

In the Eye of the Storm

Փոթորիկին Մէջսէղը

Mark 4:35-41, 5:1-20

I hated the stormy ride on Lake Tahoe. Usually I love the sea, but I hated to navigate the boat when my family was in it. The strange phenomenon is that everyone was enjoying it; I was the only one who was scared.

It is said that the Sea of Galilee is quite dangerous. Although it could be very calm at a certain time, gusty winds could start anytime. They say even today there is a warning sign about where to park your car. Drivers should expect a storm to hit the sea anytime and blow the cars away.

The persons who were on the boat with Jesus that day were people with a lot of experience. Peter and his friends had probably faced stormy weather before. Even they were afraid; apparently it was a big one. The irony of the story is that Jesus was sleeping in the midst of the storm.

Two Sundays ago my sermon was about how God works when we are asleep. I hope you did have some rest, learning to trust God in your busy life. Today we find that Jesus is resting when the “whole world is upside down in a STORM.” By the way, this is the only passage we find in the Bible where it says Jesus was sleeping. (Most likely he slept at night, except the nights he spent in prayer). Is Jesus trying to tell them: “Relax, God is at work. The Sovereign God knows everything. Just relax and see how He will lead you to the shore”?

The disciples were taught before they got to the Sea. Now the theoretical part was finished. They are in the field learning how the Kingdom of God is at WORK. Also, in the same field, the faith of the disciples is being tested.

-The first story is the wind and the storm. (Mark 4:35-41)

³⁵ On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” ³⁶ And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. ³⁷ And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. ³⁸ But he

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?" 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. ⁴⁰ He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" ⁴¹ 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?" (Mark 4:35-41 ESV)

Jesus and the disciples move to The eastern side of the Sea of Galilee. Their destination is on the other side, which is more or less a **predominantly gentile** area, ruled by a strong presence of idolatry and demonic forces. We will find in the next story in Mark 5:1-20 that it is going to be a tough field trip.

They are in the boat. Jesus is tired of teaching all day. Taking a short nap was a good idea. As I said earlier, these storms started all of a sudden. (**Great windstorm**) The word **mega** (translated **great**) is being used **three times** in this short passage. Here is the first one. All were afraid and they wanted Jesus to wake up to handle the situation.

There was a man called **Jonah**, a prophet of God, who escaped the presence of God and was in a boat sleeping. There was a storm, and eventually the sailors threw him in the water as a solution. But Jesus is not escaping from God. **In fact, He is DOING the WILL of GOD.**

What was Jesus' response?

"And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" (Mark 4:39a ESV)

"And the wind ceased, and there was a great (mega) calm." (Mark 4:39b)

From **Great Storm** to **Great Calmness**? Don't you love how God works in our lives?

Jesus' intention of controlling the storm was not just the demonstration of physical power. Jesus is declaring that **"God's sovereign power is being unleashed;** that is, **God's kingdom is at hand...** It is the same power that made the world in the first place. And this power is now living in Jesus and acting through him. N.T. Wright says, "so here Jesus assumes the role of God's agent in defeating the forces of chaos." ¹

They were fearful from storm, and Jesus controlled the storm. But something else happened; another “**mega**” appears: **He (Jesus) said to them, “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?”** ⁴¹ **And they were filled with **great (mage) fear** and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”** (Mark 4:40-41 ESV)

You know disciples knew the psalms by heart (Psalm 107):

**²⁸ Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he delivered them from their distress.**

**²⁹ He made the storm be still,
and the waves of the sea were hushed.**

**³⁰ Then they were glad that the waters were quiet,
and he brought them to their desired haven.** (Psalm 107:28-30 ESV)

IN MY WORDS: Did you notice how the disciples’ fear changed? First, they were afraid in the storm, then they were more afraid when Jesus calmed the storm. Finally, their fear was greatest after the storm was over. “The intensification of their fear is their response to a new depth of understanding about the person of Christ.”²

-There is a storm, and they were afraid. And now the storm is gone but their fear is different. **They were afraid of Jesus himself.**

“Who is this, who has control over wind and sea?”

They felt the presence of the Almighty. They realized that their faith was very small. They were in the presence of the Divine.... They were afraid. (*Like the women on Easter morning, who were afraid and could not speak...*)

-We all are going through the storms of life. We have the fear of the storm; yet when we experience God in the eye of the storm, our fear is changed; it is like in Isaiah 6 when **Isaiah experiences the presence of Holy God**. Holy, Holy, Holy, God Almighty is here...**It is like Peter fishing** with Jesus in Luke 5:1-9, when Peter encounters Jesus in the boat in a different way he says: **“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”** (Luke 5:8 ESV) It is an awesome experience to be in the presence of the Divine.

-Calming the demonic storm (5:1-20) (Please read the passage)

Now the boat arrives to the other side of sea. The place was called **Decapolis**, meaning **ten cities**. The inhabitants were not Jews; they were pagans, and

obviously owned pig farms. Jesus is declaring that “there is no place in the world into which God's reign does not intend to extend itself.”³ Here we meet a man who is possessed by evil spirits, not one but a **legion**. (In the Roman army, a legion was 6000 soldiers).

What was the situation of this man?

1. Mark says he had an unclean spirit
2. He lived among the tombs, among the dead. “... and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to tame him.” Tame him? Was he an animal to tame? He was cast out
3. He lived near the pigs. For the Jewish community that was not acceptable.

