

## Jesus calms the storm – sermon – June 10<sup>th</sup> – Mark 5

I feel like I am repeating myself but the passage that we read for today is connected to what we looked at previously!

In addition, our passage for today is also part 1 of four stories that form one unit.

In order to appreciate the message that Mark is trying to communicate with this story of Jesus calming the storm, we need to consider it within the overall narrative of Mark's Gospel.

I pointed before that the question Mark is answering with all 16 ch. Is "Who is Jesus and what does it mean to follow Him?"

Throughout the unfolding narrative Mark reminds us that we can only finally answer this question once we get to Jesus' death on the cross.

Also, we have seen before that there is a key turning point in ch. 8:29.

Until that turning point, Jesus is presented to us as one who has authority and power.

The question we are confronted with then is what does it mean to follow this Jesus who has authority and power.

Starting in ch. 8, the focus shifts to Jesus being this person of power and authority and yet He is willing to die for us and be humiliated.

So in the second half of Mark's GOspel we will be confronted with the question "what does it mean to follow this Jesus who suffers and is rejected?"

But at this point in ch. 4, Jesus is presented to us as having power and authority, even over nature.

So the question Mark is answering with this story is "who is Jesus and what does it mean to follow Him?"

When we looked at the parable of the seed and the sower we learned that our response to Jesus matters and that we are invited to bear fruit which means becoming more like Jesus.

This is a journey and we are invited to grow closer to God no matter where we are at in the moment.

Last week we explored how our individual response to Jesus fits within the larger story.

We discovered that God is working towards a definite goal, the new creation and we heard about this vision from the prophet Isaiah.

Things are not the way they are supposed to be but God is at work moving all things towards the new creation.

But of course, right now, we are in this time in between which means that things are not yet what they will be.

This can be frustrating because it might feel like we are stuck and nothing is happening but we are invited to live lives that already reflect what things will be like being patient and trusting that God is at work in our lives and in the world.

Starting with the passage that we read for today, Mark presents to us four stories.

All four stories show Jesus in a certain way and the stories also introduce us to various possible responses to Jesus:

1. Jesus calms storm (Mark 4:35-41): faith or fear
2. Gerasene demoniac healed (Mark 5:1-20): acceptance or rejection
3. Jairus' daughter and the woman with bleeding (Mark 4:21-43): faith or despair
4. Jesus' hometown (Mark 6:1-6): belief or disbelief

The focus shifts a bit with these four stories when compared to what we looked at up until now.

This change is subtle: when we looked at the parable of the sower and the seed and how our individual response to Jesus fits within the larger story the question was "what does it mean to follow Jesus in light of who Jesus is."

Mark turns things around with these four stories, the calming of the storm being the first, and answers the question "who is this Jesus who calls us to follow Him?"

So lets look at this story together and ask the question "who is Jesus and what is He like?"

What do you think about this picture depicting the calming of the storm?

Does it help us understand who Jesus is?

What does this picture communicate about who Jesus is as presented to us in this story about the calming of the storm?

Does this picture faithfully represent who Jesus is as presented to us in Mark ch. 4?

What about v. 38? "But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion;"

Does this picture account for the fact that Jesus was so tired that He slept on the boat during the storm?

Here is a icon depicting the story of the calming of the storm.

What do you notice?

So in light of this icon, what does this story about the calming of the storm say about who Jesus is and what He is like?

The Jesus presented to us by Mark is not just strong and powerful but also fully human. Jesus needed a nap.

Jesus is not just the one who has all the power and authority.

Jesus is God but He became one of us.

He came to us and experienced on His own body what it means to exist in this world where things are not the way they are supposed to be.

Jesus knows pain, suffering, rejection, and death.

This Jesus who sleeps during the storm on the boat is also the Jesus who then rebukes the storm and calms it.

This icon makes us think by putting Jesus twice into this painting but of course, He is one and the same person.

In light of your own life right now, which Jesus would you rather talk to?

Does anyone know who painted this rendering of the story that we read from the Gospel of Mark? Rembrandt

Does anyone know where the original can be admired?

I am glad no one knows because the original was stolen in 1990 from a Museum in Boston.

