

Introduction

Originally, I had a different introduction prepared for my sermon this morning. It was a more humorous, personal story about me being filled with awe and fear as I met someone so talented as the great cellist, Yo-Yo Ma. But, I think it important to briefly address what's happened in the last 30 hours or so. Two wars have erupted within a day of one another. Questions, fears, and uncertainty especially arise as we wonder what will happen next in the Middle East. How many retaliatory attacks will there be on American troops or even civilians? Will Iran descend into chaos? Will this spark a regional conflict or violence across the globe? Of course, no one knows the answers but God. But, some wonder, "Where is God in all of this?"

God is still where he has always been, as the wise, good Sovereign Ruler over all. He is still and ever with us through his Son by the Spirit. Nothing that has happened or will happen is a surprise to him. He is working out his exact purposes through this current storm of conflicts. On Saturday, American and Israeli military might struck Iran, leaving many in fear and chaos. But to many who wanted to see the old oppressive regime toppled, there was also comfort and hope.

In today's passage, we will encounter might and power of a much different kind: **the unmatched power of Jesus that strikes both fear and comfort in our hearts.**

So far in Mark, we've seen Jesus demonstrate power over the spiritual realm when he exorcises demons from a possessed man (1:23-27). Jesus also has power over the human realm by healing sick people like the leper in 1:41. In our passage this morning, he will show power over the natural world.

And this passage has the **hallmarks of an eyewitness account.** Recall that Mark was Peter's scribe and here he is relaying Peter's recollection of this dramatic event. There are details that seem random or very specific, such as a reference to taking Jesus "as he was," the presence of other boats, the boat drawing water, Jesus sleeping on a cushion, that he was in the stern, and Jesus' actual words of rebuke to the wind and sea. But think about it, when we try to recall a dramatic event, we also have certain, seemingly random details etched into our memory.

So these intricate details are there because this is an eyewitness account. This means the gospels are not fabricated; they are not legend. When the gospels were written, there were

still plenty of other eyewitnesses who could have easily disputed the veracity of the gospel accounts. But there were and are no such challenges.¹

This is important because this means what Jesus did here *actually happened*. For, **if we want Jesus to be Lord of the storm, we need to know that he is truly Lord**. We need to know that the Jesus of yesterday for the disciples is the same Jesus of today for us.

So, to show this, I'll first walk us through this riveting account. We will examine the calm during the storm. Then, we'll go to the calm after the storm. And, finally we'll encounter the storm after the calm. But, after walking through the story, I want to draw three important lessons about who Jesus is so that you are encouraged to trust and love him through any and all of life's storms.

Calm during the Storm (vv35-38)

At the onset, in verse 35, on the evening of the same day Jesus taught all the parables in Mark 4, he tells the disciples to head to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. He doesn't expressly say why to do this, but it may very well be a continuation of his mission in 1:38, where he said, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out." The Sea of Galilee served as a borderland where Jewish and Gentile cultures were in close proximity to one another. It could be that Jesus wanted to cross the sea to preach to these Gentiles.

So, in verse 36, they leave the crowd and take Jesus with them in the boat. And Mark adds this very curious detail, the phrase, "*just as he was*." What does this mean? Well, recall at the beginning of this chapter, when Jesus began to teach beside the sea, "a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea" (v1). So, what the disciples likely did was that they took him in the same boat where he was without him going back to shore.²

Now, the action picks up in verse 37. "*And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling.*" A great windstorm arose, or in the NIV, a "furious squall came up." The Sea of Galilee lies nearly 700 feet below sea level; it is the lowest freshwater lake on earth. It is in a basin surrounded by hills and mountains. Close by towers Mt. Hermon, which rises 9,200 feet. So, within 30 miles, you have a 10,000

¹ <https://www.crossway.org/articles/setting-the-stage-for-the-four-gospels/>

² A literal translation of the Greek mentions that they took him "since he was in the boat."

foot gradient! The cold upper air from Mt. Hermon and the warm air rising from the sea produces hurricane-like weather for which the sea is famous. (Edwards, 148-49). Also, not only was this storm unusually great, it also happened at night, which was an unusual time. The sea was a rich source of fish and most fishing was done at night to avoid the worst winds during the day. But here, after evening has come, this tempest of a storm suddenly churns up. It's so bad that the waves are breaking into the boat and the boat is filling with water.

Forty years ago, an ancient fishing boat from the 1st century AD was discovered on the north-west shore of the Sea of Galilee. The boat measured 27 feet (8.2 meters) long, and 7.5 feet (2.3 meters) wide. So, it could probably fit on this stage. It was propelled by 4 rowers and had a total capacity of about 15 persons. But, it only had a maximum depth of 4.3 feet (a little taller than my youngest boy, Sammy). That's not high at all. So, no wonder the boat was filling fast.

And remember, that at least four of these disciples are professional fisherman (Mk 1:16-20). They've encountered storms before. But, nothing like this! And they must've been in serious trouble if they were going to ask a carpenter to help save them. Of course, he was more than a carpenter; he was their master. They had witnessed his power before. So, they at least had enough faith and sense to seek help from Jesus.

But in verse 38, we read: "*But he [Jesus] was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?'*" Here we have a **beautiful picture of the humanity of Jesus**. After a long day of teaching, he was utterly exhausted and fell into a deep sleep, even as water was splashing into the boat. Yes, Jesus is the Son of God, but he is also the son of Joseph and Mary. He is fully God and fully man.

But, Jesus' sleep here is not just due to exhaustion; it's also a **complete trust in God's sovereignty**. There's a storm raging all around, and yet our Lord is fast asleep knowing that his Father is watching over him. This is the calm during the storm. This is the only place in the gospels that specifically note Jesus is sleeping. And yet, what do the disciples do? They rebuke Jesus!

And can we really blame them? I remember when I was in Hawaii celebrating my tenth anniversary with Stacy that we went out on a two-person kayak. We probably weren't 100 feet away from the shore when the waves started to get choppy and the clouds were dark and grey. Our little kayak was bobbing up and down pretty hard (at least to me!). I looked

back at land and thought, “We need to turn around and head back now!” Even with life jackets on, the prospect of falling into the ocean was plenty scary.

Here, the disciples have no life jackets. They’re probably desperately trying to scoop out water with buckets and trying to keep their boat from capsizing. It’s dark, it’s windy, the waves are crashing...it must be utterly terrifying. And they see Jesus calmly asleep, so little wonder they cry out, “*Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?*” They rebuke Christ because in their moment of terror, they forgot all the prior miracles he performed, his power, and yes, even his care.

But, despite this stinging rebuke, the first of three in this passage, Jesus in his humility tolerates this language from them.

Calm after the Storm (v39)

At this cliffhanger moment, what happens next? It’s the calm after the storm. Let’s read verse 39: “*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.*” This is absolutely extraordinary. Without any need to call on a higher power or utter an incantation or a spell, Jesus simply speaks and the elements immediately obey him.

Do you recall that vivid scene in the first LOTR movie, *Fellowship of the Ring*, when Gandalf faces the Balrog alone on the Bridge of Khazad-dum? It’s an epic scene of evil against good. As the Balrog seeks to cross the bridge to attack the fellowship, Gandalf, with his staff in hand, says, “I am a servant of the Secret Fire, wielder of the flame of Anor. The dark fire will not avail you, flame of Udûn. Go back to the Shadow! You shall not pass!” Someone as powerful as Gandalf still had to tie himself to his staff, to the Secret Fire, the flame of Anor.

But here, **Jesus need not invoke a higher power because he is power.** He rebukes the storm, the second rebuke in this passage, saying “Peace! Be still!” The grammar in the original Greek for this phrase points not just to a one-time silence, but an ongoing one. Jesus is essentially saying, “Be silent, and stay silent!” He commands the wind and sea like a parent speaks to a child. And they obey him; the winds stop and the sea becomes eerily calm and still as glass. This is no mere coincidence; it is divine power at work.

