

## Sermon for Proper 7, Year B

The Text: Mark 4:35-41

Some of you may have travelled on the sea before, having pleasant experiences on cruise liners, or sailing in yachts. Perhaps some of you have had a not so pleasant voyage too; one where it was turbulent, causing anxiety and discomfort.

It wasn't such a good voyage for the disciples, that day they were making their way across the Sea of Galilee. A furious storm had suddenly whipped up. Bear in mind that they weren't on a large luxury liner, but a modest fishing boat, vulnerable and exposed, without modern technology or means of rescue. All they can do is hang on for dear life in the face of such ferocity, frantic for help in this frightening situation. What's more, they notice that Jesus is asleep in the stern, even though waves crash over the boat, filling it with water. The disciples wake him, shouting above the howling wind and crashing waves: "Teacher! Don't you care if we drown?" There's rising desperation and terror in those words, for their very lives are at risk.

How would you have gone out there in the boat on the Sea of Galilee that day? What does the storm represent for you? Is it symbolic of something more than a literal tempest? Is it a crisis in life—the loss of a loved one, the sudden onset of chronic and debilitating illness, an unwanted scan result, a terrible accident, family division, redundancy, a complete change in life direction that we neither foresaw nor wanted, pain and hurt caused by another, or the tumult of a restless heart that has no peace?

They can all be storms in life. But I wonder if the storm in the text represents an even greater ferocity that Mark wants us to see.

In the creation mythologies of the ancient world, evil was usually portrayed as a watery chaos monster or tumultuous sea needing to be restrained by the gods. For example, in the Ancient Babylonian creation epic, the *Ennuma Elish* [note to reader: pronounced 'E-nume-ah Ay-

leesh] Tiamat [pronounced: Tee-ah-mat] is the goddess of the ocean, the monstrous embodiment of prehistoric chaos. She mates with Apsu, [pronounced 'Ap-soo'] the god of fresh water, to produce a whole group of gods, who are engaged in a fierce struggle for supremacy, warring against each other with escalating violence and retribution. Eventually, a god named Marduk [pronounced 'Mar-dook'] is selected as the champion of the other gods and he defeats and kills Tiamat, cutting her body in half to form the heavens and the earth, restoring order.

In the Genesis creation account, there is also the presence of chaos, or disorder. In Genesis we hear that “In the beginning...the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” Then God speaks creation into existence: “Let there be...and it was so.” God effortlessly brings order out of disorder, by speaking his ordered world into being.

There, on the stormy Sea of Galilee, the disciples are in the boat together with the God of the universe who spoke creation into being, and who—the writer to the Hebrews says—still sustains all things by his powerful word. Jesus *does* care if they disciples drown. So he got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. The storm instantly obeyed Jesus’ command. By speaking his powerful word that does what he says, Jesus brings peace. They asked each other: “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”

As the storms of life rage around us it may seem sometimes that Jesus is asleep and indifferent to the perils around us. “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” was the disciples’ urgent and anxious cry. At times it can be ours also. But Jesus does care. He cares so much for you that he came all the way from heaven to earth for a world undeserving of his grace and favour. True God from all eternity, he became flesh, born in the midst of all kind of chaos, born in a dark and lost world as a vulnerable human baby in a stable with animal excrement and filth—symbolic of the filth and depravity of the sinful world. Jesus knows what it means to be human. He walked our earth, ate, and drank—and today we hear he is so human he was fatigued and slept in the boat. Jesus became one of us and though he was without sin himself, took upon himself our broken and sinful

human flesh and died in our place on the Cross. There, he was exposed to the fiercest storm. It wasn't lashing winds or driving rain he suffered. But at the hands of sinners he took the lashings on his back and nails driving through his hands, shedding his own holy and precious blood, by which he redeemed the world, from sin, death and the power of the devil.

When the storms rage hard and all we see is so much heartache on the news and wonder where a loving God could possibly be, and the devil tempts us to despair, God would have us look to the Cross and to keep our eyes on Jesus, for the Cross shows us the justice of God in punishing sin, but also shows us the compassionate and unconditional love of God in punishing sin in his own Son instead of us.

Then Jesus rose again to be our living, victorious Lord who is everywhere present, and always with you with divine help and blessing. Jesus never ceases working in a tumultuous, stormy world with the seas of evil surging and raging within it. That is why early Cathedrals were designed like boats. The main section where the people sit was called the nave, from the Latin word *navis* (ship), representing the church buffeted by the wind and waves of earthly trouble, yet piloted safely by Christ who is in the boat to protect us from every evil, by guiding us according to his word from the sanctuary. To him, all authority in heaven on earth has been given, even over the laws of nature and the devil himself who must also be silent and still at Jesus' command.

Jesus is in the boat again today, with his powerful and authoritative word for us, by which he blesses us and brings peace and rest for our anxious hearts. We are with our Lord and the safe haven he offers: his saving word and sacraments that calm the tumult in our heart and bring peace to troubled consciences. We need that safe haven when the storms in our life—those things that cause suffering and burden, anxiety and uncertainty, change and stress—crash around us. We need this safe haven when the fierce temptations and accusations of the devil rage around us and attack us. Jesus' word is his safe haven on the journey to our heavenly homeland. Hear him as he speaks to soothe your restless heart: "Quiet. Be still." Amen.