

Into the Storm

Psalm 107: 1-3, 23-32

Mark 4: 35-41

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Psalm 107: 1-3, 23-32

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever.

Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, those he redeemed from trouble 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 mighty waters; they saw the deeds of the Lord, his wondrous works in the deep.

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

They mounted up to heaven, they went down to the depths; their courage melted away in their calamity; they reeled and staggered like drunkards, and were at their wits' end.

Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he brought them out from their distress; he made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed.

Then they were glad because they had quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven.

Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind.

Let them extol him in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders.

Mark 4:35-41

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. 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?" 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. He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" 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?"

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It's been a long, busy day. Nothing overly stressful or unusual, just a very full and ordinary day. You're tired and looking forward to a relaxing evening to unwind. Perhaps you are planning a short walk, or a few chapters in the book you're reading, or watching something fun on TV.

Then there is a phone call, or a text message, or a breaking news story, and you find yourself suddenly thrust into a storm. There is a crisis, a problem, a very challenging situation. Your 'Oh my God!' is more of a panic than a prayer. Your mind is swirling like a tornado trying to think clearly of how to respond, how to act, who to contact, where to go. Your adrenaline is racing, your anxiety is climbing.

This was the situation that the disciples found themselves in. All day they had been with Jesus and the crowds of followers listening to him teaching in parables about seeds and grain and lamps and bushel baskets. Now it was evening. Jesus and the disciples went aboard their boat with plans to sail to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus gives no explanation for his desire to travel across the Sea of Galilee in the evening instead of waiting until morning, which would make for a safer voyage as sudden squalls on this freshwater sea have always been a known and terrifying concern. The Sea of Galilee is a dangerous place. Located just under 700 feet below sea level, and due to the shape of the bordering hills, sudden, violent downdrafts into the lake are capable of churning up deadly squalls. Jesus' new disciples, Andrew, Peter, James and Johnⁱ, all have plenty of fishing experience on this sea and know it can be risky, and the evening dusk makes it even more so. Yet, they do not question the plan and they sail away from Capernaum and off to the eastⁱⁱ.

A great windstorm begins crashing in, threatening to sink the boat. Even those with lifelong experience on the sea are terrified for their lives.

Perhaps the disciples regret not telling Jesus of the risks of crossing the sea at night and suggesting going in the morning instead, but it is far too late now. The waves beat the boat, sending it up and down on the rolling sea. The boat is tossed around like a toy, water floods and splashes. The disciples scramble as best they can to hang on, to not let the boat tip over and capsize, to not be thrown overboard. They are perishing and they know it.

The thing is that Jesus did not need the disciples to tell him about the potential dangers of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus knew, and he led them into the storm. This was no ordinary storm, and it was not a coincidence that they were in the midst of it.

The disciples of course were far too busy to consider that Jesus had intentionally led them into a storm, especially one as challenging and terrifying as this one.

We certainly don't want to think that Jesus would lead us into a storm. We want him to pull us away from life storms, to rescue us, to quiet what is tense and terrifying in our lives, not be the One who brings us into the eye of the tornado. Yet Jesus does. He did that with his disciples, and he does it with us.

We are not spared life's difficulties by our faith. Like the disciples, what we have is Jesus in the boat with us, riding out the storm with us until it is time to be quieted and stilled. Health issues, chronic pain, marriage concerns, relationship challenges, financial worries, political differences, our global environmental crisis, the secular-shifting landscape of our culture, and other storms threaten to overwhelm us, threaten to drown us in waves of limits, flood us with anxiety and despair.

Jesus told the disciples that they would get to their destination, to the other side. He did not promise them or us that there would be still waters the whole time.

In the disciples efforts to save themselves, to manage the best they could in the frightening storm, it took some time for them to remember that Jesus was there with them.

Don't we do the same? We get so caught up in the breaking news, the phone call, the text message that was our storm breaking in, we are so focused on the tasks and the steps and the questions and the concerns that we forget Jesus is with us. We try to manage it all on our own.

Theologian and author Bruce Epperly points out that once the disciples remember that Jesus is in the boat, they are still fearful, but they are no longer hopeless. They know that Jesus' love and power is greater than their fear. Their attitude toward the storm begins to change--- yes, this is a difficult situation, and we are in trouble, but God is with us and we're going to make it.ⁱⁱⁱ

We are going to make it. We will get through this storm. We will get soaked, but we will get through the storm as God intends. We may be changed by the storm, we may not, but we are not in it alone.

Like the disciples we may feel alone. "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

Jesus more than cares. His sleeping presence on the endangered boat is a lesson for the disciples, and a reminder for us, that even though Jesus is *in* the storm, he's not *of* the storm. He's not controlled by the storm. He's at peace, resting in the knowledge that God is good, God loves him, and he will be okay. His perspective on the storm is not one of worry or fear but of peace and trust. Whatever storm you're going through, you can bring it to him. He'll walk with you. Jesus is Lord in the storm^{iv}.

When the time was right—then and now--Jesus woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.

The song of the psalmist echoed. 'Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he brought them out from their distress; he made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. Then they were glad because they had quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven.'

When the sea calmed by his command alone, Jesus asked them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"

When our boat takes on too much water is when we need help the most. The next time you are rocked by a storm, remember that you don't need to stand in the bow all alone, trying to be strong. Remember, God is in the boat with us, bringing us to our desired haven. Amen.

ⁱ Mt 4:18-22

ⁱⁱ Matt Skinner ~ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-12-2/commentary-on-mark-435-41-4>

ⁱⁱⁱ Bruce Epperly ~ <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/livingaholyadventure/2024/06/adventurous-lectionary-fifth-sunday-after-pentecost-6-23>

^{iv} Jonathan Romig ~ Lord-of-the-Storm-Mark-435-41