



Pentecost 4-June 20, 2021
Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish
Mark 4:35-41

"But He was in the Stern"

Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

"The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how." If you have forgotten when or where you heard these words or who spoke to them, it's ok, so did Jesus' disciples. These words were a part of the gospel from last week that Kendra preached from. Jesus had spoken these words to his disciples describing how faith works. Jesus told his disciples that when you have faith, you don't have to watch to see if seeds will sprout after they are planted. When you have faith, you can go to sleep trusting that Jesus will do for you what you cannot, like making seeds to grow or calming raging seas. As I said, it has been a week since you heard these words from Jesus that he spoke to his disciples, but the scripture that you just heard about Jesus calming the storm happened just later in the same day.....and Jesus' disciples had already forgotten that he said, When you have just a little faith, you can go to sleep without worrying what is going on around you. In the gospel reading for today, there was only one person who was not worried. It was the person who was fast asleep. But Jesus was there, he was in the stern of the boat.

The disciples may have wanted to forget this frightening event on the sea with Jesus. However, as the reading states, there were other boats that went across the sea with them and saw what happened and were witnesses to the fear of Jesus' disciples who had been told that if you have even a little amount of faith, faith the size of a mustard seed, you will have nothing to fear and can overcome great things. You can be certain that the people who were in the other boats were just as frightened as Jesus' disciples.

It seems as soon as Jesus spoke these words about having faith, the disciples' faith was tested. Jesus didn't give the disciples any options about what happened that evening. He didn't ask these seasoned fishermen if they thought it would be a good idea to cross the sea with the threatening dark clouds in the sky. He didn't ask them if they thought it was too late to set sail that night or if they thought it would make more sense to wait until the light of day. Jesus simply stated, "Let us go to the other side."

You can often lose the intended meaning or effect when translating from one language to another and there are some examples of this in the gospel for today. I often recall my grandparents speaking to others from their generation in Norwegian and after a long exchange of words they would burst out in laughter leaving me only to wonder what was so funny. Many times, when they attempted to translate what they said into English, but the joke still felt flat and wasn't humorous to me. The story of Jesus calming the storm doesn't translate very smoothly from Greek into English. At the beginning of this reading in verse 36, it says "And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was." This, however, doesn't mean that the disciples didn't give Jesus' time to change clothes or freshen up before getting into the boat. After all it was Jesus' idea

to go to the other side. The original Greek text emphasizes that Jesus was present by saying that they took Jesus with them when he was already in the boat. This is not the last time in this reading to make this important point that they were not alone in the boat to battle the raging storm. You might say that they took Jesus with them, but he was already there.

Then we learn that a great windstorm arose. The water didn't just get a little rough to make the disciples wonder if they should have talked Jesus into waiting until morning. Most versions of the bible describe the windstorm as great. However, the Greek word that was used is where we get our English word "mega". The storm was a mega storm, and it was about to destroy the boat and the disciples thought that they were next to perish. Not one of them reminded the others what Jesus had just said, that when mega troubles come your way, if you have just a little bit of faith, you could just curl up on a cushion and go to sleep. And even when they saw Jesus doing just that, not one of them remembered what Jesus had just said. None of them realized who Jesus was. But they knew where he was and what he was doing, he was asleep in the stern.

I don't know much about boats other than I appreciate other people who own them and are willing to give me a ride in them. So, I had to google what part of the boat was the stern. From what I discovered; the stern is the rear of a boat. I suppose maybe I am reading a little more into where Jesus was in the boat than what maybe scripture intended, but it seems possible that this specific location is mentioned to let you know that if Jesus opened his eyes up from his sleep, he would be able to know where all of his disciples were and see what was ahead of them. This is unlike this past weekend at RiseFest when we walked from our camping site to our chairs which were placed near the impressive new stage which seemed a mile away. It was a long distance to walk and the old alfalfa field where the concert is held was rough from years of digging of gophers and badgers. When we started out, we wondered if we would make it across the rough field with the intense heat. We loaded two large collapsible wagons with what we needed for the concert including some of our grandchildren who couldn't or didn't want to walk that far. Whoever was pulling the wagon needed someone to walk behind to spot what or who might fall out of the wagon, since they were not in the back to see all the dangers that lay ahead. But Jesus didn't need any spotters in the boat since he was in the stern.

Throughout this reading, Jesus' name is never mentioned. The bracketed verses in your bulletin are for your benefit so that you do know that it is Jesus and his disciples in the stormy water, but without that, Jesus is referred to only as "he" or "him" and the disciples as they or them. Even when the disciples wake Jesus from his sleep, they only call out to him as "Teacher" and say, "Do you not care that we are perishing?" Now this could have been a great teaching moment for this teacher when Jesus could have reminded them of the lesson that he had just taught them about faith. But the disciples didn't need a teacher at this moment. They needed a Lord who could calm a storm. Jesus didn't start by rebuking the disciples. Instead, he first rebuked the wind and said, "Peace! Be Still!" The translation that we read for today describes what happened to the sea after Jesus spoke to the wind as there was a "dead calm." The same Greek word that described storm as a mega at the beginning of the reading is the same word describing the sea after Jesus spoke. The sea was now "mega" calm. Maybe this is a good translation since a "dead" calm is about as mega calm as you can get.

After first rebuking the sea, Jesus next rebukes the disciples and their lack of faith. The reading says that the disciples are filled with great awe. Once again, this is the same Greek word used for the wind, the calm, and now the disciples are filled with "mega" awe. However, this awe is better described as a "mega" fear as they are only beginning to see who this Jesus is that can calm a storm by his words.

In 1987, my grandmother, mother, and sister attended the Billy Graham Crusade that was held at Howard Wood Field. Nearly 25,000 people attended this event. I am told that the event began by being clouded over and a light rain started to fall. But later the skies turned coal black as if a mega storm were about to strike this stadium of people only protected by umbrellas and garbage bags. My mother recalled Billy Graham telling the crowd to simply have faith and stay where they were and that the storm would pass. Most people stayed and the storm indeed passed.

Most of this reading for today focuses on the mega storm and the mega fear that the disciples had even after Jesus calmed the storm since they did not recognize him as being more than their teacher. We too can fail to recognize Jesus for who he is and think that he has fallen asleep while storms rage around us. The good news for you is that Jesus will take you to the other side of whatever storm that is in your life. It is Jesus' plan to go with you to the other side of your stormy sea. Jesus is not afraid of any storm that is in front of you. Remember, Jesus is in the stern, watching out for you. Amen