

## Trust in Fear

Mark 4:35-41  
Job 38:1-11

June 21, 2009  
the Rev. Karen Millard

- (Karen) He's sleeping  
I can't believe he's sleeping
- (Wilf) Sometimes I wonder if he's ever awake.
- (Karen) Doesn't he know?  
Can't he hear?
- (Wilf) Does God have any idea of suffering?  
Or does he just show up for the good times?
- (Karen) He's sleeping – God's sleeping.
- (Wilf) Nothing disturbs her.
- (Karen) But, it's getting rough – really rough
- (Wilf) I'm going to be sick!
- (Karen) We're going to drown!
- (Both) Don't you care that we are perishing?

We are now changing to the God/Jesus Character.....

- (Wilf) Shhhhhhh.....  
Shhhhh....
- (Karen) Be still and know that I am God  
Be still and know that I am God  
Be still and know that I am God.
- (Wilf) Why are you afraid?  
Where is your faith?
- I am with you in the storm  
I am with you in the darkness  
Peace! Be still.

(Karen) Be still and know that I am God.

instrumental “Be still and Know”

*“Who is this then that even the winds and the seas obey him?”*

That’s the questions the disciples asked because they don’t really know who Jesus is yet. They have begun to wonder and discover. They don’t know who Jesus is but they know there is something about him because they have heard about his mysterious baptism, when a voice from heaven spoke and it seemed that the spirit of God was right there with him. They don’t know a lot about this man but they know that when he asked them to follow they immediately dropped everything and followed because there was something about him, something they had never felt before and they knew they wanted to be a part of it.

They were not sure whether he was a prophet or a healer but they knew that somehow he could demand unclean spirits to silence and he could heal and comfort the ill and despairing.

They were not fully aware of whom they were with but they watched as multitudes gathered to listen to his teachings. They were beginning to make sense of who he was but Jesus had only begun to speak to them in riddles (or parables) that they sort of understood.

They thought maybe he was a prophet or religious leader, but they were confused because this teacher they followed, willingly spent time with outcasts and sinners. And they knew that was not what a priests and prophets do.

The disciples don’t yet know they are in the presence of The Holy in the boat but they are beginning to discover because in the midst of a brutal storm he sleeps until he is awoken at which point he scolds them in their fear while he calms the waves and halts the winds.

And so they and we ask “Who is this then that even the winds and the seas obey him?”

Who is this that says to us “Don’t be afraid” in the midst of a storm?

Is this the same one who engages in a whirlwind of debate with Job?

Who is this who turns to the disciples in a frightening storm and says “Where is your faith?”

How often we are like Job and David and the disciples wondering where God is.

Wondering why God is sleeping?

How often do we forget like prophets before us that God is the creator?

“The stilling of the storm, like the other Marcan miracles that are not healings affirms that Jesus Christ is the ‘ruler of all nature.’<sup>1</sup> In fact this may be the whole purpose of the story. It is not so much about the miracle itself but about who Jesus is.

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<sup>1</sup> Williamson, Jr. Lamar. Interpretation, Mark. John Knox Press, Louisville. © 1983 pg. 100

Jesus reveals several things about God's character in this text. That is why the setting of our story is of critical importance.

You see, the disciples in the storm are in the very same boat from which Jesus preached from on the shore line earlier that day. So even though they haven't left the temple of teaching so to speak they have quickly forgotten his words. They are in the same place in which they listened to his wisdom earlier that day but not that Jesus is taking a rest they have forgotten it all. Now that they are not looking Jesus directly in the eyes they have begun to fear.

Jesus isn't with them on deck because he is tired from teaching all day and he has gone to rest before he goes to preach to a new group of people.

I am also sure Jesus trusts that the disciples to handle the boat out on the water. He is not at all concerned about them, after all many of them of fishermen.

But the handling of the boat is not the disciple's only concern, because Jesus has made an unusual request. The request to go across to the other side may seem innocent enough to us but to the disciples this was a challenge.

First of all every one of them knew the danger of the sudden storms on the Sea of Galilee. And that made them a little nervous before they even began.

