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Mark 4:35-41

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It had been a long day – another long day. Jesus and the disciples had been dealing with large crowds who were bringing him lepers, paralytics, the blind, and those possessed with demons. Jesus and the disciples were working so hard caring for all of these people that the scribes began to say Jesus must be possessed himself. Even the family of Jesus tried to come and get him because people were saying he was out of his mind with work. All the while the crowd kept getting bigger and bigger.

Finally, exhausted and spent by the shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus was ready for a break. Our text tells us, “When evening had come, Jesus said to the disciples, ‘Let us go across to the other side.’ And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat.” Jesus went back to the stern of the boat, a place reserved for the captain of the boat, and he fell asleep, exhausted by the crowd.

There is not a person here who doesn’t have to deal with a crowd of issues – issues of work or school, either of which can get out of hand; issues of health, weight loss, and trips to the doctor; issues with family, friends, the huge needs of small children or grandchildren, and the anxiety over aging loved ones; issues with bills, planning for the future, and paying for the past; issues of taking care of the house and the car, which always have something wrong. We can handle any one of these issues if they come one at a time, but when they crowd together and we try to take care of them all at the same time, it drives us out of our minds. Exhausted and spent, we would love to join Jesus and his disciples to sail away, to anywhere, and leave the crowd behind. But it is always when we are exhausted that we discover the greatest challenges are just beginning.

While the disciples and Jesus were at sea, the sky grew dark, the wind began to blow, and the waves of a great storm beat against their little boat. The disciples were terrified that they were going to die. Remember that many of these guys were fishermen and had spent most of their life on the Sea of Galilee. There was no doubt that they had seen a lot of storms on this sea. For them to think that they were about to go down means that this had to be a terrible storm.

We can envision them frantic with activity – trying to haul down the sails, bailing out the water, trying to steer their boat into the wind, and yelling orders to each other. All the while the sky grew even darker, the wind continued to blow, and the waves kept breaking into their boat. Someone looks over at Jesus the miracle worker, who is

sleeping in the captain's chair. The disciple screams out, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

This is the first of three very important questions in our text today. "Jesus, do you not care that we are perishing?" We have all been right there. Maybe not at sea, but certainly in our life we have sailed through great storms. And they always seem to hit when we are the most exhausted.

The phone rings. It's bad news. Real bad. A loved one has died suddenly, or a friend's or an adult child's marriage is in trouble, or your spouse has lost a job, or the doctor called to say that the tumor is malignant. You hang up the phone. The sky grows dark, the wind begins to blow, and the waves of a terrible storm start to break against the little boat called your life. As you frantically do all you can to steer clear of this disaster, you look over at Jesus, the captain of your ship, and you pray: "Don't you care that we are perishing?"

Notice carefully the disciples' question. They don't ask, "Jesus, *could you* do something about this storm?" They ask, "Jesus, do you care?" Remember, the disciples had spent days and days seeing what Jesus did for others. They knew what he could do. The thing they fear is that Jesus won't care for them. That is our doubt as well.

You probably wouldn't be in church if you doubted Jesus' power. We know Jesus cares about the Middle East, but we are not always sure that he cares about our little boat.

According to the passage, Jesus rises in the midst of the storm in response to the laments of his followers. That is so important. He doesn't prevent the storm; he rises in the midst of it. Then Jesus calms the storm by saying, "Peace! Be still!"

Following this, he presents the second question in our text: "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" Faith is not supposed to make us blind to the storms. Faith is supposed to make us unafraid of the storms. As Jesus uses the word here, faith really isn't about the doctrines we hold or our ability to muster up belief that this story really happened. Frankly, I do believe that this miracle happened, but that is easy. The hard thing for me to believe is not *did* it happen, but *does* it happen? What we are afraid of is that Jesus doesn't care enough to calm our storms. Real faith is not just about our intellectual beliefs or doubts, but in the end, faith is a choice that we make. The reason we say the creed week after week is all to give us the courage to make this choice. And the choice is to see that Jesus the Savior is on board our little boats.

God is with us! This is how God expresses his perfect love to us. According to 1 John, perfect love casts out fear. Again, Jesus doesn't prevent the storms, but out of his perfect love, he is already in the boat with you.

All this week I wondered what should the disciples have done in this great storm? What should we do in our storms? Everything that we disciples do in this story is right. We steer the boat through the storms the best we can. Jesus seems to expect this action as he rides along silently in the back of the boat. Everything we do is right in our story except for the fear. It is the fear that makes us crazy and leads to the worst choices in a storm. Every one of us knows that on any day we could lose the lives we have so carefully constructed. Our fear of that is our most deadly baggage; only the perfect love of God can throw it overboard.

After the Savior calmed the storm, the disciples asked the third question in our text, which is just wonderful. "Who is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?" Who is this Jesus? There is more to Jesus than they, or we, know. He is not just your source of personal inspiration. He is not just your call to mission or to social justice or to ethical behavior. He is the incarnation of the God over all things in heaven and on earth. That means he is the God over all things, including our disease, our enemies, and our midnight anxieties. He is the Lord of all things, and he cares about us, whether we can see that or not.

You see, it was actually the disciples who were sleeping through the storm. That is what our frantic busyness does to us – it makes us sluggish to the spiritual realities of our lives. Now the disciples have awakened to what only an experience of being out of control could reveal – that Jesus cares, that he is already in our boat, and he is not out of control. Jesus is powerful.

There is a poignant scene in the otherwise very violent film *Pulp Fiction*, when two hitmen, Jules and Vincent, are trying to come to terms with their narrow escape from death. Jules describes their experience as a miracle; Vincent disagrees. After defining a miracle as "God making the impossible possible," Vincent argues that their escape from death earlier that day doesn't qualify. Which prompts Jules to say, "Don't you see, Vincent, that...doesn't matter. You're judging this thing the wrong way. It's not about what. It could be God stopped the bullets, he changed Coke into Pepsi, he found my...car keys. You don't judge [stuff] like this on merit. Whether or not what we experienced was an according-to-Hoyle miracle is insignificant. What is significant is I felt God's touch. God got involved."

In discovering that the powerful Jesus cared for them, the disciples' fear was turned to awe. Awe is the fear of the divine. It is the only fear in Scripture that we are

permitted; in fact, actually commanded to have. In the words of Phillips Brooks: “If you do not fear the God above you, you will fear everything around you. But if you do fear God, you will fear nothing else.” The reason we are called to fear God is not because of his judgment, but because the God of the wind and the sea cares about us. This is no ordinary passenger we have on board our little ship.

And this is how we face the challenges of today. It is how we navigate a pandemic and a return to a new normal. It is how we find strength when facing those calls at night, those worries and anxieties that are so very real in our lives. It is how we make it through what seems impossible and overwhelming.

Friends, we have no idea what the next day, month, or year will bring, but the chances are good that there will probably be a storm or two. When the storms hit, our calling is simply to steer the boat the best we can but without fear of perishing. A Savior who cares for us is on board. Amen.