The man is in pain. He is miserable...

When I was reading about this phenomenon, it reminded me of the evil that goes around us: the sex traffickers, the coaches who abuse young children, the war criminals, the rapists, the drug and alcohol addicts.... Ask the victims about their pain.

Jesus does not address the man, **but the evil spirit in the man**. Evil Spirits are always afraid of Jesus. They know who Jesus is. **“What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me.”**

You see Jesus can finish those evil spirits and send them somewhere that they can never bother us. He does not do that. The time has not come for the final battle against Satan. Jesus sends the evil spirit to a herd of pigs, all 2000 of them.

Now the evil spirit went into the pigs. Jesus gave permission for that. Why pigs? I read in a commentary that pigs were sacrificed by the Canaanite to the demons.

The battle was between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. Jews wanted to throw the Romans into the sea. Well, the “evil spirits” were thrown to the sea.

You see, what Jesus did to the evil spirits who were thrown to the sea, is exactly what the Jews wanted to do to the Romans. Yet, Jesus is declaring that the enemy is not Rome, but the enemy is the EVIL, the Evil Spirit who can possess humans. This is a war between God and Evil.

Paul writes to the Ephesians: **“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”** (Eph 6:12)

What was the response?

The pigs died; and that hurt the economy. How sad is that they did not see what Jesus did to this man? The man was healed. How important is that? How much will cost to heal this man? How sad is that people don't want to see who Jesus is? “We don't want Jesus in our town,” even though the sick man living in the graves is back to us.

What is Jesus' response?

Amazing! “Jesus who had conquered the storm on the lake and driven out the demons, yielded to the free will of human beings.”⁴ Jesus quietly leaves the town. God never imposes Himself on our free will. We have to make the choice of receiving God in our lives.

Application:

1. We will face Storms. Jesus is with us sound asleep in the middle of them.

We need to be careful how we apply this in our lives. Some can say, you see when there is danger and storm, Jesus will stop it immediately. Yes and no. We cannot decide how God will interfere when we face a storm.

The point of this miracles was to know who Jesus is, the Son of God who reigns over hostile forces. Storms are part of life. “Reading Mark helps one learn to trust in a Savior who does not deliver us from storms but through the storms.”⁵

Sometimes we think “I think Jesus was tired and was sleeping.” But God the Father and the Son and the Spirit are never sleeping.

Here is a promise from God; **“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you...**

Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, who brings forth chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick. (Isaiah 43:1-2;16-17 ESV)

They are always watching over us. Yet, the image of Christ sleeping in the eye of the storm is reminder to all of us that God is in control. In the last message, I urged you to go to bed and relax. Learn to trust God. Again I see the same message; this time Jesus is sleeping in the midst of the dangerous sea. We are facing a dangerous sea every day. Where do you go for help?

2. Jesus was rejected, but the seed was planted

When the leaders of the town rejected Jesus and asked him to leave, the man who was healed was the “small seed” which was planted in that area.

Jesus said: “Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled. (Mark 5:19-20)

I believe he did. What happened to these pagan cities called Decapolis?

“In less than four centuries a magnificent cathedral would stand there on those heights. The presence of the bishop of Hippos at the very first Church Councils (Nicea, Constantinople, etc.) will bear witness of how Christianity conquered heathendom. Did the Christians of Hippos remember their first missionary by building the chapel which can still be seen at the site of his tomb-cave on the slope above Kursi?” ⁶

Jesus brought peace in the midst of the storm. May you experience His peace in your life.

Amen

1. NT Wright; *Mark for Everyone* p. 52
2. R.C. Sproul, *He Thought Them as One Who Had Authority* Mark, P 82
3. David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary*, Mark P 202
4. Bargil Pixner, *With Jesus Through Galilee According to the Fifth Gospel* (Rosh Pina, Israel: Corazin, 1992), 45.
5. David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary*, Mark P 200
6. Pixner, *Fifth Gospel*, 46

There was painting competition between two painters for the best picture that represented calmness and peace. One of them drew a wonderful sunset on the seashore. Everything looked calm and peaceful. The choice of colors was so relaxing. The other artist drew a very strange painting. Rough colors, like gray, were chosen, and a dark stormy sea. Things were upside down, dangerous. But in the middle of the storm there was a sparrow in its nest sitting with her chicks, singing peacefully as if nothing was happening.

Our picture of the storm on the Sea of Galilee represents the second painting. There is a storm; there will always be one. We need to trust Jesus who can take a nap in the storm.

Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever!

² Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,
whom he has redeemed from trouble

³ and gathered in from the lands,
from the east and from the west,
from the north and from the south.

Some went down to the sea in ships,
doing business on the great waters;

²⁴ they saw the deeds of the LORD,
his wondrous works in the deep.

²⁵ For he commanded and raised the stormy wind,
which lifted up the waves of the sea.

²⁶ They mounted up to heaven; they went down to the depths;

their courage melted away in their evil plight;
²⁷ they reeled and staggered like drunken men
and were at their wits' end.
²⁸ Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he delivered them from their distress.
²⁹ He made the storm be still,
and the waves of the sea were hushed.
³⁰ Then they were glad that the waters were quiet,
and he brought them to their desired haven.
³¹ Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,
for his wondrous works to the children of man!
³² Let them extol him in the congregation of the people,
and praise him in the assembly of the elders.