

Mark 4:35-41 - <sup>35</sup> That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side."  
<sup>36</sup> Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him.  
<sup>37</sup> A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. <sup>38</sup> Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" <sup>39</sup> He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. <sup>40</sup> He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" <sup>41</sup> They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

## *Why are you so afraid?*

*So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

*(Isaiah 41:10)*

What are you afraid of? Are there things in life that make you uneasy, nervous, or downright scared? You can admit it. It's kind of a universal thing that comes with each stage of life. As we get older, we might not be afraid of the same things that used to frighten us. Maybe at age 60 we're not so scared of things that made us skittish at 6. When I was younger, something that made me uneasy was walking up the basement steps when the lights were off. I would either sprint up the stairs as fast as I could, taking them two at a time, or walk with my head turned slightly, just to make sure nothing was following me. Looking back on it now, it sounds foolish, but when I was about 7 years old it made all the sense in the world. And now, we don't even have stairs at our house, so it's kind of a non-issue. What was it for you? Were you afraid of the dark? Did a fear of heights keep you grounded? Do you still shriek at a spider or get nauseous at the thought of public speaking? These are all common phobias, and many times, people can usually grow out of them or learn to adjust.

But we didn't come here to talk about those. What about the big ones – you know – the real, grown-up fears, the ones that rob joy from your day and peace from your heart and sleep from your eyes? What are you afraid of? Are you afraid of a diagnosis that's less about a cure and more about treatment? Are you afraid for your family – their safety, their spiritual well-being, their lives? Are you afraid that your past might finally catch up with you? Does your fear of the future paralyze you in the present? Are you scared about the ever increasing disparity between slim bank accounts and fat bills that need to be paid? Maybe you're thankful you've outgrown your fear of the dark because sometimes it seems like the darkness is your only friend – just me and my fears, trapped in the prison of my own mind. Fears are real. But have you ever taken a step back and asked yourself the bigger question, "Why are you afraid?" I realize there may be no universal answer, but I think most fears in life boil down to uncertainty; uncertainty about whether the past is really the past; uncertainty about what might happen in the future; uncertainty whether we can really trust someone or something.

In our gospel lesson for today, we find ourselves asking the disciples the same question Jesus asked; "**Why are you so afraid?**" Why were they so scared? They had heard Jesus' words drive out demons. They had watched Jesus hands touch the unclean - healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, and legs to the lame. But now, as the angry Sea of Galilee bombarded their boat, the disciples succumbed to the fear that finds itself near the top of many phobia lists: death. While the disciples were on dry land, listening to Jesus teach about how God protects and provides in every situation it was easier to be bold and unafraid. But when *terra firma* gave way to a wild and watery ride, it seemed more natural to fear than to trust. Have you ever been there? When life is smooth sailing, and things are going well, it's easy to feel like Jesus is on our side. We're ready to give credit where credit is due, "*God is good – he really knows what he's doing!*" But when life gets real, the storm clouds build, and the boat starts taking on water, our sinful nature always wants to get in the way of our faith; and that gives way to fear. It's like we're saying, *I know God promises that all things work for my eternal good – but this time it's different!* It's at that moment you need to ask yourself, why are you so afraid? Jesus is in the boat.

In the gospel, Mark tells us, **That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowds behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat...A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"** You might remember from Bible history, the Sea of Galilee was situated in a valley between some high hills. Strong winds would sweep

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down the hillsides, collide over the water, and cause storms to arise on the lake with little warning. Well, it happened, and it wasn't pretty. Waves kept on pounding against the boat, water was rushing in, and hope was flooding out. Just like that, the disciples went from seasoned sailors to petrified passengers. Remember, some of the disciples had been fishermen. They grew up on the water, some of them on that very lake, but now in this storm they were afraid for their lives. This was no Sunday school felt board illustration – a little wind, a little rain. This was serious! You know it's bad when the professionals are panicked. It's kind of like when you're on an airplane, and you go through turbulence. Look at the flight attendants during that bumpy ride – if they're still smiling and serving Diet Cokes, then I tend to breathe a little easier. But if they hunker down in their chair and don't make eye contact, it's a whole other story. So this was no joke – petrified Peter, terrified Thomas, and the other ten faced the prospect of a watery grave more seriously than ever before. The wind was howling, the waves were pounding, the rain was pelting...and Jesus was asleep.

