

Not Dead, but Something More

It was a day like any other. Jesus had amassed a crowd so large that he needed to take a boat into the lake to teach. Parable after parable, he shouted over the water to the people on the edge, using images of a farmer casting seed into the ground, of that seed dying and rising to new life...images of the tiniest of seeds giving birth to shrubs large enough to make homes for all the birds of the air, to get the rest and refreshment they need. He didn't take the time to explain his parables to the crowd, but he did open them up for his disciples. Then, after the long day of teaching, Jesus decided it was time to pack up shop, leave the crowd, and head to the other side of the lake.

Whether it was a journey long enough to become drowsy or simply because he was wearied from teaching, Jesus fell asleep right there in the stern of the boat, just as the winds began to howl and the waves began to spill over the boat until it was swamped. The watery chaos broke against the boat, and panicking, the disciples rushed to wake Jesus, understandably fearing for their lives. And even though they had seen him cast out demons, heal paralyzed men, and touch all the ones society had deemed unclean, they did what anybody in their situation would do. They questioned whether he cared enough for **them**: *Rabbi, don't you care that we are about to perish?*¹

It's a question that I've asked before. And it's a question that I guarantee I'll ask again before my time is up. And I bet many of you have asked some version of it: *Where is God in the midst of all this chaos? Does God love me less than everyone else? Has God abandoned me?* These are questions of desperation that come when it seems as if chaos is about to swallow us

¹ Translation from *Mark: A New Translation* by C.S. Mann

whole, with no chance of escape. An emotional tidal wave of depression...the unforeseen death of someone we love...financial instability...the list goes on. It is within our right to ask these questions, almost like it's hard-wired into the human experience when we are suffering the pains of chaos. So, yeah, I can identify with the disciples, and refuse to blame or shame them for their fear. We are human, all too human. And so too were the disciples.

But Jesus...when he is awakened, he does something totally and beautifully divine. Mark doesn't give us any stage directions, any indication of how Jesus moved as he stilled the storm, but I imagine him standing on the stern of the boat, his pillow cast aside, lifting his hands, stretching them out, clenching his fists and shouting straight into the face of the wind, "Peace! Be still!" It's a beautiful image, and a beautiful phrase, but I don't think the translation does it justice. There's a deeper meaning to the word translated "peace," and it's richer than just the calming of a storm, or the ceasing of a wind. It's a word used to indicate the binding up of someone's mouth, the literal muzzling and shutting up of something, and it's the same word Mark has used repeatedly to illustrate what Jesus does to the demons that afflict his people. So here, what we really have is not just a simple flick of a wrist and the stilling of a wind. What we have is Jesus actively, forcefully, clamping together the jaws of the storm...sealing the mouth of the wind...shutting it up, so it could do no harm to those he loved. And it results in not just a 'dead calm', but more accurately translated, a 'great calm.' What Jesus gave to his fearful disciples was not just the stilling of a storm resulting in a dead and stagnant lake, but the binding up of those forces that would threaten their very lives, resulting in something truly glorious...an expansive calm of peace greater even than the calm before the storm.

And this is the same Jesus who fights for you, who wrestles the storms in your life, who binds up the mouth of the winds that rage against you, who muzzles those voices that produce

nothing but crisis for you. It is this same Jesus who keeps you from falling into the watery chaos of death and despair, who brings you safely back to shore. Mark's Gospel is full of moments that raise the question "Who is this Jesus?" And we have an answer here: the embodiment of the peace that passes all understanding, who will declare to all the forces, voices and crises in your life, "Shut up." And because of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, this Jesus dwells within our hearts, and within the life of this community, empowering us with his strength, love, and peace. This is the one we serve. This is the one we worship. This is the one who lives within our hearts, strengthening us to share this peace, this Gospel, with a world always on the brink of shipwreck.

Yet this isn't just about him, just about Jesus. It's about us, too. It's about us remembering who we are: we have been washed in the life-giving waters of baptism, made something more than human. We are fed by the very body and blood of God, a food so rich it sustains the universe! We are more than our fears, and our failures. We are more than our depression and despair. We are the ones who stare into the face of the raging storm, with hands lifted high, tapping into the same power of Jesus Christ: 'Peace! Be Still'

Within the chaos, within the storm, on the edge of a sea of despair, that is where true faith comes alive. When all seems lost, we still hold onto the hope of salvation. When all seems broken beyond repair, we reach just a little farther to take hold of the hands that once stilled the storms and called forth a great calm the likes of which the world had never seen before. When we reach the end of ourselves, there we find the beginning of God. Whatever storms come your way, remember that within you dwells the very same power of the one who rebuked those storms and exorcised those demons. Remember who you are.