

“The Calm Amidst the Storm”—Mark 4:39-41

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “The Calm Amidst the Storm”, is Mark 4:39-41. Jesus *awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?” And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?”* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

“God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” You may have heard this prayer or even seen a copy of it on plaques and cards. It’s called the Serenity Prayer. It is a favorite prayer of many people because it expresses an attitude they wish they could constantly reflect in their lives. It speaks about having peace and contentment while dealing with stressful situations which make life seem out of control, accompanied by a desire to respond properly to the changes we encounter.

It’s amazing how much we would like to be in control of everything that affects our lives. Spouses spend years trying to change each

other into the spouse each thinks the other should be. Sometimes government regulations are used by “we the people” to control others for selfish, self-serving purposes. Many strive to get in control of bad habits, be in control of their free time, and the list goes on and on. Actually, being a “control freak” with “control issues” who have a difficult time giving up control reflects that we truly are our mother and father’s children. Eve & Adam wanted control to be like God and sin took charge of our relationships with “control issues” on all levels (cf. Genesis 3:6-13).

In our text we hear of Jesus’ disciples feeling completely out of control while crossing the Sea of Galilee and encountering a *great windstorm*. Since it is impossible to have complete control over weather patterns, this truly is a situation which is beyond one’s control. This particular weather pattern provided Jesus with the opportunity to teach His disciples a lesson about faith.

In many respects we can see ourselves in the midst of this situation at various points in our own lives. Notice the similarities between this voyage and the “voyages” of our daily lives:

- It appears the storm came upon them unexpectedly (cf. Matthew 8:24 NIV). Many times those experiences which we consider “storms” in our lives come in the form of trials, afflictions, problems, temptations and so forth. They too seem to come

upon us unexpectedly and suddenly, especially, it seems, when we are totally unprepared for them. Not only do they challenge our living but our faith in the midst of how we choose to deal or cope with these “storms” in life.

- Matthew 8:24 tells us *that the boat was being swamped by the waves. Just as their boat was . . . filling up with water* there are times when our problems and circumstances look very overwhelming to us. From all appearances and analysis it feels as if they are going to completely overtake us and even drown us. Satan gets a foothold and tempts us to fall into the sin of idolatry by worry and manipulation in an effort to control our destiny in desperation. This was reflected in the disciples’ question to Jesus: *Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?* (cf. Mark 4:38)
- Notice the intensity of the storm—it was a **great windstorm**. Have you ever felt as if your problems are the worst ones in the world **at the moment**? Satan can get a foothold in this feeling to lead you to despair—like there’s no way out and no hope. Anyone who’s been in a furious storm knows what it’s like to feel totally out of control and helpless. King David used this picture in his struggle—his “storm” if you will. He prayed in Psalm 69:1-3 →

Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me. I am weary with my crying out; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God.

There is one other interesting detail to note throughout this storm—**Jesus slept through the whole thing**. Jesus *was in the stern, asleep on a cushion*. Have you ever gone through trying circumstances when it seemed like Jesus was “sleeping?” Did you feel He was far away and not doing something to help you? Satan can get a foothold here as well to lead you to doubt God’s promises of protection and help. In the midst of fear, desperation and discouragement where do you find the calm amidst your “storms” of life?

It is only natural to be fearful in the midst of situations which seem so out of control in our lives. However, Jesus attributed His disciples’ fear to their lack of faith when He said to them in verse 40 of our text: *Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?* Throughout His earthly ministry they had witnessed His divine power over sickness and demons, revealing Himself to be God’s promised Messiah and Savior. The challenge for them and us is to trust He Who has the power over what is out of our control in the midst of our natural

human emotions.

While the natural human emotion of fear can serve to protect us in dangerous situations, the devil can easily turn it into a self-centered perspective where we are so focused only on our inabilities that we are disabled into inactivity. We take our focus off of Christ and place it on the storm swirling around us. Remember what happened to Peter during another voyage on the sea of Galilee? Jesus came walking on the water to His disciples who were in the boat. When they cried out in fear thinking Jesus was a ghost, *immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid."* And Peter answered him, *"Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water."* (cf.

Matthew 14:27-28)

In the midst of his fear Peter gave the devil a foothold as expressed in the phrase: "Lord, if it is You . . ." This is classic revelation that something is coming from the devil. When the devil tempted Jesus he repeatedly said, "If you are the Son of God . . ." while placing something before his eyes to lead Him into sin (cf.

Matthew 4:3,6). Those who crucified Jesus used the same phrase: *"If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross."* (cf. Matthew 27:40)

The devil uses the environment around us—like the storm—as a catalyst for our own sinful nature to take our focus off of Christ, thus leading us into the sin of unbelief. Look what happened with Peter. In

Matthew 14:29-31 Jesus said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me.” Jesus immediately reached out His hand and took hold of him, saying to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”

The lack of faith reaction shows that at this point His disciples didn't have faith and confidence in Jesus as **Lord of all**. It is reflected in the question of Jesus in verse 40 of our text: “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?” It is also reflected in their question in verse 41—“Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?” This confidence came later after receiving the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

Jesus can bring calm in the midst the “storms” of your life today as you trust in His Lordship over your life **and** everything that affects your life. He never promised you a life this side of heaven without its “storms.” It will be filled with struggles, problems and spiritual battles on all levels. However, He has promised you a calm which can only be experienced in relationship with Him where faith takes your focus off of your inability to control the uncontrollable by coming to Jesus Who is Lord of all. Philippians 4:6-7 tells you: *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace*

of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Psalm 46:10 puts it this way: Be still, and know that I am God.

Years ago I remember encountering a man who had just experienced the death of his twin brother, and that by suicide. Upon giving him my condolences he responded: “We’re just trusting in the Lord.” I responded with the typical cliché: “I guess that’s all we can do.” He immediately looked me in the eye and said: “No. I could go out and get drunk. I could beat up my kids because I’m so hurt and angry. I could treat others with disrespect and dump all my hurt and anger on them. But I choose to look to Jesus.”

When we take our attention off of God’s controlling power in the midst of the “storms” of our lives it leads to hopelessness and wrong coping mechanisms in the face of our inability to control the situation. This man’s words expressed his faith in Jesus as Lord in the midst of the “storm” he was facing in his grief. That’s what the Holy Spirit produces in you. Our text records the disciples going from being afraid to being *filled with great fear* in awe of the power of our Lord Jesus Christ!

This is the impact of God’s wonderful grace in your life: Jesus showed His disciples that He was still in control of the situation **on their behalf** even though they weren’t aware of it. In fact, He is so in

control that He produces the *great calm* for you by taking control of your sin of idolatry in worry and providing for your complete forgiveness of that sin! By the power of the Spirit of God in you, given at your baptism and every day through His Word, you can trust in Jesus, recognizing His controlling power over all the “stormy” circumstances in life. **When you do, you’ll experience a peace which only God can give you—truly “the calm amidst the storm.”**

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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