

June 21, 2009
Lectionary 12
Mark 4:35-41
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Crazy wind. Driving rain. Thunder and lightening that's deafening and dangerous. No, I'm not necessarily talking about the Gospel reading—yet. I'm talking about two days ago. How did you experience Friday's storm—from an office window or from home? Were you trying to get somewhere in a car or on public transportation? I trust you weren't in a boat out on Lake Michigan. The remnants of the day are stark in our front yard, where a large tree that came down still blocks our front door.

As a Minnesotan, I've experienced plenty of thunderstorms. Generally, like some you I'd guess, I think a good storm is fascinating and exciting if I can watch it from safety. But a few years ago, while at the family lake home, we were under the proverbial tornado watch. The rain was coming down in sheets. Every few seconds the lightening made the dark sky look like day. The wind was so fierce, it knocked our boat out of the hanger. The waves then knocked our boat against the shoreline rocks and we were helpless to do anything about it. Instead, we sat huddled in the hallway—the only place with no windows—with blankets and flashlight, listening to the local radio station and holding Peder, then a toddler, encouraging him (mostly ourselves!) to not be afraid and trust that the storm would soon pass.

Now, to today's storm: Some of the disciples in the boat with Jesus were professional fisherman, so one can assume they were familiar with the sort of storm that frequently came upon the sea. This must have been a pretty bad storm if this is the one that made them fear for their lives. (Now how Jesus could sleep through it all is amazing to me.) As the storm rages out of control, the disciples wake Jesus, not to ask for a miracle, but to tell him they are going to die. Literally their question is, "Teacher, is it not a care or concern to you that we are dying?" Their fear and anxiety was strong and as out of control as the raging storm that surrounded them.

Sometimes in the middle of our fear, we may feel like shouting as the disciples did. "Hey God, we're dying here, don't you care?" At various times in our lives each of us has experienced fear: Fear of failure, of losing a job, or of illness, fear of responsibility, of losing a loved one, of being alone, growing old, even death.

Maybe you've been anxious about a big change in your life, anxious about how it will turn out. Or perhaps you're waiting for some kind of news and there is anxiety in the waiting. Or, sometimes were just overwhelmed by life and not even sure why. We might think that having Jesus in our boat would guarantee some smoother sailing. But no, with Christ in our boat, in our life, we meet the same scary wind and waves as everyone else.

Some days, it feels as though Jesus is sound asleep as the storms of life rage and we ask, "Lord, don't you care?" It's normal, and perfectly alright to ask that question. Everyday and throughout history, men and women of amazing faith have cried that question from the darkest places. "Where ARE you, God? Lord, Why don't you answer? Where's the help? I'm dying here! Even Jesus cried this prayer from the cross, "My God, why have you forsaken me?" In our most desperate moments, it has sometimes felt as though God is asleep.

But this is not the end of the story. After the disciples cry out in fear, Jesus gets up, rebukes the wind and says to the sea, "Peace! Be Still!" One commentator said the Greek word Jesus uses to calm the storm could be interpreted as his exclaiming, "Shut Up!" Calmly and with authority Jesus commands the wind and waves to be still, and at the same time he commands his friends in the boat to do the same. Peace! Be Still! Stop all this anxiousness. Why do you fear? I am here with you.

And the wind dies down, and peace comes.

There are times in our lives when trusting God means that we can take naps in a stormy boat. We can be like little children resting comfortably in a parent's protective arms. Michael Lindvall writes this about the storms that make us anxious: "Time and time again in Scripture the word is, 'Do not be afraid.' It is, you might say, the first and the last word of the gospel. It is the word the angels speak to the terrified shepherds and the word spoken at the tomb when the women discover it empty: 'Do not be afraid.' Not because there are not fearsome things on the sea of our days, not because there are no storms, fierce winds, or waves, but rather, because God is with us....even though there are real and fearsome things

in this life, they need not paralyze us; they need not have dominion over us; they need not own us, because we are not alone in the boat."

Even today, there may be another storm brewing—in our weather or in our lives. Both, in so many ways, are out of our control. But the One who promises to be present for us through all the storms of life, says to us once again: Peace, Be still. And in this place, if even for a moment, in the songs and silence, eating and drinking may it be so.

May the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen