

NRS Mark 4:35 - 41

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side."

And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him.

A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped.

But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.

He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"

And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

If you have ever spent time around the sea – you might know just how scary it is to be in a boat with a storm on top of you – with the waves pounding. If you have a motor you can give the throttle enough speed to make it up the crest of the wave and then cut back the engine as the bow of the boat falls down into the valley between the waves – and as the next wave hits – you can give it more gas again to make the bow rise up to meet the next wave.

But the disciples didn't have a motor...they had oars, There was no way for them to tackle the oncoming waves with the speed they needed. So, as their bow went down off the crest of one wave, the next wave broke over it and poured water into the boat which sat lower and lower in the water. It was a catastrophic situation – they were sinking – and there was no stopping it!

And this is when they woke up Jesus - who was in the back sleeping on a cushion - a pillow – seemingly oblivious to the violence all around him – to what they were enduring!

It's interesting that in Mark's version of the story – the disciples don't ask Jesus to save them as in other versions.

Instead they wake him to voice their complaint - "Don't you care that we are dying?"

Put another way...Aren't you going to get up? We thought we were in this together.... We're out here because you told us to go to the other side!

Certainly Jesus was tired....It has been a busy day for Jesus and the disciples. Crowds follow Jesus wherever he goes -wanting healing – wanting to hear him speak. Back in chapter 3, Jesus told the disciples to have a boat ready so he could get away if the crowd started to crush him. Now he makes a speedy exit. Evening is falling, but four of the disciples are professional fishermen – skilled at handling boats on the water.

They must have been going for a while – since Jesus had time to get settled in the back of the boat (in the stern) and fall asleep.

But then it happened – “a fierce windstorm” hit; it could also be translated as a “whirlwind” or “hurricane” – wind powerful enough to kick the waters into raging waves. Even the fishermen could not handle these conditions.

Have you ever been there? Going where Jesus told you to go – out in the boat - thinking you had the skill you needed to get where you were going – and then out of no where – you are getting hit with wave after wave of relentless pounding? Chaos threatening to overtake you, overtake your mission? Even to take your life?

Things like the economic crisis – church budgets in jeopardy with church members not being able to give as much money as they have in the past...or parents' health issues – children's health issues – our own health issues – deaths of loved ones – deaths of relationships

And you are so far out in the water that you can no longer see the shore. You've made a commitment to go forward – you can't turn back. You know Jesus is with you. You know this is where he said you were to be, but it's getting dark. It's hard to see the waves coming!

Of course the disciples are scared! They know they will die if the boat sinks. They are too far from shore to swim back. All the other boats on the water are in danger, too. No one is there who can come rescue them.

I find it comforting that as soon as the disciples woke up Jesus he ignores their comment, assesses the situation, and takes immediate action.

Right away he rebukes the wind and sea, but he does not rebuke the disciples. There is nothing in the passage to suggest that he had anger toward them; there is nothing to suggest he is irritated at them for waking him. (He will – after all – later wake them up when they are in Gethsemane – Jesus will want their conscious presence with him.)

Jesus was not upset that they woke him. In fact, I believe that Jesus expects them to call on him – he wants them to turn to him when they

experience hardships. He is in relationship with them - just like we would wake a sleeping roommate or spouse if we had chest pains during the night – and thought our life was in danger. This is an emergency!

Yet – the emergency does not faze Jesus. Jesus is about as worried about this storm situation as we would be about getting a dog to quit barking. The verb used here (in the Greek) actually means to muzzle. Jesus muzzles the wind with just a command and then (perhaps still groggily) and turns to the disciples and maybe still yawning says “Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

The word here for afraid means fear linked with timidity and lack of courage. Why are you acting cowardly? Don't you get it yet?

- Faith in the book of Mark – is more than intellectual conviction. It is trust in God that goes hand in hand with bold action. In Calvin's commentary on this passage, he says that fear is not a sin in itself unless the fear is so big that it causes us to lose our faith. Many fears (he says) can actually cause our faith to increase.
- In this story, the disciples are not showing a faith like Mark talks about. The disciples here do not trust God. They don't even ask Jesus to pray to God on their behalf. They have already given up. They don't say we will die, or we are about to die. They say, “We are dying!” They have no hope.
- Yet, just when we think the story is about to end with the disciples being saved and the danger gone, we get one more verse that turns the whole story on its head. It is at this point of the story when all is well that the disciples experience not fear, but terror.

In v. 41 after Jesus has calmed the storm the Greek translation says, “They feared a great fear.” Or, “They feared exceedingly.” Or “They were terrified.” It's a much greater fear than they experienced when they thought they were dying.

