

June 20, 2021 4th Sunday after Pentecost
Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

Job 38:1-11, Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32
Mark 4:35-41

[Working Preacher Commentary on Mark 4:35-41, by David Schnasa Jacobsen, posted for this date:

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/ordinary-12-2/commentary-on-mark-435-41-5>]

Would you join me in prayer? May the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God who stills the storm, O God who is our peace. Amen.

Grace, peace to you, beloved of Christ Jesus.

I've been chuckling to myself, shaking my head,

that after all these days, weeks, really, of heat and drought,

today, the day when we hear the story of Jesus stilling the storm, brings rain!

Some years we'd be disappointed by rain.

And it's, true, I'd love to be with many of you gathered outside, in person, for worship.

But this cool rain, and even afternoon thunderstorms, are so very needed.

I'm giving thanks for rain, for storms.

I'm also thinking about time spent on the water:

How at the end of the service today we'll pray Godspeed for two groups from Hope and First

Congregational, leaving after church for some days paddling and camping in northern Wisconsin with Camp Amnicon.

And I'm recalling the ease of yesterday, a beautiful day on the St. Croix River.

I joined a bunch of you in kayaks and canoes,

acquainting and re-acquainting as we paddled and floated and chatted.

Today's passage from Mark goes further than just boats on the sea,

further than rainy days, or even typical storms.

These fishermen-turned disciples must have weathered their share of storms over the years.

How could they not?

They would have known what to do, how to respond.

And yet in Mark's telling, there is an anxiety, a stress in the air and on their lips:

The windy storm rising.

The waves beating into the boat.

The fear that they would be swamped as they take in water, and more water.

And there's Jesus "just as he was" asleep on the cushion.

"Teacher, don't you care that we are perishing?" they cry. "Don't you care, Jesus?"

Take a few minutes this morning, and think about the storms.

Perhaps these are physical, actual storms, we've seen a few,

but even more, think about the metaphorical storms.

Add to the chat (as specific as you feel comfortable) a storm or two you've known.

The unexpected diagnosis that catches you off guard and shakes you to the core.

The stress of this last year, working or studying from home, parenting.

A love lost, fragile health, a mental health crisis.

The truth of racism so squarely before us we must respond.

In a line or two, you who are on Zoom, add your storms in the chat and I'll read a few of them aloud.

[STORMS-READ]

In today's scripture, Jesus has the non-anxious presence down, doesn't he?

As the boat rolls, he's so calm, he's napping.

To these storms, Jesus declares, "Peace, be still."

Calming the storm,

calming the disciples in the storm,

calming us in the storms. Peace, be still.

Let's go a little deeper, though.

It says in today's reading that Jesus rebuked the wind.

The Greek word that we hear as Rebuke,

is the very same verb that is used early on in Mark when Jesus Rebukes the unclean spirit.

It'll come up time and again through this gospel.

The miracle of rebuking the wind and calming the storm is big, no question.

But Jesus is doing even more.

Jesus is challenging the powers,

challenging the politics,

challenging evil and chaos in the cosmos,

challenging everything that we think has sway in our world, and in our lives, everything.

The people for whom Mark is writing would have known these deep-seated challenges.

Mark's gospel was finally written down around the year 70,

That's about the same time that the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed.

The center, the heart of the Jewish community's religious life and cultural life was broken.

And with it, so, too, their identity: Who is this community without the temple?

For Mark's community, there would have been, as Professor David Schnasa Jacobsen writes,

“a kind of cultural trauma,

a displacement that asks deep questions that touch on our life together

and the shared forces that threaten to upend us all.”

In today's gospel, Jesus, through the pen of Mark, is addressing the big questions, the big storms.

Job knows about big questions, too, and we heard about them in our first reading today.

Job and his friends have been mulling over his suffering, arguing about the cause.

Here, at the very end of the book, God finally speaks,

laying out this big, beautiful, grand vision for creation.

After all the back and forth, all the stewing about the complexities Job faces,

God weighs in, claiming God's very own power, the power to create, but also to care for:

“Where were you,” God asks, “when I laid the foundation of the earth?”

For the last several weeks, my spouse Jane has been musing about this untimely heatwave,

the scorched, crispy, grass,

the low water levels,

the schools that couldn't meet in person during the final days of the school year,

so hot it was in the buildings, one more hit in a year of challenges.

Day after day, I hear the anxiety in Jane's voice, I see her shaking her head:

this isn't right, something is wrong, the world is out of whack.

My pre-teen, she'd tell you with emotion about the northern white rhinoceros,

on the absolute brink of extinction.

What I've noticed is the intensity and the stress on the streets.

I see it in the driving: fast and hard.

I see it in the gun violence: daily gun fire, daily news reports, daily grief

It feels like we're out of control, something not right.

Beloved of God, these are the cosmic-sized storms moving across our land,

tearing at the heart of our society,
sickening our souls.

And it's to these storms, and in these storms, that Jesus speaks so clearly, so calmly: Peace, be still.

Peace, be still.

Easing our anxiety that we, the church, might find a steady, strong voice,
a sure and grounded footing,
an engaged and compassionate posture.
a present hope.

As we sing our hymn of the day, let these simple words of promise roll over you,

Jesus' voice in the wind,
calming the storms—
those within our hearts and minds,
and those threatening the balance of the cosmos.
Peace, be still.

Don't be afraid, my love is stronger, my love is stronger than your fear.

Don't be afraid, my love is stronger, and I have promised, promised to be always near.

Beloved of Christ Jesus: May it be so, may it be so. Amen.