

A Sermon for the  
3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
June 21, 2009  
Texts: Psalm 107:1-3,23-32  
Mark 4:35-41

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“Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the mighty waters; they saw the deeds of the Lord, his wondrous works in the deep. For he commanded and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea. They mounted up to heaven, they went down to the depths; their courage melted away in their calamity; they reeled and staggered like drunkards, and were at their wits’ end. They they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he brought them out from their distress; he made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. They they were glad because they had quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind.”

Psalm 107:23-31

“On that day, when evening had come, [Jesus] said to them, ‘Let us go across to the other side.’ And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, ‘Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?’ He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, ‘Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?’ And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, ‘Who then is this, that even the wind and sea obey him?’” Mark 4:35-41

I really like Eugene Peterson’s translation of the gospel story in *The Message*: “Late that day he said to them, ‘Let’s go across to the other side.’ They took him in the boat as he was. Other boats came along. A huge storm came up. Waves poured into the boat, threatening to sink it. And Jesus was in the stern, head on a pillow, sleeping! They roused him, saying, ‘Teacher, is it nothing to you that we’re going down?’ Awake now, he told the wind to pipe down and said to the sea, ‘Quiet! Settle down!’ The wind ran out of breath; the sea became smooth as glass. Jesus reprimanded the disciples, ‘Why are you such cowards? Don’t you have any faith at all?’ They were in absolute awe, staggered. ‘Who is this, anyway?’ they asked. ‘Wind and sea at his beck and call!’”

This is one of the most famous events in a story studded with miraculous events. Mark uses it as the opener in a section of his gospel featuring the miracle working power of Jesus. From here Jesus will reach the other side and the region of Gerasa where he will cast out a legion of demons from a possessed man. Then he will cross back to the other side of the sea and there

he will heal a woman who had suffered from hemorrhages for 12 years and raise from the dead the daughter of Jairus, a leader of the synagogue. This section of Mark's gospel serves almost as an answer to the question asked by the awestruck disciples, "Who is this, anyway?"

But I think there is a danger that lurks in today's story, and the others that follow. And that is to hear the message or moral of the story as keep close to Jesus and all will be well, he will rise up and make the storms go away. Something that we all know doesn't happen all the time. Throughout life we encounter all kinds of storms and sometimes, in spite of our prayers, they don't go away, we get hurt. So I don't think this story is most importantly about Jesus' supernatural abilities, rather, it's about faith, and having the courage to face our storms.

Carter Shelley, New Testament professor and pastor, suggests as a different way to hear this story and get at an important part of its message, to imagine that Jesus' words "peace, be still," or as Eugene Peterson translated it, "quiet, settle down," was directed not at the wind but at the disciples. As they are engulfed in panic over the threat to their boat, would they not respond better to the crisis after settling down? The storms we face rage not just outside of us, they rage inside of us too.

As the storms rage inside of us how often have we reacted by asking, "God, don't you care I'm falling apart here? Jesus, don't you care I'm dying here?" When we know that God is steadfast love, that nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ. In response to our need for faith, Jesus says, "Quiet! Settle down! Peace! Be still!" Be still, and know that I'm right here beside you through the storm and beyond. Have courage.

Another suggestion I have heard is to hear this story as a dream sequence. One of those difficult dreams that arise from the soul in times of stress where you are flailing about in panic. I remember back in college having dreams around final exam time. When I had stayed up late studying - cramming - for a difficult test the next day and then tried to get a few hours sleep I remember struggling through the night dreaming that I was late and I was running to get to my exam. It seemed to take forever to get across the campus to the classroom building and when I got there the doors were locked. I was running around and around the building trying door after door and they were all locked, sweating and in a panic I finally woke up realizing that it was just a dream, but exhausted. Later in life I have had similar anxious dreams occasionally about arriving at church and realizing I can't find my sermon and panicking as the service approaches. Jesus says, "Peace, quiet, be still, settle down!" Have some faith, know that I am with you, then you will find the resources within you to go on. Because, as a child of God, God has equipped you already, with a faith that is intended to encourage you and uphold you through all things. Be still and remember that.

Edwin Friedman, the family therapist and leadership trainer, lifts up the importance of having the ability to be a "non-anxious presence" in situations of anxiety and stress. Jesus is in the stern of the boat sleeping as the disciples are quickly dissolving into panic in the face of the storm. How did he do that? Not because he was the Son of God and knew what he was going to do anyway. By faith. Stilling the storm outside began with the stillness present on the inside. I would suggest he was being the very model of a non-anxious presence. And when he arises and reprimands the disciples it was for their inability to display that non-anxious presence as well. Have you no faith? Where there is faith, peace is available, quiet is at hand, so calm down.

As I researched this week's sermon I came across an interesting little anecdote about the British navy. Supposedly there is a strange custom in the British navy. If there is a sudden disaster aboard a ship there is a special "call" or horn that is blown. The ship's horn can be blown in a variety of ways like the call to general quarters, everyone to their post. Well there is a call known as the "still." At the moment of crisis the "still" calls the entire crew to a moment of stillness, a pause, silence, as the orders say, "To prepare to do the wise thing." Panic is a contagious power. It seeks others to join in. It asks that "don't you care" question. As panic threatens the welfare of the ship, the "still" is called, a moment taken to think about the wise thing to do next, and the panic is stopped in its tracks. Observers of this system have noted many times when this moment of calm averted a catastrophe.

The stilling of the storm story became a very important in the life of the early church, the context in which the gospels were written and to which they were intended to speak. So much so that one of the earliest symbols for the church became the sailing ship. The church faced many storms, persecutions and challenges. Jesus wanted them to have faith that would give them the peace and courage to face those storms. Something that is no less true for any of us today. When storms rage outside and within us, Jesus reminds us that the power of peace and stillness lies within our faith. So listen to Jesus' words of authority spoken to each of us, "Peace! Be still! Quiet! Settle down! Be a wise, loving, non-anxious presence in the storm. Amen