Storm after the Calm (vv40-41)

And after the “great calm” sets in, Jesus turns and utters the third rebuke in this passage, this time to his own disciples in verse 40: “*He said to them, ‘Why are you so afraid? Have*

you still no faith?” This and the last verse are the most interesting ones of this passage and elevate its meaning from merely “Jesus is Lord of the storm and thus can calm the storms of your heart.” Don’t you see how Jesus’ calming the storm actually *created* a storm in the hearts of the disciples? This is the storm after the calm. No, the true meaning of today’s passage is that **“Jesus is Lord of all, who should strike both fear and comfort in our hearts.”**

Jesus’ question here is not meant to extract information from the disciples. No, he wanted to make them self-aware of their weak faith. It was their weak faith on display during the storm and also afterward, as dramatically shown in verse 41. Instead of the disciples high-fiving Jesus for delivering them or giving him a hug or even expressing gratitude, what do they do? They have “great fear” and wonder with panic, *“Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”*

The word for “great” here is the Greek word *mega*. It is used three times in this passage in conjunction with the three rebukes. In verse 37, a *mega*-windstorm arose, leading to the disciples rebuking Jesus. But upon Jesus’ rebuke of the storm, there was not just calm but a *mega*-calm. Jesus’ power is so great (so *mega*) that he transforms a mega-storm into a mega-calm with just a few words. And then Jesus rebukes his disciples and they are filled with a *mega*-fear.

It evokes a passage earlier in Peter’s life when after a long night of no fish, he reluctantly agrees to cast his net where Jesus commands him and he catches a record number of fish. How did Peter react? Did he say, “Jesus! We could be great business partners; all you need to do is tell me where to lay my nets and I’ll do the rest; we could split profits and have a splendid gig.” No, he says in Luke 5:8, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” At that moment, **Peter realized he was in the presence of divine holiness.**

The same thing happens here. You would have thought Peter and the other disciples would have received a big boost in their faith upon seeing Jesus calm the storm. But they responded with *greater fear*, a mega-fear. They realized that what’s more frightening than the natural power of the storm is supernatural power. **What’s worse than having a storm outside your boat is God in your boat.**

Lesson #1: Jesus is Lord of All

And that is the first lesson we derive from this passage: Jesus is Lord of all. The majesty, holiness, and divinity of Christ is magnified in this episode. The disciples almost lost their bodily lives and were scared, but then they realized they were in the presence of he who could destroy both body and soul and were petrified.

But, the storm presented the disciples an opportunity to see Jesus **as who he is, as majestic and Lord of all**. In the Old Testament, wind and waters symbolized hostile forces over which God prevails.³ And Jesus is the one who calms the waves and stills the waters. By Jesus' mere words, nature obeys, because he is God (cf Gen 1:2) and that is why, as the author of Hebrews puts it, "he upholds the universe by the word of his power" (Heb 1:3).

By stilling the storm, he is bringing order to disorder, he is overcoming the forces of evil and sin that were unleashed by the Fall and Satan himself. When Jesus rebuked the storm, he used the same Greek word that he used to exorcise demons. The unusually fierce storm could be seen as demonic in nature. The storm tried to stop our Lord from preaching the good news to other regions; it tried to vanquish the Son of God.

But it failed because Jesus' time had not yet come. Instead, like lightning flashes during the storm that briefly illuminate everything, Jesus allows us to catch a glimpse of where we're headed and that the Light of the World, the Holy One of God, leads us.

Jesus' power in this passage is over nature, but **it is a holy power; it is of God**. That puts Jesus in a class by himself. In fact, it is because the disciples have no category for someone like Jesus, who is both truly God and truly man, that they are exceedingly fearful. As R.C. Sproul puts it, "[W]hat the disciples experienced that night on the sea was ultimate xenophobia—the fear of the ultimate Stranger, of One who was unlike every other man" (p. 93).