After Jesus orders the wind to stop and the waves to be calm, the disciples realize that Jesus is not just their teacher. They realize that Jesus is exhibiting divine powers. Jesus' other miracles (healings, and exorcisms) were things that magicians could do through trickery, but this was so much more and the disciples knew that what Jesus has just done (showing command over nature), only God can do.

There is only one other place in the New Testament where this same exact phrase describing the disciple's fear is used. It is in Luke 2:9.

Maybe the words sound familiar:

“In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. They were “filled with awe.” They were trembling.

These disciples, who were with Jesus day and night (who he had just spent private time with – explaining the meaning of his parables on the Kingdom of God – the ones who saw him heal the crowds – the ones who knew him best), these disciples saw a glimpse of the kingdom in Jesus’ actions and suddenly shared the same emotions as the shepherds out in the field who were surprised and overcome by God’s glory breaking through – out of the blue - the splendor of the heavenly hosts announcing Jesus’ birth.

This one verse, one phrase, turns the whole story around.

The disciples are terrified in this story not because they thought they were going to die, but because they see that Jesus has the power to save them. They are terrified because in this one moment, their whole world has changed because they now have seen a glimpse of who Jesus is!

Now they are beginning to get it and they tremble with awe in the presence of the one whose identity they thought they knew. And in this fear their faith grows.

I’ve heard stories from people about how they came to know God’s power in a new way - about how their faith grew as they came to know, more and more, the identity of this Jesus – the one we thought we knew.

Their eyes get big with wonder sometimes misty as they remember their experience....

“A Presbyterian pastor told me of a woman who was working at the hospital as a chaplain – She went in to see an inmate – who was hospitalized – had surgery – he was an angry young big man – who was in jail for a violent crime – he grunted to people – hoping they would leave him alone – but this petite woman in her 60’s – felt led to go to his room even though she didn’t really want to -- she said a prayer to herself as she went in to sit beside his bed because she knew she didn’t know what to say – she knew he didn’t want her there – she had read on his chart that his mother had given him up as a baby – he had been in foster homes growing up –

This chaplain had given up her own baby for adoption as a teenager – She sat there in silence....But then she realized words were coming out of her mouth –

She said, “Your Mother loved you.”

“What?”

“Your mother loved you.”

He broke into tears and wept like a baby. And she did, too. They spoke for over an hour.

The chaplain later said the words came not from her – but from God. The experience overwhelmed her as much as it did the inmate. They both experienced healing. They both were in awe of what had just happened.

Or the story of the middle aged woman who was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and was expected to live not more than a year. She went to the session of her church for them to lay their hands on her and pray for healing. She clung to the promises of the bible and her fight against her cancer became the congregation’s faith awakening as they clung to the promises of the bible with her, as they cried with her, and as they prayed for healing with her. When she returned to her doctor to check her condition, the doctor was amazed that her cancer was no longer visible on the scans. He had no explanation, but she did. She lived through the year and then went on to live six more years.

We, like the disciples, think we know who Jesus is. After all we read stories about him. We’ve prayed asking him to intercede for us or for those we love.

But sometimes, we are still not prepared for the things that happen in our lives along the way when the waves are crashing in over our boat.

Jesus calls us to the deep waters without motors, without the Coast Guard.

Jesus calls us to places where our skills will fall short in ways we did not anticipate; places where the waves keep coming. Where we know that we are perishing – we are dying.

Our faith starts us rowing – but it is our encounters with the Holy One when we are out on the waters that make us tremble like the shepherds and enable us to begin to believe with the bold faith like Mark talks about - the faith that gives us the courage to move toward seemingly hopeless situations with a confident trust in God even though our abilities fall short.

You see, the disciples accused Jesus of not caring about their predicament, but the one whose birth the angel announced to the shepherds – this Jesus – does care and does know what is at stake for us (much more than even we do).

And isn't it ironic that It is precisely because he cares so much that he comes to us and rides in the boat with us, and that in his humanity he has to catch up on his sleep when he can.

It is because he loves us so much that he comes not just to quiet storms, but to endure human suffering. To be beaten and to bleed, to hang on a cross, to die, to give his whole self because without him, without his grace, he knows that we are perishing! Even when the water is smooth and we think we are safe, he knows we are perishing!

We think we know this Jesus. But as we go forward, as we dare to step forward in faith, as we row into the deep water beyond our abilities to where God calls us:

Expect to experience God's glory breaking through the realities around us,

Expect to tremble and be filled with great awe like the disciples (and the shepherds). Expect to find yourself wondering, "Who *is* this Jesus?"
