

Raging Storm/Peaceful Heart

FCC/SWC

Mark 4: 35-41 (Jesus Calms the Storm)

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This story found in all of the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, & Luke) is about as famous as another story found in the OT about another man of God who fell asleep in a raging storm. Can you think of his name? Jonah! Hear some of that story: Remember that Jonah was hiding in the boat to escape from God's instruction. God had told Jonah to travel to (extra points for this..) NINEVEH to tell the people to stop sinning or they would suffer the wrath of God. Remember? And Jonah was tossed out of the boat (at his own request) by the other men in the boat. Jonah had three days inside the belly of a "big fish" to think it all through. Three is a very big number in our Bible. We, like Jews and Muslims, are known as "People of the Book."

And in our "Book" there are repetitions of lessons and similarities of stories and messages that get said in many different ways. Jonah got taught a lesson after falling asleep on his boat. The disciples got taught a lesson after Jesus fell asleep on his boat. What to think about all this? You can read commentary about the Sea of Galilee, how it is a fresh water lake, more than a sea. It was therefore very important for the livelihood and good health of the villages surrounding it. The boat was very small and one like it (if not actually it) from the first century CE can be found in a museum in a place called Geneseret. It would probably have held about twelve or so men but not more than that. So, you can see why they would have been pretty freaked out by the storm. Compare and contrast the good men here and the good men in the story of Jonah. Jonah knew it was he who was the problem and even told the men to throw him overboard. Jesus, in contrast, asked the men why they lacked faith. Then he said very simply, "Peace, be still." Calm waters. Happy fishermen. There was probably some nervous laughter, maybe a tear of gratitude here and there, certainly awe at the person of Jesus.

The Bible is interesting, fascinating even, to regard as literal story. Actually, it is full of all kinds of literature: folk tales, letters, poetry, and parables. But to draw the story into present day, we need to go metaphorical. Metaphysical. Allegorical. That's the turn I'd like to take with you in our little boat this morning.

In our faith we regard Jesus as the Second Person of the Trinity. He is the closest thing on earth to God that we have, because he shows us the character of God. So, in this story and all our stories, Jesus represents God. He is God to us. Let's look at this from a People/God/Storm/Peace perspective. I could draw a diagram, but I can't draw very well and don't have a flip chart today. But consider the four elements of the story. People. We are the people; we are the disciples. We have literal storms but more often we have storms that develop from things like misunderstandings, intolerance of others, unfounded suspicions and fears, wounds from the past, things like that. All these things obscure the light of God (innocence and trust, wonder, etc.) and the storms rage, to varying degrees. It's a little choppy, but we say we can handle it. We can count on ourselves, and boy, do people do that in the good old US of A, especially here in Yankee country. Fiercely independent, never wanting anyone to know of our troubles, our sorrows, our doubts or our fears. We say in one way or another, "I can handle this. I've done it before, I'll do it again." And many times, we do.

But in our faith, especially on Sundays we talk about opening our hearts and minds. It's pretty talk; it's poetic, but if we don't really do it, it's all words. It usually takes something big, like a mega storm, like a raging sea, to have us admit to needing help. We have faith in God, to be sure, but most of the time, we say (consciously or otherwise), "I got this, God. You take it easy. In fact, why don't you just take a nap over here in the corner of the boat." Then it gets stormy. The waves are rising, water is getting into the boat. WATER IS GETTING INTO THE BOAT. There are emails flying. There are people not speaking to one another, or worse. Someone beloved dies or leaves us. Someone walks out the door and we don't even get an explanation. We are off balance. MORE WATER IS GETTING INTO THE BOAT. And so, NOW, we want the LORD TO WAKE UP. Why aren't you saving us? Do you want US TO DROWN???

Over the years we have a number of storms. Our culture goes through enormous storms. As individuals and as cultures, through "many dangers, toils and snares" we have all already come. Some of us seem to live in a constant storm; the storm's the norm, so to speak. Maybe you have known someone like this. Personally, or on the national stage. Our character and our personality reflect these storms, unless we learn to practice peace. I'm asserting today that peace is a practice, an inner practice that has great reward, if we choose it.

French mathematician and religious philosopher whose birth anniversary was yesterday), Blaise Pascal is quoted as saying, "All of humanity's problems stem from an inability to sit quietly in a room alone." Think about that for a moment. We are not alone but let's sit quietly. How is it for you? Is your mind peaceful? Active? Impatient? Irritated?

Around us is the Sea of Galilee, my friends. It is in a chaotic state. It is a raging sea. As we breathe in and out, as we forgive and consider God's power and compassion for us all, might we begin to do the work of sitting still, so that we might, like Jesus in the storm, say to the raging seas, "Peace be still?" Might we have his peaceful heart to calm the world around us? Let us pray.