

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Cross of Glory Evangelical Lutheran Church

Why Are You So Afraid?

Mark 4:35-41

That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

Do you remember a time in your life when you were very afraid? It probably doesn't take much time for you to come up with a memory or two of crisis situations, which you experienced, that really frightened you. Perhaps you were riding in a car that had lost control on the freeway or you found yourself hunkered down in your house with a hurricane looming on the horizon. These are the kind of events that always stick with us. We can even remember the smallest details of what happened: the time of day, who was there and how the situation was eventually resolved. It's a frightening situation such as this that the evangelist Mark relates to us this morning in vivid detail. But why was Mark so afraid? Why were the disciples completely terrified that stormy night? And on a more personal level, as our sermon theme this morning asks, "*Why are you so afraid?*"

Before we take a look at Mark's account of this miracle, we need to see the wider context in which this miracle took place. This is one of the first stories Mark relates in his gospel and occurred relatively early in Jesus' public ministry on earth. The disciples had not been with Jesus for a very long amount of time. They had, however, already seen Jesus heal many sick and heard Jesus preach about the kingdom of God. In fact, this miracle comes at the end of a long day of preaching and teaching. Earlier in the fourth chapter, Mark tells us that so many people were gathered to hear Jesus that he got into a boat and preached from just off the shore. It is in this boat that the disciples take Jesus across the sea, just the way he is—tired from a hard day's work and in need of some sleep.

Mark tells us, however, that the trip was not as peaceful as the disciples would have hoped. As they were on their way, a furious squall came up. This was not something uncommon to the Sea of Galilee. The wind being channeled through the mountains on the west of the sea can often cause sudden and violent storms. It seems that this storm was something special from the way the disciples reacted. Even these experienced fishermen panicked as wave after wave came crashing into the boat. By the time they woke Jesus, they had already reached the point of despair, exclaiming, "*Teacher, don't you care if we drown?*"

It seems like a natural reaction for the disciples until you think about the situation a little more carefully. Who was it that was with them in the boat that night? It was Jesus. How could the disciples be frightened when the Creator of the universe was only a few feet away? The problem was not the violent wind or the crashing waves. The problem was the disciples' faith. Jesus points this out in his rebuke of the disciples: "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" In essence, Jesus is calling the disciples cowards. Here they have all the help they would ever need right by their side and yet they fret and worry as though the situation is completely out of control.

In accounts such as these, it is easy for us to come down hard on those foolish disciples. But don't we act the same way at times? What do we do when an illness hits us or someone close to us? We grow afraid. We worry about all the possible outcomes. We see all the worst-case scenarios. And in our darkest hours, we give up all hope. What do we do when the wedded bliss we once knew becomes a day after day struggle? We get angry. We see our marriage as hopeless. We look to the future and see only dark days ahead. Or how about the time when we feel the pinch of a depressed economy? We see the bills piling up. We see our income stretched to its limits. And we grow afraid. In all of these situations, there is one common element: a lack of faith in the simple truth that Christ is still in control.

It may even come to the point that we want to approach our Savior the same way the disciples did and grab him by the shoulders, give him a shake and ask, "Jesus, are you really going to let this happen to me?" And Jesus can give us the same response that he gave to the disciples, "*Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?*" They are difficult words for us to hear but they are words we need to hear, because they are words that remind us of who is really in control. It's not we mortal human beings. It's Christ, the Son of God.

As we look at the events in today's gospel, it is easy to see who is the one in control. While the disciples were terrified at the horrible storm, Jesus slept peacefully in the stern of the boat. Interestingly enough, this is the only mention of Jesus actually sleeping in any of the Gospels. Just because Jesus was sleeping, however, does not mean that he did not have the situation under control. We only need to read the next verse to see how fully Jesus was in control of those events. Mark tells us that when Jesus got up from his sleep, he rebuked the wind and spoke to the waves. This in itself is a miracle. Jesus held a conversation with nature. This is not something the disciples could do. It's not something you or I could do. But Jesus could do it, because Jesus was the one who had created the wind and the waves. He had the authority and the ability to say to them, "*Quiet! Be still!*" And they were still. In fact, Mark recalls that the sea became completely calm. What a miracle! A turbulent and violent storm was replaced with an absolute stillness. The lake once filled with waves now became as smooth as glass. Only the all-powerful God could do such a thing.

This fact was not lost on the disciples. They had witnessed a miracle. If they had not been convinced earlier that Jesus was true God, this was certainly more of the proof that they desired. And as their time with Jesus lengthened they were convinced again and again that Jesus was the true Messiah, sent from heaven. They saw even greater things than the miracle of calming the storm. They witnessed Jesus' tremendous power when he conquered sin, death, and the devil on

the cross. Even greater than bringing peace to the Sea of Galilee, they saw Jesus bring peace to troubled hearts and souls longing to be free from the grip of sin. The lips that spoke with fear, "Who is this?" would one day say with confidence "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

This is what knowing the Savior does for all of his people. It changes fear and cowardice to courage and confidence. We have witnessed the same powerful acts that the disciples witnessed. In the Word of God, we see the tremendous power of our Savior. He healed the sick. He calmed the sea. He fought off every temptation. And he won our salvation on the cross. A Savior such as this brings peace to our hearts. We know that all of our sins have been forgiven. For every time we have lacked confidence in Christ's power, we have found forgiveness in his blood. Our souls are safe in Christ's control and our lives are as well. We do not need to be afraid when we face troubles and hardships in this life. We simply need to remember who Jesus Christ is.

He is all-powerful. And he is all loving. That's the perfect combination for peace of heart. If Christ were only all-powerful, but not all-loving, we would have cause to be afraid because we could be destroyed at any moment and for any reason. If Christ were all-loving, but not all-powerful, we would have cause to be afraid because Christ might want good things for our lives but he would lack the power to provide them. But that's not how it is. Christ has both the power and the love so that we do not need to be afraid. When God promises that in all things he will work for the good of those who love him, he is able to carry out that promise. We can trust in that.

And so we return to our original question and the question that Jesus asked of the disciples: "Why are you so afraid?" When we take a closer look at who Jesus is and the power that he possesses, you realize there is no good answer to that question because you have no reason to be afraid. The same Jesus who rebuked the wind is at your side even now. The same Savior who told the waves, "Be still" has spoken to your heart "Be at peace, your sins are forgiven." You don't need to be afraid. Christ is in control. **Amen.**

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