

November 23, 2014 “In The Midst of the Storm” Mark  
4:35-41

Being Canadians, I have a feeling that if I say, remember the weather on Tuesday and Wednesday, especially after dark, I suspect you would say something like...”O yeah. That’s when we got the snow.” And I especially expect the choir members would remember the snow, because it was not snowing when we gathered. That started while we were singing. We drove home in the midst of the swirling snow. What I remember about Tuesday and Wednesday night was not the snow so much as the wind. Trees swayed. Snow swirled all around you. And all night long...both nights it howled. I get nervous when there are howling winds. That’s another story!

So it was when evening came that Jesus looked out over the water and said, “Let’s go over to the other side. He was tired. He had been teaching the crowds. It was a quick get away. Relief from the pressure created by their neediness. Quiet after the hubbub created by numbers. The disciples were used to the water. They had expertise among them. They made no great preparations, they all climbed into a boat and the disciples did their thing...they sailed it. Jesus stretched out in the stern on a cushion and quickly fell asleep. Protective of Him, the disciples let Him sleep.

If that had been where the story ended, a placid and peaceful, literally uneventful time on the water, we probably would never heard a thing about it. And isn't that the way of life? A lot of our memories are in fact forged in the midst of the unexpected, and unplanned for circumstances that simply arise. Life takes a sudden turn to the left, or the right. Suddenly there is a hill to be climbed that looks awfully like a mountain. And then there are those moments when the bottom falls out, and we feel like life is in freefall.

Mark tells us, and I have never doubted for a moment that the source for this one was uncle Pete, Mark tells us a furious squall came up. I am not a sailor, but even I know that squalls are not sought out by those who are experienced sailors. White squalls, are code for potential disasters among mariners. That Mark, and therefore Peter would call this a furious squall means two things. It came up fast. And they, those who recognized the danger knew in moments, seconds, that the danger was great. There was reason to be afraid.

Have you ever been in circumstances that caused you to whisper, "O God". Prayer code for help! That's exactly what it means that they woke up Jesus. I believe that what we have here is a physical demonstration that the disciples believed Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. They have heard Him teach. They have responded to his calling them to service,

to follow Him. They have seen Him heal really sick people. He has taught them to heal sick people through prayer and the exercise of faith. But here they are on the lake. A normal day and familiar surroundings ....and the bottom has fallen out.

That they woke the carpenter, with the words, “Don’t you care that we are about to drown,” means they have come to the conclusion they are all about to die. Life is in freefall. They get it, being an experienced sailor, a fisherman is no help here. And what one does not need in this moment is a carpenter. What they are saying is their version of “O God...Jesus help!” The boat is awash. It’s going down. And while we may find this hard to understand, it would be normal for these fishermen to know nothing about swimming for it, artificial respiration or CPR. The boat is filling with water. It is going down and so are they. “Jesus don’t you care?”

Jesus gets up. He tells the wind and the waves to stop it, as though he is speaking to a noisy child. And like that...it is over. The white squall is not squalling. The wind is not howling. The waves cease their rolling, bucking, twisting motion. The surface of the water calms. Clouds part. It’s quiet. It’s beautiful. When Jesus speaks, it is to say something like, “What are you afraid of. Do you still have no faith?” And the disciples are saying things like, “My God! And Who? What? And ...Even the water!” It is not rational. But in stunned fashion

they see the power of the Creator God, in Jesus, as the lake becomes (another nautical term)...dead calm. There is humour here. They have gotten what they wanted...now they are going to have to row. Think about it. Who is going to ask Him to command a breeze to take them to shore...on that blows that away!

Here is a strange thing. (I really wanted to say a funny thing). It makes theologians extremely uncomfortable. It is not what this text says that is important so much as what this text means. When our boat won't float, when our plane won't fly, when our cars can't run, when our circumstances have become lethal, literally life threatening....Jesus can do miracles. Jesus can save us. Which does not mean we will live forever or even to be a hundred. Remember what Jesus said to Jairus, when his friends brought news Jairus daughter was dead? Jesus ignored the news bearers. He looked Jairus in the eye. He said, "Do not be afraid. Just believe." That story is in Mark 5. It is not so much what the text says as what it means. Jesus can alter the circumstances in which people find themselves. Jesus can alter the circumstances in which we find ourselves. And does not that meaning leave us with things on our lips like...God, Jesus, What! How?

I have several stories that boil down to, I could have died before now. There was the wind-rain storm (our

kids, Barbara and I tend to call it the Tonado) July 4<sup>th</sup>, four o'clock in the afternoon. The forest blew apart, and it was done in seconds. By the time we reacted it was over...and before we knew it we, and all whom we loved who were there were safe. There was the incident at Ramor, the north branch of the Trans Canada, when I lost control of the car on black ice. Three trucks hauling tree length logs made it past me as I fought for control and then spun 180 degrees hung up on a snowbank, the car pointing north east when I had been travelling south west. Or even two years ago when I was cutting the lawn at the farmhouse and wound up on my back, the lawn tractor above me, the engine running, and gasoline soaking my shirt and jacket....O God...Jesus....what....how...in my case followed by tears, a sense of unworthiness, mixed with anger at my foolishness...and in the utter quiet of the moment a sense of the holy...the nearness....the love ...of the One who redeems.

I am left with two thoughts and both of them need to be expressed. On the one hand it is obvious that in moments when I literally flew or walked into danger...it was not my time. As Shakespeare would cause Hamlet to remark...."there is a divinity that shapes our ends." That's another way of saying, Jesus can save us in the midst of lethal and life threatening circumstances. Regardless of how we got there, or what role our boldness/ carelessness played in our

being part of the scene, Jesus can keep us safe. The second thing that has to be said is this: none of us lives forever, by which I mean this body of flesh will wear out. And yet even when that happens the salvation of God is about living even when we die. On the one hand a contradiction. On the other hand an abiding truth. Being saved by faith is no guarantee of living to be a hundred and five...even though it is a guarantee of eternal life.

So here I am. And part of my testimony is that faith in Jesus includes His having brought me safely through storms in the midst of which I was terrified. He gives peace. He gives calm. He quiets the storm, the noise of which, the sight of which definitely unsettle me. I know when it appeared I was going to die...I did not. Jesus can fill me with the wonder that asks the question "who are you" ...and He can cause me to know even as I ask it. He is God. The wind and the waves obey Him. So do pulp trucks and my out of control car...Jesus takes the wheel. He has seen me through. He has seen us through. We are not alone. Praise God we are not alone!

Let us pray;

Heavenly Father, Lord Jesus, Holy Spirit, the One true God; thank you for moments in which we have witnessed and known your grace. Be with us in the time that remains in which we may serve you. Grant us the determined faith to do what

you empower us to do together. May we be servants of you will, in the lives of those with whom you privilege us to share the journey. In Jesus name we ask. Amen.