But I think it is also interesting to note that the word used for storm in this context is 'whirlwind' which is the same word used when Job is arguing with God. It carries overtones of doubt and even demonic power,<sup>2</sup> for the sea in most biblical stories represents evil. So the raging waves and winds are not just a storm they are also the presence of doubt, evil and fear.

There are a lot of reasons for this turmoil within the minds of the disciples because in asking them to cross over to the other side, Jesus has also asked them to go to a new Gentile territory. He is asking them to step out of their comfort zone in every way. Even though there is controversy about this new Jesus movement that is stirring up the early church Jesus wants to carry his ministry on to the 'west bank' of the Sea of Galilee to 'pagan territory.' Jesus is not concerned about the critics; he wants to spread the news to everyone. Jesus is revealing a God who longs for all peoples to hear the Good news of grace and love. Jesus is showing them God is not limited to just them.

And so the disciples anxiety only rises when a storm creeps up. And yet Jesus takes this opportunity to reveal even more about God.

Jesus says to the storm "Be quiet"

And with those words, he silences both the raging storm and the doubting disciples.

And then he turns to his friends in the boat and says "Are you still without faith?"  
Do you still not recognize me? Do you not yet trust God?

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<sup>2</sup> IBID

Have you not seen? Have you not heard?

Now, I don't know about you but I have been in a boat in a storm and I am pretty sure that in the back of my head I would be thinking ummm....well yah...but the storm. It was huge. I was scared. You were sleeping.

But perhaps if I were there in that moment I might have understood a little better what Jesus was saying with his direct, powerful, peaceful calming presence. That presence that seems to draw people to himself.

You see, I think what Jesus wanted the disciples to know and the Holy wants us to discover is the same thing God wanted Job to understand.

“I am with you.”

Sebastian Meisel asks the question “Could Jesus want for us a faith that doesn't need the storm to be stilled?”<sup>3</sup> Could it be that what God longs for us to know is that he is with us even in the storms. That in spite of our fears God is with us.

Lindy Black tells a story of John Wesley experiencing a storm in one of his many Atlantic crossings. Wesley said “A fierce storm broke out; pitching and tossing the ship about like a bathtub toy. While he and others clung to their bunks and hid their heads, a community of Moravians, traveling to their new homeland, calmly gathered to hold their daily worship service and sung praises to God. Watching these Moravians, so apparently unperturbed by the howling winds and crashing waves, Wesley realized he was witnessing a truly waterproof faith. From that moment on, John Wesley prayed that God would give him the ability to ride out life's storms with as much confidence.”<sup>4</sup>

Most of us are prone to ask God in the midst of our trials “Don't you care? Are you sleeping?” Many of us have had moments of attempting to wake God up but these passages today are set to remind us that God is with us even when we cannot see. Sweet suggests that “The miracle Jesus wanted to show them was not the miracle of calming the storm but the miracle of calming them in the storm.”

I have read that The British Navy has a custom of blowing a “still” if there is a sudden disaster aboard ship. The “still” is a whistle that calls the crew to a moment of silence in a time of crisis. When the still is blown, people aboard know that it means, "Prepare to do the wise thing." Observers of this system note that the moment of calm has helped avert many a catastrophe. It has prevented many scatterbrained actions.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Workingpreacher.org blog. For June 21, 2009

<sup>4</sup> Textweek.com Sermon Nuggets for June 21,2009

<sup>5</sup> IBID

Imagine the fears that are controlled in that moment. Rather than being reactive one would more likely be wise remembering procedures, protocols, and most likely acknowledging who is in control. I think one might also remember they are not alone.

There is one other thing that I notice in almost every Biblical story of calm and presence and we find it in our gospel today. People are rarely alone in the discovery of God's presence. Jesus almost always reveals himself in the presence of a group of people. Community is a key component of our faith. As many of you, I have come to see its importance in times of doubt and struggle because at times even the most faithful need others to remind them or show us God with us.

If there were not storms or trials or struggles we would not need texts like we have today. But we all know there are. We all know there are people and places in our lives and throughout this world that are facing situations of despair. We will forever wrestle with how that can be and yet if we are open to trust our fears may lessen. If we as people of faith continue to be with one another in the boat we will continue to hear the voice of the Holy say "Be still and know that I am God."