

Mark 4, 35-41, Jesus calms the storm

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God of the universe, ruler of all, help us to hear your word of peace to us today, by the power of your Spirit at work in us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

With a story like this one, it's tempting to our cynical modern minds to ask 'Did that really happen?' We have absolutely no way of knowing the answer to that, and so I think it can be a way of just dodging the real issue. We might as well start asking 'Was there really a prodigal son? Did he really exist and do what Jesus tells us in the story?' Clearly, that is not the point. Nor is it the point with the miracle stories we read in Mark's gospel. The important question to ask is: 'What does this story mean? What truth are these stories telling us?'

One thing that is important to remember with our Bible stories is that they are full of metaphors, of symbols, pointing us to a deeper meaning. So here, with the lake, or Sea of Galilee, we have to be aware that in the Jewish mind, the sea, the great waters, represent chaos. Think back to the opening verses of the whole Bible, and the story of creation in Genesis chapter 1. 'The earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep.' Chaos, darkness. And into this comes the wind of God or the Spirit of God, bringing order, creating life.

Then in Psalm 107 we read:

Some went down to the sea in ships,

doing business on the mighty waters;

²⁴ they saw the deeds of the Lord,
his wondrous works in the deep.

²⁵ For he commanded and raised the stormy wind,
which lifted up the waves of the sea.

²⁶ They mounted up to heaven, they went down to the depths;
their courage melted away in their calamity;

²⁷ they reeled and staggered like drunkards,
and were at their wits' end.

²⁸ Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,
and he brought them out from their distress;

²⁹ he made the storm be still,
and the waves of the sea were hushed.

³⁰ Then they were glad because they had quiet,
and he brought them to their desired haven.

³¹ Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love,
for his wonderful works to humankind.

Doesn't this sound just like today's Gospel story? Mark's listeners would know this Psalm. They would understand that for the disciples to be out on a stormy sea in the dark would represent fearful chaos; the sea represented a dark, powerful force threatening human life. And, as at the beginning of creation, and as in Psalm 107, so in today's story the word of God, in Jesus, brings order, calm, peace.

And we should note that the words Jesus uses to rebuke and silence the storm are just the same as the words he uses in the earlier story where Jesus rebukes and silences the demon-possessed man, whose life has been one of chaos and destruction until he is healed by Jesus. "Be silent! Be still!" In this way Mark hints to us that the stilling of the sea is linked to the overcoming of the demonic.

I'm sure most of us are familiar with this story, but we often notice something different when we come back to these Gospel stories. This time I was struck by the disciples' reaction. They already knew a bit about Jesus. They have him there in the boat with them. But when the storm gets up, they don't just give a straightforward cry for help. It seems to me that there is a real anger in their anguished cry: 'Teacher, don't you *care* that we are going down? Doesn't it matter to you?' It sounds more like a rebuke. Come on, Jesus, why are you just sitting there! Why don't you do something?!

And it occurred to me that we can sometimes feel like that. Something goes wrong in our lives, and it gets worse and worse. And we pray, and still things are hard. And it feels as though God is asleep in the stern of our own little boat, doing nothing. And we can feel abandoned, angry, resentful. 'Don't you care, God?' we might want to shout. 'Can't you see how I'm suffering?' Although we might not put our feelings into words quite like that! It might seem a bit bold, a bit disrespectful, although when we read the Psalms we find that there is no holding back there in expressing true feelings.

I wonder how you are feeling today? I wonder what your fears and anxieties might be? Does it seem to you that Jesus is asleep in your boat, that he isn't taking any notice of your troubles? Do you begin to wonder whether he really cares for you? If so, please read this passage for yourself and spend a little more time with it, Mark chapter 4, verses 35-41. Talk to Jesus. Tell him how you feel. Believe in his presence with you in the little boat of your life. And trust yourself to his power to bring calm into your storm, whatever it may be. In the storm of anxiety let him give you his peace, the peace of the love of God for you. Amen.