

## “The Man Who Still Stills the Water”

We will be looking at a story found in Mark, chapter 4. It begins at verse 35. “On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, ‘Let us go across to the other side.’” The other side of what? It was the Sea of Galilee. The beginning of the chapter provides the setting for this story. “Again, he began to teach beside the sea. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the sea and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land” (Mark 4:1).

Afterwards, it says, “And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him” (Mark 4:36). It must have been a full day of teaching for Jesus (the previous verse says it was now evening). At this point, Jesus and His disciples want to leave the crowd behind, and have time alone.

Mark writes, “Just as he was”. I’m not sure what that means. He had been sitting in the boat, teaching. Does this mean they just started to row away from shore while Jesus was still sitting there? Perhaps it suggests that they got out of there quickly, with no preparation. It also says there were “other boats”. Matthew and Luke relate this same story but leave out this detail. Mark says nothing about what happened to these other boats, but we will see what happened to the boat Jesus and His disciples were in!

Verse 37 says this: “A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped.” A huge windstorm came up. The waves not only beat *against* the boat, but the water began to fill the vessel. The Sea of Galilee was notorious for storms. They came up quickly even when the sky was clear. The terrain around the Sea of Galilee was such that the area acted like a funnel for forceful winds to be released. Years ago Nancy and I hosted a trip to the Holy Lands. We were scheduled to have a Sunday worship service on a boat on the Sea of Galilee. It was a beautiful, sunny day. Yet our boat trip and service was cancelled because the captain suspected a storm to come.

Well, one of these monster windstorms hit the boat carrying Jesus and the disciples. The boat was pitching violently. They were taking on water rapidly.

Have you ever been in a storm at sea? (If you’ve served in the Navy or Coast Guard you probably have). A few years ago Nancy and I went on a cruise. The first full day at sea was rough. It was not a bad storm; the waters were just rough. The ship we were on was not the largest of cruise vessels. Both Nancy and I began to feel nauseous, a bit unsteady. I’m sure we looked pale. (I took Bonine – but that made me feel worse!). I got to talking to an elderly man who had a cap on showing that he had been in the military service. He just calmly smiled about the choppy seas and remarked how we were “rockin and rollin.”. Now we were not on a small boat – we were on a cruise ship. And we were nowhere near sinking. What Jesus and His disciples experienced was more like what we see on TV shows like “Deadliest Catch” or “Wicked Tuna”.

*So, this huge storm comes up, their boat is “rockin and rollin” and filling with water. How do the disciples react? Well, they are scared. Terrified! Apparently all of them!*

This is kind of surprising, since some of the disciples were *fishermen*. You would think they'd be used to it. So this storm must have been really bad.

Notice that this happened in the evening. At night. Have you ever been on a small boat at night? It's kind of eerie, spooky. When I was young, my dad and I would sometimes go fishing in the bay in Maryland at night, in the dark. It was kind of eerie. Going through a wicked storm *in the dark* just adds to their feelings of sheer terror!

***Rough sailing. Turbulent seas. Isn't that a description of today's world? How about the current political scene. Life in Washington.*** That's pretty calm, isn't it? *Not!* Whether or not you like Donald Trump and his policies, you'd have to admit he has made life far from boring in our nation's capital. And the venom and hostility that divide Republicans and Democrats don't make for smooth sailing in Congress either. We face our own terrors today with terrorist bombings, cyber attacks, the threat of more countries being able to produce nuclear weapons and send them to our shores.

***How about life inside the church.*** We've known of clergy sexually abusing children. But this awareness has spilled over top with the report that came out about 6 weeks ago bringing to light widespread sexual abuse of children by priests here in PA. The Catholic Church is in turmoil. We've got our own stormy seas in the United Methodist Church. When the special session of General Conference is held in February, it is quite possible that we will have a split within our denomination over the issue of homosexuality. Things are far from calm in United Methodist seas.

***Some of us no doubt are sailing through some stormy seas in our own lives. Our boat's rocking, taking on water.*** Maybe its money problems...family issues...illness or failing health...or we're grieving or depressed and we feel like we are sinking and we just can't pull ourselves out of the water.

