

“The Storm”

June 20th, 2021
Mark 4: 35-41

Rev. Diane Strickland
Wall Street United Virtual Church (66)

I speak to you in the name of God who made us, Jesus who came as one of us, and the Spirit who never leaves us.

We aren't far into the Gospel of Mark, but it's been one scene after another, boom, boom, boom: almost like the story has a life of its own. That's just how the Gospel of Mark rolls. But in today's story there's a break in the momentum. Because at the end of this story there's a dead calm, and a missing link to what happens next.

Everyone has ended up at the Sea of Galilee. It's a big lake with a particular geography that means it is often beset by sudden fierce storms. And if I know that, they knew it. These disciples were fisherman. Night is falling. Jesus is worn out. But the crowds remain.

He says, “Let's get in the boat and do a night crossing.” As experienced fisherman who the know the water, the disciples could have said, “Teacher, let's wait til daybreak when we can at least see the weather coming on this lake.” But they didn't. Maybe they thought “Finally we can do something. Rabbi, we got this. We're fishermen!”

As they leave the crowd behind, verse 36 says they got Jesus in the boat “just as he was”. So then, Jesus was in some kind of a state, probably tired because of the crowd. Even after they left, it says other boats followed them.

In Mark chapter 4 verse 37 disaster happens. A big storm comes up and the boat is being swamped.

Verse 38 shows us our first look at the surprising picture of Jesus sleeping in the stern on a cushion---oblivious to their peril in his exhaustion. He was so tired from the first four chapters that the storm was raging, the boat was filling with water, and he was still sleeping.

But as the verse unfolds, the disciple's “Rabbi, we got this”, has now become, “We don't got this.” They don't got this at all! But they have options. They could wake Jesus up, and say “We're afraid. We need your help, the boat is going to sink.” But, instead, they wake him up with this: “Teacher! Do you not care that we are perishing?” They challenge his leadership and his love for them. That's what this storm brings out of them. “You don't care if we die!” It's

shocking, but it's often our "go to" when terrible things happen. What kind of a God are you? Asleep in the stern because you don't really care.

In verse 39 re read how Jesus woke up; rebuked the wind, and spoke to the sea saying; "Peace, be still". The storm stopped. And there was dead calm. Dead Calm. As it turns out, dead calm is a new problem. You're not being swamped, but the wind isn't at your back either. You're not going anywhere in a dead calm. And now would be the time to put your PfD"S on, because Jesus isn't finished. He's finished with the storm, but not with them.

In verse 40 Jesus asks "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" So here's where Greek is handy. There are several words to use when you want to say "afraid". And they are nuanced in different directions. Delios, the Greek word used here, is about fear that is cowardly. Being afraid of a storm isn't cowardly. But trying to blame your fear on your Rabbi and suggesting he doesn't care about you, so it's all his fault, is cowardly. So in the dead calm, Jesus responds. "You think I don't care about you. I think you might have a little look at the quality of your discipleship." Cowards and no faith. It's a stand off.

In verse 41; the last verse, the disciples have got to turn this around. They don't try to respond to his questions about their fear or their faith. They don't want to be the focus of the teaching moment at all. So they execute a nice de-focus and act all awed by Jesus; talking to each other about their leader's power over the wind and the sea and asking "Who then, is this?"

But even after they chat that up for a while, they're still stuck in the boat at night with their teacher, in a dead calm. Even if they are sure of the direction, they can't get there. And the story ends without them getting there. We only know they do reach the other side because it says so in the first verse of the next chapter. But we don't know how it happens.

For us, the story ends with them safe from marine disaster, but stuck in a dead calm, not answering Jesus's two questions at all.

The dead calm. Some of you know I serve in disasters and critical events, including the pandemic. The dead calm is the best description of what happens after a disaster, a near-death experience, a traumatic event, a pandemic, 215 children's graves, a Muslim family murdered for being Muslim.

The dead calm. We keep trying to be ourselves the way we used to be ourselves, before this and this and this happened, and we can't get moving, or if we do, we can't sustain it. There is no wind at our back. The storm is over

but there's a dead calm ... and no matter how much we do, we're still stuck in the boat.

The Gospel of Mark has the ongoing theme of asking "Who is this Jesus?" And so that's where the disciples go in this story instead of answering his question about them. But this is a story that says the Gospel is NOT just about discovering who Jesus is — *it's about discovering who we are because of Jesus*. It's about who we say we are now, that we were not before, after we live through a life-changing experience. We call things life-changing, but sometimes we don't let our lives change at all.

Every time I come close to a disaster or critical event, I'm not talking about who Jesus is. I know who he is. He's for certain. I'm answering Jesus' question about me. Who am I going to be? When I watch a pandemic wreak havoc with human lives, I'm not worried who God is. I know who God is. Who Jesus is. Who Spirit is. I'm asking *who am I going to be?*

When I hear my friend's story of struggle and despair over knowing who he is inside and trying to be someone else so he fits in, and how much of his life was wasted doing that, I'm not asking who God is, who Jesus is, who Spirit is; I'm asking *who am I with my friend?*

When I'm knocked back by the realization that what Indigenous people told us about their missing children is a truth bleeding out of the ground all over this country, I'm not asking who God is, who Jesus is, who Spirit is; I'm asking *who am I in this?* When I hear news of the heinous killing of a Muslim family I'm not asking who God is, who Jesus is, who Spirit is. I know who they are. I'm asking *who am I going to be now? Who are we in the dead calm?*

Mark didn't tell us how they got out of that dead calm. We only know the next chapter starts with them on the other side of the sea. Mark doesn't always tie up the story neatly for anybody. That's why there are two added endings to his gospel. He left that ending hanging too, so people tried to fix that.

When Mark leaves a story hanging, I believe he wants us to write the ending with our lives. The gospel is not just about asking "Who is this Jesus?" It's about asking us, now that we know, who are we going to be as his disciples? And that's the question that nudges us further into the gospel, changing us, all for the sake of the world God so deeply loves. Who am I in that world, who are you, and who are we, together?