

Gospel: Mark 4:35-41

Jesus' calming of the storm on the sea reveals his power over evil, since the sea represents evil and chaos. The boat on the sea is a symbol of the church and invites us to trust God amid life's turbulence.

³⁵When evening had come, [Jesus said to the disciples,] "Let us go across to the other side." ³⁶And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. ³⁷A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. ³⁸But 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?" ³⁹He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. ⁴⁰He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" ⁴¹And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

“Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” “Do you not care?” Isn’t that the question we often ask about each other in terms of trials, tribulations, and difficulties that we face in our lives? We say to our neighbors, our relatives, our co-workers, our immediate family members in times of struggle, “do you not care?” It is a question that many times can have some assumptions behind it. For usually when we ask the question, it comes out of a wounded disposition. Perhaps something has happened to us, we have been wronged, hurt, cheated, challenged, or greatly frustrated, and we begin to feel as those who we thought were connected to us, those who may even be the ones who have inflicted the situation upon us have not acted appropriately to either consider our well-being, or perhaps have intentionally done something to wrong us, so we ask the question: “Do you not care?”

In regard to the politically volatile policy of children being separated from parents at the border, of leaders quoting Bible passages to justify such acts, many are justly asking our leadership, our country, and one another – “Do you not care?” In the last couple of weeks just about every Christian group from the Roman Catholic Church, the ELCA, the United Methodist Church, the AME, the Moravians, the Reformed Church of America, Mennonite, Presbyterian, Southern Baptists, Billy Graham’s son Franklin, have condemned the policy surrounding the support of taking children away from the parents as a way of retribution and as a bargaining chip, as a way of saying that people do care about respecting the humanity of one another.

This is but one demonstration of the conflict of being a living human being. Humans have conflict with one another, conflict with nature, conflict with governments, and even conflict with God. The conflict of God often

appears in the form that it did to these disciples. We are going through difficult times and it seems as though God is aloof. It seems as though God might not be paying attention to us. It is almost like we are taking water in our ship and are in danger of drowning and it feels like God is asleep, so we cry out to God: “Do you not care?”

The scripture appointed for this day goes on to read: “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?’” Now who would get voted off the island, and whom would we want to keep on the island with us? “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” Not a bad guy to have around after all.

The disciples had been challenged, they were in fear for their very lives. What was their hope in awaking Jesus? Was it to get another man up to help keep the boat from capsizing? Was it a hope that somehow, in his mysterious way he might get them to shore? Did it even cross their minds that he would speak a word and the winds and the waters would listen? The fact that the disciples even ask this question of: “who then is this,” may indicate that it was doubtful that they expected Jesus to do what he did. What were their expectations and what were they looking for, for Jesus to do?

With the exception of our few avid boaters among us, most of us will probably not have to encounter a raging sea that the disciples did, however, it is not hard to make that connection to realize that we have many other storms in our lives. What are some of the storms that each of us are facing these days? What are the storms raging in our lives around

issues of family crises or dilemmas, about difficult health news or approaching tests, about issues of our schools, community, congregation, or country, about personal direction, tough choices, and personal cross roads? Where do we find God in all of this? Are we experiencing and feeling that God is asleep in the stern? Are we sitting back with expectations that God will eventually stand up and calm the waters? It is important to recall that it is unlikely that disciples realistically expected the result that they were given. The solution from Jesus most likely did not come in the form that had anticipated when they arose him from his slumber. What about us? What are our expectations of how God should act when we are in crisis? Do we limit God's power from our own set of eyes by only focusing on the solution that we want or think is best? It is some times a difficult pilgrimage that life can lead us on. It is only being honestly human to wrestle with God, and we must recall that God understands that wrestling and questioning. God knows we do not have the mind of God and that we are limited in our ability to see things in the biggest of pictures. God can handle our questioning and crying out, of trying to awaken him, when we may think that God is asleep. God understands that human condition. God also understands that God's way and will in this world will often not meet our own expectations, desires and hopes. This also is sometimes troublesome to live with, we want God to act in certain ways and those things do not occur. We want God to yell out: "Peace! Be still," so that the waters calm around us, but the reality as we all have probably experienced in one way or another, is that is not the way it is. Isn't that the dilemma of sailing the sea of this life? Either there is no wind or there is too much wind?

The Good News however, is that whether we can see it or not, we know that God is in the boat with us. Perhaps sometimes God wants to remind us of that, as the Son of God does do his disciples: “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” God reminds us that despite what we think or experience, we are in the same boat together. This motif was so strong in the early church, that one of the major designs, that still influences church architecture today, is that often the ceiling of a church looks like the bottom of a boat. It is a reminder that we are in boat together. Through our faith in Christ, no matter what occurs in our lives, we will not be voted off the island, voted off the boat. God’s promise of grace reminds us that God will be there, maybe in an unexpected way, but present with us nonetheless. May we continue to strive in opening our eyes to God in the midst of us in all conditions that we face yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Amen.