Whatever is going on in your life right now, Mark presents Jesus to us as being right there with you in the middle of the storm.

Now it is not a coincidence that this story of Jesus calming the storm is recorded right after Mark talked about how our lives as individual followers of Jesus fit within the larger picture of what God is doing in this world.

Do you remember what we talked about last week?

Things are not the way they are supposed to be but God is at work.

Remembering that things are not yet the way they will be still leaves us with the question "why does God not calm the storm in my life?"

If Jesus is who He says He is and if He can do things like calming the storm, and if God really cares than why is there still all this pain, suffering in my life?"

Why did this or that happen?

I am sure you have asked yourself that question before.

Mark gives us an answer but he is not interested in abstract arguments.

Throughout history people have wrestled with this question and have come up with various ways of thinking that may or may not be helpful.

For me, any way of thinking that turns suffering and pain into an abstract problem that can be solved with a way of thinking is in the end not satisfying.

I think the passage that we read for today provides a much more satisfying way forward.

But our passage for today is only helpful if we are willing to let go of abstract problems and come to a place where you and all the pain and suffering of your life meet with Jesus as a living person.

Jesus is not abstract! He is a living person who slept on a boat but also calmed the storm!

If pain and suffering and if the question "how God can let that happen" is an abstract and rational problem for you than Jesus and the story of Him calming the storm provides no way forward.

But if pain and suffering are part of your journey with God and if you ask yourself what it means to follow Jesus in the midst of our messy lives than the story of Jesus calming the storm provides hope and a way forward.

Mark really turns things around with this story!

Instead of inviting and challenging you to follow Jesus, Mark presents Jesus to us as someone who comes to us to be with us during stormy times.

What feels threatening to us does not even keep Jesus from sleeping.

He is able to help. But he knows what it means to be exhausted. Jesus knows about our need for rest.

It is precisely as the one who needs to sleep Himself that Jesus is there for you to calm the storms in your life.

Jesus is with you in the boat.

Jesus' being with you in the boat during the storm may not answer all your questions but Jesus' presence opens up ways forward.

Instead of rationalizing the pain we feel, Mark invites us to enter and live into the reality that Jesus is with us.

Mark invites us to adopt a new framework that is determined by who Jesus is, what He is like, and how God is at work in our lives and in this world.

Yes, things are not the way they are supposed to be but things will not remain the way they are because God is at work moving everything towards the new creation.

But we still live in this time in between when the seed has not yet grown into a shrub, as we learned from Mark ch. 4 last week.

Things are not yet what they will be like.

Our lives exist in this time in between.

But we are not left alone with our pain and suffering!

Followers of Jesus are in the same boat with Jesus.

Our God is for us, with us, and in us.

Our God is faithful and cares about us.

To be a follower of Jesus means to be in one boat with Jesus.

At the end of the passage that we read for today, Mark writes, v. 40 and 41, "He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" <sup>41</sup> And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Followers of Jesus are in the boat with Jesus but that does not mean that they have it all figured out.

Those who are in the boat with Jesus still have questions!

This means that the difference between those who reject Jesus' call, those who are not in the boat with Jesus, and those who follow Jesus and are with Him in the boat, the difference is about proximity.

In other words, following Jesus is not about being in or out.

It is about being close to Jesus.

If this dot represents Jesus than every single person in the universe is one of these dots around Jesus who is at the center.

The difference between those who do and those who do not follow Jesus is not that they are in or out.

Instead, the key question is "how close are you to Jesus?"

Also in v. 41, Mark says that the disciples were terrified when they saw that Jesus calmed the storm.

The word in the Greek that Mark uses is exactly the same word used in the Greek version of the passage that we read from the OT book of Jonah.

What is Mark trying to communicate with this parallel between Jonah and Jesus?

As one commentator put it, "The pagan sailors in the Jonah story recognized God in the presence of the miracle and offered sacrifice to him. In the calming of the storm on the lake Jesus does again what only God can do, and Mark invites followers of Jesus, then and now, to recognize in Jesus the same presence of God."

The disciples were terrified and ask "who then is this" because the presence of God is unsettling!!!

There are ways of thinking about Jesus and what it means to be a Christian that domesticate Jesus into someone we can snuggle up to.

