if we perish?’ And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ And the wind ceased and there was a great calm and he said to them, ‘Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?’ and they were filled with awe and said to one another, ‘Who then is this that even wind and sea obey him?’”

I suppose there are all kinds of ways we can get into storms. Sometimes the storm whirls around our life because of an emotional crises. Sometimes there is storm because there are differences between persons who love each other. Sometimes there are storms because of financial crisis. There are storms because of illness and because of grief. There are also storms which are perhaps more longstanding in character. The storm which may be part of even being a middle aged person, wondering if life is speeding by, where you're going and are you going to get there and are all the days going to add up together to something which is significant in the presence of the Lord. That is, approved by him.

There is often in life a kind of quiet desperation, a loneliness, which in itself is a sort of storm.

Here in the gospel record we find a particular storm at sea. But like all the miracles of Christ they are meant to not only describe historical situations but they are meant as action parables. That is, by reading the story we not only gain an insight of not only what the Lord did, we gain insight of what the Lord does now. These stories of action are also stories of teaching for us and they were meant to lift up our eyes and look deeper into the text and see that beyond the nature of the physical storm all storms are being represented. Quiet storms, major storms, any storm which threatens to destroy your work or your personhood. A storm which threatens your life. A storm which threatens your family. All of these are represented in the idea of storm.

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Intellectually of course we know that no storm can last forever. We know for example that God has pretty much appointed boundaries or limits for everything. Gravity has its pull. Life has its span. Illness has its point of termination. All of life has those boundary marks. Day has its night. And so on.

Storms also come to an end. That should be noted. There has never been a storm in the history of planet earth, which has continued endlessly. There has never been a storm, which has picked up momentum and momentum so that while beginning small, spread over the course of the whole earth. Never do we see this in human history. Nor do I doubt that we ever see a storm that always continued in one place. Storms rise and they fall back.

His story, which had arisen on the Lake of Galilee intellectually, if you think of this philosophically, is like all storms. Once it has arisen, it will be violent for a while, but like other storms it too will come to an end. And indeed storms on the Lake of Galilee are noted for the speed in which they arise and also the quickness, which they may dissipate.

The disciples recognizing the maxim or the loss of storms end are trying to last it out through the storm. Trying to hold on to the best of their human resources. So their solution probably, although we're not told this in the text, but certainly their solution from a human point of view would have been to have used whatever utensils are within the boat to scoop water out of the boat. Mark tells us that the boat was already filling. The winds and the waves were batting that ship wildly across the water, spinning it in a nightmare of experience. The disciples, being persons of resolve and ingenuity and hard work no doubt had tried their best to control the boat and to get the water out of the boat. Because they operated on the general principle that given a long enough time this storm will come to an end and we will get to the other side.

Where they ran into problems is where we run into problems. When you get to a point in the experience of storms when your strength is going to give out before the storm gives in.

So seeing that that storm may ultimately come to an end, is not going to come to an end until they are at the bottom of the lake. That makes them immediately go to the master recognizing that their best efforts have failed and they come to him therefore and say to him, "Teacher, do you not care if we perish?"

What a parable, what a picture this is for ourselves. We know in storms we face that life goes in cycles. There are good days and there are bad days. I was reading Ecclesiastes this morning and thought, "There's a person who knows what it is to write a book when he's down." If Ecclesiastes were presented to us as an average committee of Christians deciding whether or not a book should be in the canon of scripture, we'd have thrown Ecclesiastes out long ago. It's too much on the down side. But it certainly shows from a biblical perspective the attitude of a person who recognizes that attainments in life don't quite do it. He sees that life does have its cycle.

But recognizing this there are sometimes things that get into our life – and maybe you're going through something like this right now – where you feel like your strength is going to give out before the storm gives in. You need to know what to do. The disciples are to find this out in their experience. They will bail water. But the water that they're throwing out is not sufficient to keep the boat afloat.

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Isn't it amazing to find as we face into a storm that intellectually we may know something? But experientially we have a rough problem with it. We know for example that the storm will come to an end. But experientially that knowledge is nothing for us. Because *this* is the storm that's going to sink us.