“A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped (Mark 4:37). ***Where is Jesus in all of this?*** “But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion” (verse 38a). He is snoozing! Sure, He's probably been teaching all day. If you are a teacher, you know teaching can drain you. But the boat is tossing and turning, everyone's getting soaked, how can the Lord sleep through all of this!

Have you ever felt like the Lord's asleep when all heck is breaking loose around you, or within you? I can't tell you how many times over the years where people have expressed in one way or another that God seems absent when they going through a difficult or terrible time. I'm thinking of the time I visited a dear Christian friend, a giant in the faith, near the end of his life. We both knew he had just a short time left. I asked him how it was with his soul. He told me God didn't seem that near to him, that God seemed further away than when my friend was able to do his normal daily routine of reading the Bible and praying.

Jesus is snoozing! Mark writes: “And they woke him up and said to him, ‘Teacher, do you not

care that we are perishing?” (Mark 4:38b).

**How did Jesus respond?** He didn't panic or wring His hands saying, "What are we going to do!" He didn't just hold on for dear life. He didn't pull out a portable lectern and deliver a nice little talk about how God cares for us when bad things happen. This is what He did: "He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!'" Then the wind ceased, and there as a dead calm" (verse 39).

He "rebuked" the wind. He talks to the waves! The Greek here is strong. *The Message* has it: "Be quiet! Settle down!" (His command sounds like that of a parent trying to hush a child throwing a fit, or a teacher trying to discipline an unruly classroom). *That night on the Sea of Galilee, nature itself obeyed the command of the Lord Jesus Christ!* The sea becomes smooth as glass. Can you picture that! The boat stops rocking and heaving. There's a hush over the water.

A little side note here: the words Jesus uses to calm the violent seas are the same words He spoke to command a demon to come out of a man! In Mark 1:25, Jesus says to the demon: "Be quiet! Come out of him." The demonic forces that cause chaos in nature and the demonic/evil forces that destroy people are all tamed by the Lord Jesus Christ!

What took place that night on the Sea of Galilee...well...that doesn't happen every day, does it? The disciples in the boat with Jesus recognize that something awesome – something *holy* - has taken place before their eyes. "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?'" (verse 41).

Ladies and gentlemen, there is One greater than any storm of life we will ever face! There is One more powerful than all of the evil and chaos that are part of living in this sinful, broken world! *Jesus is the One who still stills the waters! He is Jesus the Christ, Lord of all creation!*

We don't have to panic when Washington D.C. is in turmoil, because our future doesn't lie in the hands of Donald Trump nor Vladimir Putin nor Kim Jong-un of North Korea, nor does our destiny ultimately lie in the hands of warring members of Congress. We don't have to wring our hands over what is taking place in the Catholic Church or the United Methodist Church. Of course, what we are going through is serious, and must be dealt with. But whatever the future holds for the Catholic Church or the United Methodist Church, Jesus promised that the gates of hell would not prevail against *God's Church, that body of true believers throughout the world.*

We don't have to fret and get all bent out of shape over whatever is happening in our personal life or family life, no matter how choppy and turbulent the waters are that lash out against us. Our ship isn't going to go down if we've got Jesus in our boat!

**Oh. One more thing. We left out a verse!** Verse 40 says this, "He (Jesus) said to them, 'Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?'" Jesus says to these scared disciples (probably still visibly shaken from the experience), "Why are you so afraid? Do you *still – still* – lack faith?"

Do you think maybe Jesus is slightly disappointed by their unbelief? No – it sounds like He is *exasperated!* It's like He's saying to them: "I've been trying to show you how to live by trusting in Me. Do you *still* not get it?"

I can't help but wonder: If I had been in their shoes (sandals), would I have reacted any differently when the storm came up that night? Maybe Jesus is saying to me, "You've been a follower, Harry, for all these years. I've given you so many promises in the Bible. You've seen how I've taken you through so many storms in your life. Do you *still* not get it? Don't you trust Me? Can't you see that I'm greater than anything that may come against you to destroy your life? And if you keep your eyes on Me, your boat isn't going to sink or capsize!"

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