

Sometimes He Calms the Storm
Mark 4:35-41
June 21, 2015

That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

When you read today's Gospel text, it's hard not to say, "There they go again." They, of course, being the disciples. Can you imagine the frustration that Jesus must have felt sometimes? These disciples had heard Jesus preach and teach, they'd seen the miracles he performed, and still their faith, on a scale of one to ten, would at best be a one. Now, if that sounds like too harsh of a judgment, let's take a look at the story.

The text opens with Jesus telling his disciples he wants to go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Now this wasn't an outrageous request since at least four of the disciples, Peter, Andrew, James, and John were accomplished fishermen and, therefore, accomplished sailors. Sailing across the Sea of Galilee was nothing new to them.

The unpredictability of the Sea of Galilee was also nothing new to them. They knew the possible risks in crossing this body of water. They knew that dangerous storms could come out of nowhere. However, the Lord said he wanted to go and they went. Good for them. We should be so willing to do what the Lord says.

But now the plot thickens. Part way across their worst fears become reality. A storm comes roaring down the valley that holds the Sea of Galilee. The calm water turns into a raging, man-eating monster.

So no one misses the real nature of their predicament, it's important to know that the Sea of Galilee is 8 miles wide and 14 miles long. This is no place to be when you're in a small boat with gale force winds. It's not hard to imagine the disciples fighting frantically against nature. You can almost see them taking down any sails that might have been up and rowing to keep the boat pointed into the wind so it wouldn't capsize.

This goes on for some time. When the disciples had done everything they could think of and they realize they were fighting a losing battle, someone gets the idea – let's take this problem to Jesus. We don't know why they waited so long to go to Jesus. But my guess is they thought they could handle this storm on their own. Anything here sound familiar?

Anyway, they go to Jesus and find Jesus asleep. This turns what should have been a prayer for help into a veiled accusation – “*Don’t you care if we drown?*” (Mk 4:38). The disciples must have reasoned that just because they thought Jesus was indifferent to their welfare that he really was indifferent to their welfare. Of course, this wasn’t true. Jesus got up and calmed the storm with just a word.

So, can you see what I meant at the beginning of the sermon when I said, “There they go again?” How many sermons would they have to hear, how many miracles would they have to see before the disciples would learn to trust Jesus? Jesus’ disciples had every reason in the world to feel safe and secure but they didn’t feel safe and secure – they panicked. God himself was with them in this storm and he was calm enough to sleep, but they panicked.

Those disciples were really something. But before we start throwing stones at the disciples, let me ask you something. Have you ever found yourself in that boat with your back to God and rowing hard against the storm? I’ve been there a time or two. Have you ever fought yourself into exhaustion against the misfortunes of life when real help was only a prayer away? I have.

When you finally did turn to God, was it on humble knees or was it with an angry fist held to the sky and a screamed, “Hey, don’t you care?” If you’re in the second group, you and I have sailed on the same cruise line.

I’m sure that at least once each one of us has tried to master life’s problems on our own and been angry at God when we failed. I’m sure of that because that’s what humans do. So why doesn’t God just step in and handle all our problems? Better yet, why doesn’t God just stop the problems from coming up in the first place? A little divine preventive maintenance or something like that.

God doesn’t shelter his children from life’s problems because, like any good parent, God loves his children. Ask yourself this, “Did Jesus know there was going to be a fierce storm before he had his disciples put to sea?” Of course, he did.

Jesus not only knew about the storm he also knew what the disciples would go through and he knew what he would do about it. Jesus loved his disciples so much that he allowed them to be in harm’s way. He allowed it in order to strengthen their faith. He gave them an object lesson on just whom they could trust in time of need.

It’s no different for you and me. God allows the slings and arrows of this sinful world to assault us so we can exercise the faith that he has given us through his Word and the sacraments.

That faith is like a muscle – the more it is exercised the stronger it grows. God knows that the stronger our faith the easier it will be for us to face life head-on and come out on top. God knows that a strong faith will stop the weight of the world from crushing us.

Now, in this story, Jesus calmed the storm the disciples had to face. But what about the times when it seems like the storm doesn't stop? What about the times when we don't see a happy ending? The job that is lost for good, the marriage that ends in divorce, the fire that destroys everything, the condition is terminal, the loved one that dies.

What's God doing when he doesn't make the storm stop? Where's God then? Where, right where he's always been, holding you with one arm and holding the storm off with the other. Sometimes a storm must be allowed to run its course because it suits God's divine will. But never does God abandon his child. The chorus of a song by Christian artist Scott Krippayne says it most aptly:

Sometimes he calms the storm with a whispered "peace be still"
He can settle any sea but it doesn't mean he will.
Sometimes he holds us close and lets the wind and waves go wild
Sometimes he calms the storm and other times he calms his child.

God loves us and wants us to be happy. God loves us so much that he allows the things that make our faith in him grow. A strong faith in the heart of a Christian gives birth to the joy of knowing that, as a child of God, all things will work for the good. And it's God's love for us that gives us the peace that passes all understanding.

When the storms of life hit, and they will hit, rest assured in the fact that your God has not forsaken you. When the wind is howling, when the waves are crashing, when the lightning is flashing all around, rest assured in the fact that you're not out in this storm alone. And when you're faced with an outcome that the world would call a loss, rest assured in the fact that you have a loving Father who knows just when to calm the storm and when to calm his child.