These high winds which boil up on the Lake of Galilee and threaten the existence of the ship just like the circumstances that come into our life today are followed by a certain kind of thing which I would call voices of desperation. These voices come and are reflected in the attitude of these men as they wake up Jesus from his sleeping position. I would think that as you look at their word to the Lord you would recognize first of all in regard to their plea for help they have come across a situation which suddenly has made a very familiar scene to them a very dangerous scene.

For example, the Lake of Galilee was very familiar to these men. Particularly four of the twelve directly earned their living from fishing on the Lake of Galilee. They knew its shoals and its harbors, its sandbars, its depths, its length and its width. Many are the hours they had spent on this Sea of Galilee fishing, sailing, talking and they knew it in most of the time in a calm sort of a way.

Life indeed for us goes along most of the time on a calm level. There is not a crisis every day. Hopefully in your life there is not a crisis everyday. There may be one continuing crisis. But hopefully most of the situations we have become somewhat familiar to us. But when the storm breaks is when the familiar gets threatened. The same that we thought was the most secure is suddenly up for grabs.

There are a number of ways to tick this off. Health is one. We're here and we think we're fairly secure. One day word comes and we recognize how tenuous that security is. Financial security is another factor. The security within the home.

How quickly the storm can arise. One thing that in a moment is the every day kind of event, the familiar, had become the most threatening thing. No control over the situation.

The disciples were out in the boat. It's familiar to them. The lake is familiar to them. But the storm has risen. They're trying to do something about it. They're strong men. They had to have been strong to have been in Jesus' company. He had a regular physical fitness program alongside his teaching program. The physical fitness program was simply walk so many miles every day. These men got in shape. I imagine they were doing their best to dispel the effect of the storm. The problem was they were in the boat. Their strength was in captivity. On the land they could have easily run from danger of the storm. They could have made it. But all of their strength was locked in the boat.

Aren't there situations in life like that? You are captivated by something which you don't have control of. And all your strength is locked inside that situation and you can't get outside that situation. You must face the storm from within the boat. If you could only be on land. If you only could be in the days when you had better strength or weren't in that situation or position. But now, you're in the boat.

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They come to the Lord and the Lord is asleep. Something very striking about this, showing the Lord being asleep. Obviously it indicates that he'd worked hard that day and he was exhausted. And he could sleep through the whole storm because he was so physically worn out.

The disciples come to him and say "Master, we are perishing!" I kind of think, just speculation, that what the idea was in waking him up is that his lying down in the boat while they're working is a very frustrating experience. They're drowning and he doesn't care. At this point they could use one more person bailing water. And he's as strong as any of them. Why should he sleep and the rest of them work. So "Lord! Wake up! Here's a pail. Get to work. Don't you care if we perish?" They had never seen him do a storm kind of a miracle at sea. They'd seen him heal the sick and cast out demons. They had heard about, even been there, when the water was changed to wine. But they didn't actually see him do it and there were probably all sorts of rumors connected with that miracle how he might have done it. They'd never seen him calm a storm. So I don't think they woke him with the idea of "Lord, get up and still the elements!" In fact, Jesus says they had no faith at the end of the story.

Which is kind of the way we handle storms. We see the way out. Lord, if you'll just do *that*. Here's the pail I want to give you. If you'll take that pail we'll get through this thing ok."

Another quality of a desperate voice is that there is a real gravity of the disciples coming at this point to the Lord. They're short on words: "Master! Do you not care if we perish?"

If you'd been on a lake on a calm day you'd know that being by a lake is a very restful experience. You can also when you're at a lake, listen easily to conversation. In fact you can hear very readily when you're at a lakeside and everything's quiet. In fact, Jesus often taught by the seashore in order that the natural amplification produced would carry his voice to the multitudes. He taught from the boat and people listened on the shore. The voice can carry a hundred yards out. It's very easy to hear a person often when he's talking in a normal voice.

The disciples had been on the Lake of Galilee and in the stillness of that lake their banter had gone back and forth within the boat and to other boats. Now however the storm has come. And all of the many words are forgotten in the crisis. There's not time to talk. And not only not time but what is said can't be communicated to the other boats. Whereas on a normal day they could talk with people in the other boats. Now they cannot get through. They could stand on the prow of the boat and call out to the other ship but the wind would only beat their words back into their faces.

