

Gospel and Sermon June 23, 2024
Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
Pastor Jaime Larson-McLoone
“Jesus stays with us through storms.”



Fear can cloud our vision, mess with our perceptions, and chip away at our trust. Until it feels like Jesus is sleeping through the worst thing that has ever happened to us. 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.

Gospel: Mark 4:35-41

When evening had come, [Jesus said to the disciples,] “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?”

Sermon by Pastor Jaime Larson-McLoone

“Jesus stays with us through storms.”

Jesus doesn't always still the storms. We know that for certain today. We knew it yesterday, as storms fired up to the west of us. But we knew it long before that, too. Jesus doesn't always still the storms. At least not to our liking. So what then does today's story have to offer us? Is this story for us?

It is. It is for all of us who have faced storms, all of us who have been overtaken by fear, and all of us who have dared to wonder: Does Jesus really care that we are perishing? So we might as well climb into the boat with the disciples:

I knew we shouldn't have taken off this late, someone mutters as the clouds gather. We should have waited till morning. It would have been safer.

The fishermen in the boat know this: Simon and Andrew, James and John. They work these waters. They know these waters. They have studied the skies above them. The fishers in this group can distinguish between a garden-variety wind and a dangerous storm. And this storm has turned dangerous. Winds whip. Water pours over the sides and into the boat faster than they can bail it out. When even the professionals panic, everyone should be afraid. Right?

What do we do now? They shout to one another. Do we wake him? How can he sleep through this anyway? Does he even care?

Fear spreads so fast, doesn't it? On a fishing boat. On social media. Through press conferences and phone calls and whispers after church. Fear spreads so fast. The disciples don't know what to do. They don't know whether it will make a difference, but they shake Jesus awake.

Don't you care that we are about to die? You have healed people and driven out demons and made enemies. And for what, so that we could all die in this boat while you napped?

Don't we sometimes lash out when we are afraid? Say things we don't mean. Things we come to regret. But Jesus gets up nonetheless. He reprimands the roaring wind. He commands the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And just like that, it's over.

Jesus turns to the disciples: *Why are you so afraid?* They don't quite understand just who is in the boat with them. Even though they have seen some things that others have not. Even though Jesus explained everything to them in a private master class on his parables less than 24 hours ago. They still don't fully understand who is with them in the boat - or what that means.

But they do know what it takes to control the chaos of the waters. It takes divine power. Listen again to the lecture God delivers to Job and his companions, after they have worn themselves out debating the cause of Job's suffering.

"Who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb?— when I made the clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band, and prescribed bounds for it, and set bars and doors, and said, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stopped'?"

Were you there, Job? The sailors in our psalm knew enough to cry out to God when the waves towered over them. They knew exactly who could still the storm and guide them safely to the harbor. They called on the God who created order from chaos in the beginning, set the boundaries for the waters, and then parted them so the Israelites could pass through safely.

That is the power the disciples in the boat called on, though maybe with a little less eloquence and trust than those sailors in the psalm: "Do you not care that we are perishing?"

But still, Jesus responds. The disciples witness his divine power over the waters. And they are stunned. "They were filled with great awe," our version of this story says. A more literal translation is that they were filled with great fear.

Up until now, these disciples have been observers. They have watched Jesus heal people and forgive sins. They have insider information on his powerful teaching. This time, though, they are the recipients, the beneficiaries of Jesus' power.

Seeing and hearing is one thing. Experiencing is a whole other level of learning. The teachers among us know that.

The disciples have just experienced Jesus' presence and power in a new and personal way. They are still getting to know Jesus, still learning about his power. In fact, Mark's story will end before his followers come to terms with who he is.

In just a couple of chapters, the disciples are going to take another nighttime trip across the sea. This time, though, Jesus sends the disciples on ahead without him. They'll struggle against the wind, and their arms will wear out from all that hard rowing. But they won't be out of Jesus' sight. He will catch up with them, walking on the water. He'll climb into the boat with them, the wind will cease, and the disciples will be utterly astounded. Again.

I would be thinking to myself, "Gosh, it would have been nice if you'd shown up an hour ago, Jesus." Probably some folks thought that last night, too, after huge storms. I bet at least one of the disciples was thinking that, too.

The disciples should know better by now. *But sometimes, so should we.* It's often easier to look back and see that Jesus was right there beside us as we struggled. It's often clearer in hindsight that he sent someone who got us safely to the shore.

But fear can cloud our vision, mess with our perceptions, and chip away at our trust. Until it feels like Jesus is sleeping through the worst thing that has ever happened to us. Still, Jesus is there. Jesus shows up even when we doubt him. Jesus shows up even when we have decided all hope is lost. Jesus shows up even when we are red-faced and shouting mad and accusing him of not caring at all.

The One with the power to overpower all the chaos this world can muster rides with us in the boat. Stays with us through the storms of our lives. Never loses sight of our struggles.

Sometimes, Jesus will still the storms. Sometimes, we'll just have to ride them out together. Maybe sometimes Jesus will calm the storms in ways we don't even realize because we are so busy flailing around in the waters trying to save ourselves.

We can fight him. We can doubt him. We can fear him. We can completely misunderstand him. And still, Jesus will be there. There will be more storms – even bigger storms – for the disciples and for us. The seas of our lives won't always be calm. We know this.

But Jesus will be with us. The one who overpowers death will not leave us. And like death, the storms and the sea do not get the last word. Jesus speaks to the wind, to the waves, to us: *Peace. Be still.* And then he keeps traveling with us and teaching us, as we learn to trust the peace that he offers.

Pastor Jaime

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