Beloved, do you have a similar fear of Jesus? Maybe the reason some of you don't treat Jesus with the reverence due his name is that you do not fear him. Yes, there are passages talking about how he is meek, mild, humble, and compassionate. And yes, in Mark we will see that Jesus came not to be served, but to serve. But, perhaps you cling too much to this

³ Ex 14:21; Job 12:15, 28:25; Ps 33:7, 65:7, 77:16, 107:23-30, 147:18; Prov 30:4; Amos 4:13; Nah 1:3.

“softer” version of Christ, which leads you to treat his commands lightly and domesticate him into a safe Savior.

But, Jesus is not safe. Yes, we are safe with him, but he is not to be tamed. He’s not just our shepherd, our friend, our brother, all of which are true. **But above all, he is Lord!** Let us never forget how much higher he is than us, how much greater he is than us, how different he is from us. Let us not treat Jesus like a genie, expecting him to fulfill our wishes, or like an insurance policy or an ATM.

Take account of how you follow Jesus on a daily basis. Do you truly place him at the center of your life and decisions? Is it your heartfelt aim to bring him honor and glory? If not, repent of your failure to do these things. Resolve through prayer to exalt him as Lord, as one who is surely worthy of your life and worship.

Lesson #2: Jesus is Faithful

But that’s not all that this passage teaches us. We learn that Jesus is God and holy, but the second lesson we need to internalize is that **he is faithful**.

Remember that the disciples got caught up in this storm because they were *listening* to Jesus. It was *Jesus’* idea to cross the sea to the other side. **Beloved, sometimes when we obey Jesus, he leads us into storms.** He can allow suffering and still love you. He can allow you to go through trials and have his good purposes for doing so. He can lead you into a storm to build your trust in him.

We can definitely relate to the disciples’ plea to Jesus to save them. We’ve all been there when life is so hard and we might feel God is asleep or not there. But, had the disciples realized that Jesus allowed them to go through the storm, they would have no right to panic. **The cure for fear is faith and trust in Jesus.** It is fixing your eyes on Christ and clinging to his promises and recalling who he truly is.

In yet another episode of Peter’s life in Matthew 14, Jesus is walking on water as the disciples battle yet another set of waves and wind. They cry out and think Jesus is a ghost, but Christ reassures them “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” Peter then says, “Lord, if it’s you, tell me to come to you on the water.” And as Peter miraculously walks on water toward Jesus, he is fine as long as he fixes his eyes on Christ.

But, as soon as he sees the wind and waves, he fears and begins to sink. He cries out, “Lord, save me!” Jesus doesn’t stand there as Peter sinks and lecture him about why he should

have kept his gaze upon him. No, he immediately grabs his arm and then says something very similar to the disciples in this passage, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”

Beloved, in your storms of life, do not doubt the leading of Christ. Jesus is saying: “If you knew I love you and that I am faithful, you can be calm and be comforted even during the storm.” Jesus told the disciples to go to the other side, and he brought them there. **When you listen to him, he will get you to the other side too**, even if it means going through a storm.

Personally, I am not sure why I’ve suffered through a storm of sorts with two back injuries within 4 months of each other. I have sometimes wondered if my obedience to Christ to enter the ministry resulted in Jesus leading me through this particular storm. Either way, this past Tuesday, right before my surgery, when I was nervous, I recalled this truth that Jesus will get me to the other side. And I was calm.

Perhaps you’re really pressed right now, and you don’t see a way to pay the bills or find a job even as you earnestly pray to him...the financial pressure is mounting. Take heart, Jesus, in his power, will bring you through the storm to the other side. Perhaps your relationship with a friend or family member is strained to the point of almost breaking because you want to be faithful to Christ. Take heart, Jesus, in his good timing, will bring you through the storm to the other side. Perhaps as you’ve walked with Jesus, your physical health is failing, causing depression, or your mental or emotional health is deteriorating with no end in sight. Take heart, Jesus in his compassion, will take you through the storm to the other side.

