

A Storm on the Sea -- Mark 4:35-41

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The story is told of a farmer on the Atlantic sea coast. He was having a difficult time finding a farm hand because of the frequent, damaging storms that often swept through that area. The farmer finally found a willing man, though he seemed a little strange. When the farmer asked him about his abilities as a farm hand, his only words were, "I can sleep when the wind blows." Things went well until the first storm. The farmer jumped out of bed and ran to awaken his hired helper. The only response he got was the same strange answer, "I can sleep when the wind blows," and a turned shoulder. Enraged almost to the point of firing him on the spot, the farmer hurried outside to prepare for the storm. To his surprise everything was already in place. The haystacks were tied down. The doors were barred shut. The shutters were secured. The cows were in the barn. The chickens were in their coops. Now the farmer understood the man's strange words. The man could sleep on windy nights knowing he had secured the farm for the worst storm. In our story today Jesus slept on a windy night.

Today as we continue our journey through the book of Mark, let us begin by considering our story:

Around sunset Jesus instructed His disciples to cross over to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. On their way a strong windstorm arose and soon began to fill their boat with water. In desperation the disciples cried out to Jesus, who was sleeping. Jesus arose and rebuked the wind. An amazing calm came over the sea. Jesus was surprised by His disciples' lack of faith, while they were filled with fear. They asked each other, "Who is this?"

Let's begin by considering what Jesus experienced in this story. First of all, He experienced needing a break. In Mark 4:35 Jesus says to the disciples, "Let us cross over to the other side." Jesus gives these instructions at the end of a very long day. It is believed that the events recorded beginning in Mark 3:20 through Mark 4:34 all took place on the same day. Jesus had been busy for some time providing for the needs of the multitude that followed Him, so much so that Mark says in Mark 3:20, "they could not so much as eat bread." Understandably, Jesus ends the day (recorded in our story today) exhausted. According to Mark 4:1 Jesus had been preaching the Sermon by the Sea from the boat. So, when Mark 4:36 says the disciples took Jesus "as He was" it means Jesus didn't even get out of the boat to dismiss the people. He finishes His teaching and asks His disciples to take them across the lake or Sea of Galilee. The region that Jesus referred to as "the other side" was the Decapolis. This was an area that once consisted of ten cities (hence the name). This region was less populated than the western shores of the Sea of Galilee and was largely isolated from the Jews in Judea and Galilee.

Next, Jesus experienced deep sleep. In Mark 4:38 it says Jesus was "in the stern, asleep on a pillow". This "pillow" was most likely a leather cushion that was used by the steer man for sitting. He was in the back of the boat (the stern) not steering, but sleeping. He may have chosen this spot simply for the soft cushion or He may have intended to remind the disciples that He was the One who was responsible for "steering" them safely to the other side. Incredibly Jesus slept through the noise, motion, and spray of the storm. The waves were crashing. The disciples were yelling instructions to each other. The boat was going up and down on the waves. Water was splashing into the boat and certainly getting Jesus wet. And yet, He slept on.

Third, Jesus experienced a rude awakening. According to Mark 4:38 the disciples woke Jesus up. I imagine Jesus waking up to yelling & screaming as the disciples tried to be heard above the noise of the storm. He opened His eyes and saw looks of panic, despair, and desperation. He heard their cries for help: "Don't you

care if we drown?" All was confusion around Him as He looked around Him. After sleeping so deeply, it must have truly been a rude awakening.

Fourth, Jesus experienced speaking with authority. He doesn't scold His disciples for waking Him up. He doesn't grab a bucket and start bailing out water. Neither does He call for a huddle and say, "Come on guys! We've got to figure a way out of this mess. Any ideas?" In Mark 4:39 it says Jesus simply said, "Peace. Be still." A more literal translation might be, "Be quiet. Stop the commotion." Jesus used very similar words in Mark 1:25. I invite you to turn there with me. This was one of the first stories we covered in Mark. A man came to the synagogue possessed by a demon. The demon interrupted Jesus, who was teaching. Notice how Jesus responded. (Read) Jesus addressed the demon in the synagogue as He did the storm. He rebuked both of them. He told both of them to be quiet. In essence He was saying, "Stop it. You're out of line."