Indeed there are storms where nobody can hear what you're trying to say. Even the person closest to you does not understand the incredible storm that rages within you. Because in a storm you can't get the message out. It's locked within.

So they come to the Lord. Which is a tremendous way of learning for us that in the storm it's not the people in the other boat that can help. It's the Lord who can bring the help.

I love that dramatic phrase in Mark – "There were other boats with him". If the disciples in the boat with Jesus were panicked out of their mind, can you imagine what it was like to have been in one of the other boats where they didn't have the advantage of the Lord sleeping in their boat? But alone in the storm. And the desperate voice rises.

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To these voices, to these winds the Lord speaks some words. When he is awakened he stands up (I'm assuming) he said to these a "Peace be still." And the wind ceased and there was a great calm."

It's always struck me as an incredible witness to the divine nature of the Lord Jesus Christ, I realize there are many critics of scripture who look at the instances of the storms at sea as one of the strong affirmations of the idea that New Testament is a collection of myths. But yet holding very strongly to the principle stated in the book of Hebrews that by the word of his power all things exist one would have to recognize that the very principles scientifically upon which the world operates – the principle of gravity, the principle of electricity, whatever other principles there are, are sustained by him in the unseen world. He also sustains the elements. He has a built in communication with his world so that when he speaks his language coming in Aramaic is translated into whatever computer codes are necessary so that whatever is built into the mechanism of wind and waves hear the voice of God is tuned in to hear that voice. And it becomes quiet.

An incredible, awesome display of force and divine nature. We recognize the problems of communication. We have communication problems with persons who are close to us. I have communication problems sometimes with my children when they don't want to do what I want them to do. I have more communication problems with my dog who never wants to do what I want him to do. For me to get out into a rainstorm and try talking to the rain would be the height of ludicrousness. But the Lord had the ability to tune in and speak. It's an awesome display.

Up until this time in the story our eyes are focused on the storm. But suddenly our eyes become focused on peace. The Lord says Peace and there is peace.

Someone has commented in respect to Milton's Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained. Paradise Lost is a much better book. Much better work. It's always easier to describe the fall than it is to describe heaven. It's easier to describe hell perhaps than heaven because we live so much more with evil than we live with good. It's much easier to describe storms than to describe peace. Because it's more difficult to describe sometimes we think it's not attainable. But Christ speaks peace.

So much of the world today, or in generalization *all the world* is looking for peace. There are diplomats of peace. There are speeches related to peace. There are different meanings to the word peace. But beyond the quest for world peace there is the quest for individual peace. The Lord is saying as he speaks to nature, he has the same authority to speak within our lives – peace. Suddenly the thing that's been threatening to tear us apart no longer becomes a dangerous power. It's dissipated and broken and we are safe and are going to come to a safe harbor. The Lord then speaks to the disciples. There was an instant change in the climate of the boat. From glum and desperation and fear of going down. Now there was celebration. I can almost see the disciples clapping their hands. We made it. He did it. Wait until we tell somebody about this. There's kind of general joyful pandemonium.

You'd think the Lord would go along with this. "Terrific guys. Let me give you some more spiritual lessons you can glean off this." But the Lord is always doing the unexpected things. One of the ministries the Lord has is the ministry of rebuke. That's the hardest of things to do. It's hard to face the person in the eye and say, You're wrong. I find that difficult to do. I'd

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rather be more diplomatic and try to work my way around the situation than confronting it directly. I like peace. Sometimes my way to peace is not necessarily the best way.

But the Lord knows that they're going to get in a storm again. If this were the only storm they were ever going to face in life he could just let them be happy and celebrate. But because he knows they're going to go through more storms he's got to teach them the real failures they had in this storm so they can know how to get through the next one.

Indeed he lets them go through another storm. Mark 6, to see whether or not they got the message. They never go through a third storm so we hope that after two they got the lesson.

If the Lord gives us a word that brings us up short, a word of rebuke. It is not for the purpose of putting us down but to say, There's more storms of life than this one. Why don't you get the lesson I want you to learn in this storm so you won't have to keep repeating the same mistake?

What does the Lord do? He draws them up short with the words "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" At least they might have had *some faith* but they had *no* faith.

