

God's Peace

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 behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. ³⁷ A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. ³⁸ But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" ³⁹ He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. ⁴⁰ He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" ⁴¹ And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

After a long day of teaching the crowds, Jesus needed a break. He initiated a trip across the Sea of Galilee. Although Jesus initiated the trip, he was in the hands of his disciples, who included at least four experienced fishermen (see [Mark 1:16-20](#)). After dismissing the crowd, the disciples "took him." He was in their realm. Yet they were not alone, for "other boats were with them." Thus the entourage of Jesus' disciples was growing.

Soon, a great (*megalē*) windstorm arose, so great that the waves crashed against the boat carrying Jesus and his disciples. Soon enough ("already"), water began to fill up the boat. Such a vivid description speaks to the severity of the situation. Not even the experienced fishermen could do anything about it. They turned to Jesus, presumably because of the powers that he had shown in healing sick people and exorcising demons. Maybe he could help in this situation. However, Jesus was sound asleep on a boat cushion at the rear part of the boat. Perhaps this negatively impacted the faith of the disciples, or perhaps their faith was not as strong as that of Jesus, who could sleep through this great storm, a sign of his faith in the face of calamity. The disciples cried to Jesus, after waking him up in the midst of their panic. "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" ([4:38b](#)) The deep, calm sleep of Jesus is contrasted with the utter destruction and death that the storm could bring. **Efraín Agosto**

Fear. The visceral response of Jesus' terrified disciples in a frail storm-tossed boat resonates both in the individual lives of Christians and in our corporate life in congregations and civic communities. We are afraid of the "wind and waves" that assail our fragile vessels—our lives, our churches, our cities, and nations. We fear disapproval, rejection, failure, meaningless, illness, and of course, we fear death—our own death, the death of those we love, and the potential demise of the communities we cherish.

The overshadowing reality that these verses from the fourth chapter of Mark presents to us is that of faithful disciples overcome with fear and Jesus' loving yet firm response to their debilitating anxiety. The sea, the storm, and the fragile craft that carried our Lord and his followers across the Sea of Galilee offer evocative images of our life journey—the perils of some passages, the profound vulnerability of the craft that bears us on our way, and our longing for One who calms both us and the storm. Just think of the things that you have been through, and the things this congregation has experienced. We know from experience the storms of life and the fears they evoke. This is not simply a reading of an ancient natural miracle story, but the reality of our lives.

Fear is confronted in this story, but not by a sudden burst of courage or resolved on the part of the disciples. In the course of the storm, they never themselves pulled themselves together. They did not, at least not on their own, discover inner resources they did not know they had. Rather, it was Jesus who calmed both them and the storm with the power of his presence. This scripture does not so much challenge us to discover forgotten courage in ourselves as it invites us to turn again to the Lord of wind and wave, the one we trust to be more powerful than both Galilean storms and the storms that rage in our lives.

Did you notice that Jesus never said, "There is nothing to be afraid of." The Galilean storm was doubtless indeed fearsome, as are the "wind and waves" that threaten us. Rather, Jesus asked, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" To help understand this distinction, imagine a scene such as this. A child awakens in the dark of the night,

terrified at some dream that has disturbed child-sleep, frightened of some phantom hiding in the bedroom closet. A mother rushes into the bedroom and scoops the little one into her arms and sits in a chair. She wipes sweat off her child's forehead, caresses his hair, rocks her gently, and then she whispers what a thousand mothers have whispered since the beginning of time, "Hush now, there's nothing to be afraid of." The question these comforting words raise is simply this: "Is the mother telling the whole truth to her child? Is there really nothing to be afraid of?"

Although we often confuse them, saying, "there's nothing to be afraid of" is a very different thing from saying, "do not be afraid." The hard truth is that fearsome things are very real: isolation, pain, illness, meaninglessness, rejection, losing one's job, money problems, failure, illness, and death. As we grow in faith, we come to understand that even though such fearsome things are very real, they do not have the last word. They do not have ultimate power over us, because reigning over this world of fearsome things is a God who is mightier than they. Time and again in Scripture the word is, "Do not be afraid." It is, you might say, the first and the last word of the gospel. It is the word the angels speak to the terrified shepherds and the word spoken at the tomb when the women discover it empty: "Do not be afraid." Not because there are no fearsome things on the sea of our days, not because there are no storms, fierce winds, or waves, but rather, because God is with us.

The novelist Emily Brontë lived and wrote in a rectory set in the bleak moors of Yorkshire. She lived a grim tragedy with her half-demented father and alcoholic brother. Nevertheless, she was able to write words like these: "No coward soul is mine, no trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere. I see Heaven's glories shine, and faith shines equal, arming me from fear."

Instead of saying, "There's nothing to be afraid of," the whole truth would be for the mother comforting her frightened child to say, "Don't be afraid, because you are not alone." The easy part of the truth, which every child figures out sooner or later, is that

some things that frighten us are real and some are not. But the rest of the truth, the deeper truth that only faith in the God who raised Jesus from the grave can teach, is that even though there are real and fearsome things in this life, they need not paralyze us; they need not have dominion over us; they need not own us, because we are not alone in the boat.

A scene near the end of John Bunyan's classic allegorical novel *The Pilgrim's Progress* finds the chief character, Christian, the archetype of a person struggling to lead a life of faith, nearing the end of his symbolic journey. This journey requires him to cross a great and fearsome river. He is desperately afraid. Together with his friend Hopeful, they wade into the waters with trepidation. Bunyan has Christian cry out, "I sink in deep Waters; the Billows go over my head, all His waves go over me." Hopeful replies with what may be among the most grace-filled words in all of literature; "Be of good cheer, my Brother, I feel the bottom, and it is good ..." **Michael L. Lindvall**

It is easy to forget that God's all-powerful word is still spoken amid the noise and chaos of our lives and world. And like Jesus' word of peace spoken over the raging storm, God's word still destroys the forces that threaten to do us harm and still calms our deepest fears. "One little word," the word "above all earthly powers," as Martin Luther's great hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," puts it so well, can "fell" whatever darkness threatens to undo us. **Beverly Zink-Sawyer**

Jesus turned to his disciples and asked two fundamental questions that lie at the heart of this scripture: "Why are you afraid? Do you not yet have faith?" Questions about faith and fear plague the disciples and they plague us as well. Will we trust the promises of God to give us peace in the midst of storms in life and will we have faith to receive God's peace, no matter the situation? Will you exercise faith or fear? God still says: "Peace! Be still!"

Psalm 121 puts it this way in a song called "Assurance of God's Protection":

¹ I lift up my eyes to the hills—
from where will my help come?

² My help comes from the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.

³ He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.

⁴ He who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.

⁵ The LORD is your keeper;
the LORD is your shade at your right hand.

⁶ The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.

⁷ The LORD will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.

⁸ The LORD will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time on and forevermore.

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