Does Jesus ever seem to be sleeping when you need him most? That's not a new phenomenon. God's people throughout the ages have been wondering why a good God would let evil go seemingly unchecked and even flood into the lives of his people. Take a quick read through the psalms and you'll hear things like, **Awake, O Lord! Why do you sleep? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever. Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression? We are brought down to the dust...Rise up and help us.** Does it ever seem like God is sitting on his hands, doing nothing, while I'm down here in the thick of it dodging the devil's darts all on my own? When things are going well, it's easy to feel like Jesus is with you. But what happens when the seas are choppy and the boat starts taking on water? Faith gives way to fear. *It's not fair! Why would God let this happen to me – after all, I'm a Christian?! How come my neighbor who has no time for God is doing so well and I'm just scraping by? Why is it my loved one who has an illness that will never get better or who was taken from me too soon? What's going to happen to my family...my country...my church? Doesn't God know what's going on here? Doesn't he care?* And this is where we might find ourselves joining in the disciples' refrain: **"Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"** Where does a question like that come from? The disciples knew that Jesus cared and that he could help – that's why they asked him in the first place. But the disciples were looking for help in the way they wanted help and at the exact time they thought they should get it. What was the bigger issue here – was it just a matter of fear, or a lack of trust in the true God? They were pushing their own agenda ahead of God's. It still happens. When we find ourselves rocked by the storms of life, it becomes pretty evident that maybe, just maybe, I've sunk my trust into a god of my own making – the work of my hands or the intentions of my heart – my money, my health, myself. And not a one of my false gods can do a thing about the storm.

But isn't this precisely where we need to be? To realize, all the more fully, just what it means that Christ is all in all? When I'm rocked by the storms of life, all pretensions stripped away, and I have no resources to throw at it, no wisdom to navigate through it, and no power to change it. I am emptied of myself and at the end of my rope – and so I get to see just how true it is that Christ Jesus is everything. Mark tells us, **He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.** Have you ever stood on your front porch and shouted down a thunderstorm? You can't do it, but watch Jesus. This is no ordinary man who calls out into the stormy darkness of Galilee. This is the Almighty God who called creation into being. What a remarkable juxtaposition – the same guy who was sleeping like a rock is the one who flips the storm switch from "on" to "off." Jesus showed that he is true God and true man. As true God and true man, Jesus is able not only to calm the storms in our lives, but to still the greatest squall in history – our sin. As true man, Jesus came to be one of us and to take our place under God's law. As true God, Jesus lived every minute of his life with perfect trust in his heavenly Father. For all our selfish worries, for all our irrational fears, for all our self-made idols we cling to that we think will solve our problems and bring us hope, Jesus Christ was nailed to the cross to pay for your every sin. He

was swallowed up by the Father's wrath, so you wouldn't be. So the question sounds foolish, **Don't you care if we drown?** Jesus cares – and even more, he forgives. Jesus cares, and he saves.

And precisely because he cares for you, he drowns you. Yes, you heard me right. He drowns you. It happened again this morning, with a whole lot less water than the Sea of Galilee, but there at the font sins were drowned into the deepest depths, never to return. In the waters of your baptism, you have been connected to the death and resurrection of Jesus. Every day, Jesus puts to death your sinful nature and all its desires. Because he loves me, he drowns my sinful self and brings me up alive in Christ. Because of your baptism and the promise God made you, every new day means a new you in Christ. Every day, you can go forward with the promises of God in hand – forgiveness for your sins, a home forever in heaven, and in the meantime, he'll never leave you nor forsake you. Why are you so afraid?

When we think about it; the things we fear in life can be irrational. How can a full grown, body builder, muscle bound man be afraid of a spider? How could I have been so foolish as to think that something was following me up the basement stairs? Fears can be irrational. With Jesus on your side, and he most certainly is on your side, you don't have to fear anything – not in life or in eternity. **He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"** Jesus is not calling his followers unbelievers. Instead, in his love he shows remarkable patience and teaches them and us an important lesson – that God will make good on his promises, even and especially when it seems hopeless or impossible. What the disciples saw were waves battering their boat and water creeping up their shins. What they didn't see right away was that Jesus was in control the whole time. In life, what I see can and will deceive me. What never fails is the promise of God in the gospel, and that promise fulfilled in Christ.

That's where we find ourselves in this story. We know what our Savior has promised us, but the evidence we see around us begs us to reevaluate. When it's your health that's questionable; when it's your family that's broken; when it's your loved one you have to bury; when the devil goes to work and waves of guilt come pouring over the starboard side and you feel like you're going to drown, remember that Jesus is in the boat. He's paid for your sin and defeated your death. With his resurrection, he's put to death all your fears of the future and doubts of the past. With his word, he stands always at your side, **"Be still."** With Jesus at your side, you have nothing to fear in this life or the life to come. He has claimed you, he has cleansed you through faith, and one day he will welcome you home. Why are you so afraid? Jesus is in the boat!

Amen

*And the peace of God which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*

*(Philippians 4:7)*