Mark makes it very clear that the Jesus who comes to us and is with us during stormy times puts His arms around us to comfort us but the presence of Jesus is also unsettling.

At this point it is helpful to remember the situation of the first readers of Mark's Gospel.

They suffered under the persecution of Emperor Nero in Rome. Nero persecuted followers of Jesus because of their faithfulness to Jesus.

In other words, the first readers of Mark's Gospel experienced very stormy times!

They may have asked themselves if God even cared about their suffering.

This story of Jesus in the boat with the disciples reminded them that God was with them.

But a Jesus they can snuggle up to was not what they needed! Yes, they desired to know and be reaffirmed that God is with them, they needed to hear that God was right there beside them in the midst of the storm but they also need this Jesus who can calm the storm even though God's presence and power at work is unsettling!

This story assured them, as it assures us today that God is with us and for us!

The first readers of Mark's gospel, as well as us today, we need both, the unsettling presence and power of God at work in our lives and the comforting arms around our shoulder!

We don't have one without the other!

If you don't know God as the one who cares for you, If you have never sensed and experienced how God walks alongside you in times of pain and suffering, putting His arm around your shoulder, perhaps that's because you don't know Jesus as the one whose presence is unsettling.

At the same time, if you have never experienced how unsettling and disturbing Jesus' presence can be, perhaps that is because you don't know Jesus as the one who cares about you.

Wherever you are at in your journey with Jesus, whatever kind of storm you may be experiencing, Jesus is right there with you walking through it with you.

Yes, Jesus' presence in our lives can be unsettling but it is unsettling because Jesus is not only there with you as the one who sleeps during the storm but also as the one who can calm the storm.

For me, all this raises a question:

What does it look like to be a follower of Jesus in times when we are made painfully aware that things are not the way they are supposed to be?

Did you know that there is a icon of the Good Shepherd back there?

This is probably my favorite icon because this icon can communicate in the form of art what takes way to many words to express.

What does it look like to follow Jesus during times of pain, suffering, and tears? It looks like this:

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who carries us and our burden on His shoulders.

This means that we are the lamb on the shoulder of the Good Shepherd.

How is God at work during this time in between when things are not yet the way they will be?

Jesus is active in our lives and in this world carrying us on His shoulders during times of pain, suffering, death, and tears.

But there is more! What do you see behind Jesus head? The cross,

In light of the cross, Jesus is not only the Good Shepherd but also the Lamb that was slain for us.

As the Lamb that was slain, Jesus is the Good Shepherd who carries us and our burden which means that our Good Shepherd is at one and the same time the one who sleeps on the boat during the storm but also the one who simply speaks and the wind and waves cease.

Our Good Shepherd who carries us and our burden Himself knows pain, suffering, rejection, and death.

I am going to put this icon right there...

As you come to communion, I want to invite you to take a look at it and remember that Jesus welcomes you the way you are with all your experiences and emotions.

God knows you and all the pain you feel and God wants to meet you as you are.

My prayer for all of us is that touching and tasting the bread and the wine may remind us that God is at work in us and in this world moving everything towards the new creation where God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. Death will be no more, mourning and crying and pain will be no more because God has promised "See, I am making all things new." Amen

## Work

“The initial step of faith may not seem like one at all, for the presence of Jesus is first of all an unsettling presence. His disciples ask, “Who then is this?” (4:41), and his family and acquaintances in Nazareth ask, “How can this man do these things?” (6:2). The right judgement of Jesus cannot be made by following convention, for Jesus supersedes the powers of nature, demons, illness, death, and family influence. Confining Jesus within such categories and stereotypes is to misunderstand him; acknowledging his supremacy to such categories is the first act of discipleship.”

Potentially use the icon of the good shepherd to talk about this?

Use the painting by Rembrandt:

May this painting help you remember that Jesus is right there with you during stormy times

Also, what feels threatening to us does not even keep Jesus from sleeping. He is able to help but he knows what it means to be exhausted. Jesus knows about your need for rest

Mark shows us with this story that "Jesus does what only God can do!"

What would you do if following Jesus would mean for us today that our government persecute us?