Last of all, Jesus experienced disappointment. In Mark 4:40 Jesus said to the disciples, "Why are you so fearful?" The word translated "fearful" is more accurately translated "timid" or "cowardly". It's like He was asking, "What happened to your confidence?" He follows this up with another question: "How is it possible...?" It seems that Jesus was a bit irritated with His disciples. "Do you not have any faith in Me? You knew I was on the boat. Why didn't you trust me?" The one time this word translated "faith" has been used so far in Mark's account was in Mark 2. It is the story of the paralytic and his friends. In their determination to get to Jesus, they tear the roof apart. And in verse 5 of Mark 2 it says, "when Jesus saw their faith". Jesus beheld their actions and recognized faith. The disciples had not shown this type of confidence in Jesus' ability to help them. They had gone to Him in desperation, wondering why He wasn't helping them. And so Jesus asks them in the calm after the storm, "How come you still don't have confidence in Me?"

Well, what did the disciples experience in this story? First of all, they experienced caring for Jesus. In Mark 4:36 it says they "left the multitude" and "took Him along". Their focus changes from the needy multitude to the needs of Jesus. The word translated "took along" means to "receive near" or to "take alongside". It pictures the disciples taking Jesus under their arms and caring for Him. Mark 4:36 also says the disciples took Jesus "as He was". They pushed off of the western shores of the Sea of Galilee with a sense of urgency. Jesus remained in the boat. He didn't get out before they left. They take Him as He is – tired and hungry. During the Sermon by the Sea the disciples had been listening. But now they act with confidence. This is their area of expertise. They know about guiding the boat on the water. At least four of the twelve disciples are fishermen. With Jesus' instructions to cross over to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, they go into action. I remember times soon after we got married when my wife got into lengthy conversations about medical situations with some friends. And it was all I could do to stay engaged sometimes. The medical field is not my expertise. But when someone would start talking about framing a house, my ears perked up. I became fully engaged. This was my area of expertise. And so it was with the disciples, with Jesus' instructions to cross over the Sea of Galilee in their boat, they take action. They take control.

Next, the disciples experienced an unexpected storm. In Mark 4:37 it says a great windstorm arose. The word translated "great" is the Greek word "mega" from which we get the word megaphone or mega church. Storms were not unusual on the Sea of Galilee, but this one was extra fierce. Mark also says the waves "beat into" the boat. The word translated "beat into" means to "throw upon" or "cover". So, the picture is of the waves crashing over the boat and covering it with water. The waves were so overwhelming that in spite of the disciples' efforts it began to fill up with water. And at this point I imagine the disciples gave up all hope.

In their desperation they remember Jesus. And consequently their third experience in our story is crying for help. Mark 4:38 says they woke Jesus up. With all the noise of the storm I imagine they had to shake Jesus in

order to arouse Him. Their yelling would have been drowned by the crashing of the waves, the howling of the wind, and the loud thunder. They must have been astonished at His ability to sleep through the commotion of the storm. To them it may have seemed that He didn't care that they were about to be drowned in the sea. When Jesus awakened they addressed Him as "Teacher". That's how they knew Him. That was His expertise. That is how He had made the biggest impression on them – by His teaching.

Fourth, the disciples experienced immediate deliverance. In Mark 4:39 it says Jesus arose and rebuked the wind. He responded to the cries of their hearts. He wasn't offended by their impatient words with Him. He answers their unspoken cries for help. The disciples, though, must have been surprised by how Jesus responded. He provides deliverance simply by speaking. In response to His command Mark says the wind "ceased". This word means to "grow tired" or "relaxed". It pictures this storm as a raging monster that submits to Jesus' command and collapses in submission. There followed a "great calm" or a mega "calm". The calm was just as impressive as the storm.