I’m not saying that you’ll necessarily get what you want. I’m not advocating the prosperity gospel or affirming the name it-claim it movement. Far from it! What I am saying is that as you follow Jesus, he might cause you to suffer so as to trust in him more. **And by his way, in his timing, and for his purposes, he will lead you through the storm to the other side.** In the storm, we often don’t know what we’re doing but Christ knows exactly what he’s doing.

What’s more important to our Lord is not protecting you from the storm, but **seeing his faithfulness in the storm**. He comforts us, even as we fear him as God, by giving us peace that transcends understanding; he gives us himself. His presence in the storm is our calm and peace. Such is our marvelous Lord. **He is so faithful and merciful that we can, like he did, even sleep during our storms.**

Peter learned that lesson. Though he was freaking out during this storm in Mark 4, much later in Acts 12, he was asleep in prison after being arrested by King Herod. The night before he was to go to trial, which was likely going to be a kangaroo court, and very possibly face execution, Peter was sleeping between the two soldiers guarding him. Peter learned to trust in God's sovereignty, like his master, and remained calm because he knew Jesus would take him through the storm to the other side.

Lesson #3: Jesus is Our Loving Savior

But eventually at some point, that "other side," will actually be the other side of our life; which is our death. But for those of you who trust in Christ, death is not your final destination. No, it is the glorious beginning of being in the joyful presence of our Lord. Even in the face of death, he can take you to the other side, to eternal life.

You see, somewhere else in the Bible, there too was a storm that caused people on a boat to be terrified, crying out to their gods. There was also a person who fell asleep during the storm, and the calming of the storm which caused great fright. This person was Jonah, and Mark must have been thinking of his story. But, unlike Jonah, who was running away from God, Jesus restores us to God. Jonah prayed in the belly of the fish and realized that salvation belongs to the Lord (2:9).

But this is our third and final lesson: Jesus, the greater and true Jonah, is our Lord and our loving Savior! Salvation belongs to him. He went into the ultimate storm of eternal death and justice for our sins because of his great (*mega*) love for us. And one day, he will calm all storms on earth, including conflicts like the ones that erupted a couple days ago, and also all storms in the universe. Beloved, if you truly know that Jesus loves you so, you will be able to endure through any of the smaller storms you face in life.

We echo the disciples' cry, "*Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?*" But, that's because we and the disciples forgot that Jesus was in the boat precisely because he cared for them. And Jesus cares for us. They would learn that his entire incarnational life was for them. And his life is for us as well. On the cross, he would die for them so that they could be reconciled to God. And he died for you and me, so that we could be reconciled to God. The Jesus who was there for them yesterday is the same Jesus who is here for us today.

Conclusion

So, church, I want to end with another passage of Scripture that I'm pretty sure was in Mark's mind when crafting this account of Jesus calming the storm. He was thinking of Jonah, but also Psalm 107, in particular verses 23 to 32. There, the author speaks of ships on the sea, and the Lord stirring up a tempest causing the courage of those on the ships to melt away as they try in vain to save themselves. But, let me read to you verses 28-32:

- 28 Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble,
and he brought them out of their distress.
- 29 He stilled the storm to a whisper;
the waves of the sea were hushed.
- 30 They were glad when it grew calm,
and he guided them to their desired haven.
- 31 Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love
and his wonderful deeds for mankind.
- 32 Let them exalt him in the assembly of the people
and praise him in the council of the elders.

God brings the sailors "to their desired haven," but our desired haven is wherever Jesus takes us because there is no better place to be than where he leads, even if it's through a storm. As Peter says, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68-69).

"Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" It is Jesus of Nazareth, the Holy One of God. Who then is this? It is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday for the disciples as he is for us today. And echoing Psalm 107, let us give thanks to him for his unfailing love. Let us exalt him in this assembly of God's people. Let us pray.