That's kind of an incredible statement. That day the Lord had taught them about his kingdom. About his glorious reign. The kingdom is present in this age in the hearts of all those who will openly and willingly come to him. Knowing that teaching the least they could have deduced is that the king is in the boat with us and he's talked about the kingdom and they could have done a process of logic which would have said, If he talked about the kingdom and if he's bringing the kingdom then he is the king and the king is in our boat, and if the king went down to the bottom of the sea, then the kingdom can't come. Therefore the king must stay alive and therefore this storm isn't going to get us down. But they had no faith. They didn't really take to heart his teaching on the kingdom.

I'm amazed at how much these persons are like us. How through sermons and reading great Christian literature and all this kind of thing tuck away all these marvelous truths in our heart and then the crisis comes along and it's like somebody just let all the air out of the tire. All the theological building we've accumulated and all the nice principles we've been tucking away for a rainy day go gushing out the window as we become absorbed in our crises.

I think there was another reason why they were afraid. At the beginning, when they were headed to the other side, the Lord had said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." So there were several ways the Lord could have said that. He could have said it from the standpoint of someone who wanted to use the arousal on them. We're going to the other side!

Sometimes we need to have somebody do that to us. We may not get it if it's stated more subtly. But the Lord in a calm matter of fact voice, no raising of the decimal level, "Let us go across to the other side." It was his personal guarantee that they would make it. His personal guarantee. He said, We're going to the other side!

What happened in the storm and why the disciples became afraid is they forgot the word of Jesus, which is always the basis for fear. The fear that he will not be with us, for example. His gracious word "Lo, I am with you always. Even unto the end." A promise. We become afraid that this is one storm he didn't get into.

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There will be different manifestations of storms. The great thing though in all the storms is to recognize the difference is made when Christ is in the boat. It's tremendous to be able to go through a storm and recognize that Christ is there. It doesn't take any faith by the way, either to believe that a storm will gradually end. It just takes common sense. To know that the storm will end. It takes faith to believe that you're going to make it through. Faith to believe that the Lord will stop the storm. Whichever way he wants it to go. Sometimes he'll let you ride it through and sometimes he will stop it. That's where the faith element comes in. And the disciples were to have trusted him at this point.

There are all kinds of storms we have recognized right at the beginning. But in all the storms what a tremendous thing it is to recognize Christ as being present. How incredible it would be to face the storms of life without Christ in our boat! But because he is there the great advantage is we can always come to him. We may think sometimes he's sleeping but if we will go where he is and we will talk with him and say something to him we'll find he's saying something back. It may not be to the wind and the waves, Peace be still. It may be to our hearts he will say, Peace be still. He has so many ways of speaking. But the great thing about having the Lord in our lives is he is always there so that in the storm he can be talked with and he will answer and there is safe harbor on the other side.

We see, Lord, in this story the high winds of life which represent the circumstances that sometimes crash about us. We see the voices of desperation which represent, Lord, our great fears as mortal beings, as human beings in the midst of crises which seem to be far greater in power than we are. We also see, Lord, your unexpected word. The word, which you speak to circumstances and the word which you speak to us. I sense, Holy Spirit, that you are especially saying some things here to some in a deeper way today than perhaps others. You're saying something to the effect, You started off to follow me. You put your trust in me. You believed I would take you safely. That I would be your present guide through life. Now in the midst of the storm, which breaks about you, do not forget that I am with you. Remember that I am not outside the storm. See me in the storm. See me where you are at. See me besides you. Trust me. Come to me and hear me speak the word of peace to you. We confess that, Lord, in these moments. We confess that you do speak peace and fullness. That you make us recognize that all indeed is well. That we need not be troubled or anxious about anything. But that we can come from a position where there is great storm, as Mark tells us, to a position where there is great calm, great calm. We pray now, Lord Jesus, for the ministering peace, which you are bringing to our hearts in this very moment. To just really settle in deep upon us. May your peace be like dense fog that comes into the room, if possible a fog that we could breathe in right down within us. Which would not make us see the circumstances. But which would fill us with quiet and with a rest that you are here. We thank you for this. For the assurance of your presence. [end of tape]