Last of all, the disciples experienced great fear. In Mark 4:41 it says they feared exceedingly. A more rigid translation is they feared with a great (mega) fear. The word translated fear is the Greek word "phobia". From this word we get claustrophobic, which describes someone who becomes terrorized by being in a small space. So, after the storm is over, the disciples are filled with terror. Why? Their question gives us a hint: "Who can this be...?" And in the Greek the understood answer is, "none of us know. We don't know who this guy is! We thought He was a great teacher. But no teacher has ever had the authority to command the forces of nature into submission! Even the wind and the sea obey Him!" The word translated "obey" means literally to "hear under" or to "listen attentively". The forces of nature listen to what He says!

Next let us consider how this story reveals Jesus as our Example. We have started on this journey through the book of Mark in order to learn from Jesus what a healthy and dangerous Christian looks like. How, in this story, is Jesus revealed as our Example of a healthy and dangerous Christian? First of all, He knew His limitations. He knew when He needed a break. Others had thought He needed to take a break before this. But He had refused to do so. In Mark 3:31-35 we read about how Jesus' brothers and mother tried to get Him to take a break, but their agenda was not God's agenda. Jesus took a break when His humanity needed it and when His Father called for it. Through the Spirit He had a right understanding of His limitations. He knew when to press on and when His humanity needed a break. So, Jesus reveals to us in this story that a healthy and dangerous Christian is someone who knows their limitations in ministry. When a healthy Christian is helping other people they don't burn out. When they are serving in the church they don't just quit. They realize that you will never be able to make everyone happy. And you won't always be appreciated for the ministry you are involved in. You and I will never be able to silence all the cries for help. I am not the savior of the world. Jesus is. So, a healthy and dangerous Christian has an accurate understanding of their humanity's abilities. And they also understand what their Father is calling them to do and not to do.

Second, this story reveals Jesus as our example of a healthy and dangerous Christian in that He totally trusted His Father. He slept in the middle of a raging storm. I invite you to turn with me to John 8:29. Notice how completely Jesus trusted His Father. (Read) Jesus always believed that the Father would never leave or abandon Him. From the cradle to the cross He always trusted His Father. So, a healthy and dangerous Christian is someone who is at peace in the middle of a crisis. This is a tough one for us Christians. As some of you may know, I recently had an upper endoscopy. I have to admit, I struggled with some fears in anticipation of this procedure. In terms of surgeries it's a pretty minor ordeal, but I had never had one done before, so there was some fear of the unknown. In addition to this I would not be in control. And not being in control creates fear in us, does it not? I also have acquired a fear of IV's. The only time I had had one was after

falling off a roof. The nurse kept poking and digging around without success. It hurt so bad, that I dreaded ever having to go through that again. I also was fearful of the possibility of gagging when they put the scope down my throat. Then I worried that they might give me too little or too much drugs. I think I was afraid of too little than I was of too much. But in spite of my fears, I have to say that I did manage to do one thing. I kept talking to my Father in heaven. And I believe that's where it starts. Maintaining a connection with our Lord in the crisis is how we will become healthy and dangerous Christians who remain at peace in the midst of the storm.

I don't know where you are today. You might be in a raging storm or in a great calm. Either way, the disciples' experience is for us. In our story they called Him "Teacher". That is how they knew Him. They didn't conceive that He was also "Lord of the Raging Sea". Whatever situation we are in we need to see Jesus as Someone who has ultimate authority. There's nothing He can't fix. There is no situation He's not in control of. It's like me and the water hose. The other day I was washing our vehicles, using the water hose to spray them off. To my daughter, Abigail, this spray of water was terrorizing. But to me it was nothing. I could shut it off simply by the release of my hand. My authority over the spray nozzle is like Jesus' authority over our crises. Jesus has all authority. No matter what you're going through right now, you're going to be ok. Just remember, Jesus is in the boat.