

June 21, 2009

Scripture: Mark 4: 35-41

Sermon: "The Calm after the Storm"

They were fishermen by trade. They were fishermen at heart. They knew no other trade. They knew when to cast their nets and when to call it a day. They knew the best fishing spots and the places where no one ever caught a thing. Fishing. It was how their grandfather had made a living. And it was how their father had made a living. It was how their children would make a living.

By being fishermen, they knew the sea. Wait. That's not quite right. They understood the sea. They understood the many moods of the sea. These young men knew that the sea could be as giving as selfless mother to her children. These young men also knew that the sea could be as harsh and relentless and stormy as a child who throws himself down in a temper, wailing mournful cries, heaving fists of rage, and disrupting the serene calm of the grocery store.

Yes, these men understood the sea. They had experienced her embraces and her rages. Yes, these men understood the sea.

They know the dangers of a fisherman's life. They know that there was a chance that their boat may not return. They know that the livelihood of their people is an all or nothing risk.

But they boarded the vessel of rough wooden planks, ready for the journey. But they steered the boat onto the water, awaiting the unexpected. But they sailed all for the sake of their livelihood.

All at the request of their leader. All at the command of their teacher. All for the sake of one person, Jesus.

Imagine how Peter, Andrew, James and John, who have fished the this sea from the time they were able to first cast a net, must have felt at that moment when Jesus said, "Let us go across the other side." Imagine what Peter, Andrew, James and John, who had had a love-hate relationship with the sea, must have said to Jesus at that moment. "Jesus, don't you know that it is the end of the day? No fishermen takes his boat out at night. It is not safe. We won't be able to see where we are going!" "Jesus, don't you know that storms are fierce at sea. You really don't want to be out at sea at night when people can't see to rescue you!"

But they climbed on board the boat, despite the mystery of the sea, all for Jesus. But they guided the boat upon the dark waters all for one person, Jesus.

Jesus who had come into their lives and change them. Jesus who had shown them a new way to love God. Jesus who had done so many great things.

So the four experienced fishermen along with the rest of the disciples set out across the sea when evening had come.

And soon a great windstorm came upon the boat. The storm was whipping the boat back and forth. The storm was flooding the boat with water. The storm was playing with this boat like a

child who plays with her bath toys, dunking them, splashing them, and throwing them around, overtaking the boat with water.

These experienced fishermen huddled together to keep each other safe. They struggled to stay on board. They weaved back and forth on the deck, trying to make it to their teacher who has always been there to guide them. And these experienced fishermen find their leader asleep in the midst of this tempest.

Then something extraordinary happens!

With a few simple words, the storm was stilled. With a few simple words, the waters calmed.

With a few simple words, these skilled fishermen experienced a new mood of the sea, a new creation, and a new miracle that showed them who this teacher, this leader, Jesus really is, Jesus, the Son of God.

This new creation is just one incident in a long history that the people of the region called the Sea of Galilee had with the sea. Many people who lived around the sea were fishermen. The sea provided food. The sea provided a supply of water. The sea provided a way to bring commerce in the area and a way to travel for many people. But the relationship was so much more than seeing to the people's physical needs. The people also understood the spirituality of the sea.

The tradition of the sea as a part of religion goes beyond ancient Israel. There were many creation stories from other ancient cultures that described how the main god overcame chaos, in the form of the waters of the sea. In one particular story, a Babylonian god took two parts of a destroyed dragon and separated the primordial waters, thereby creating sky and land.

In Ancient Israel, there are many stories that tell of how God overcame the waters of the sea. We are reminded of the creation story in which God separated waters of the chaos. Sky was created and Land was provided as a safe haven for God's creation. We are also reminded about how God let the waters overtake the land, thereby flooding everything. Even some of the Psalms praise God for setting the boundaries of the chaotic sea. Psalm 104 says "you cover it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains, At your rebuke they flee; at the sound of your thunder they take to flight... You set a boundary that they may not pass, so that they might not again cover the earth."

The sea: It was part of the people's understanding of God, of how God control the chaos, how God showed majesty and might in creation. The sea was part of the people's livelihood and understanding of God.

The Israelites praised God for creating an orderly world out of chaos. The Israelites understood that it was through God that order was a part of their world. They knew that they would be safe because God was in charge, God was in control. God alone could control the waters of chaos and God alone could still the raging sea.

So as the disciples experienced Jesus calming this tempest, this storm with just two words, they were left wondering, left almost fearing, left in awe, Who exactly is this man that they follow? Who exactly is this man named Jesus? Who exactly is this man standing in their presence? Who is this person that is doing what only God can do: Stilling the chaotic waters of the sea.

And looking back, in light of the resurrection, the disciples get the answer to their questions. Jesus has just spent all day, preaching and teaching. Jesus has spent all day healing people who are sick. And then he calmed a storm at sea!

Jesus is and was the Son of God and as the Son of God, is able to do what at one time only God could do: that is to control the waters and to still the storms. And bring peace to the chaos in people's lives.

Jesus controls the waters and stills the storm by saying two simple phrases: "Peace. Be still." These are the same words that Jesus uses when he exorcizes a demon at Capernaum in an earlier story in the Gospel of Mark. Jesus has shown that he has power over demons and now he has shown that he has power over the chaotic often-demonic sea. Jesus shows that he is now in control. Jesus shows that he will bring peace to the chaotic world where people are starving for the Good News, where the people are oppressed, where people need the love of God in their lives.

With just two words, Jesus lets his disciples and us as contemporary Christians who even now are facing storms and seas that threaten to bring us down, with just two words, Jesus says "Do not be afraid." "I am with you". "He says this, not because there are not fearsome things in our lives, not because there are no storms, fierce winds, or waves but rather because God is with us...even though there are real and fearsome things in this life. They need not paralyze us. They need not have claim over us. They need us have dominion over us. Because we are not alone in the boat, facing the storms of life."

With just two words we as disciples are reminded that we are not called to live our lives by simply "managing the storms of life." We are called to "live our lives by the Word of God, [the same word that] created out of the watery chaos, [the same word that called us into discipleship, the same word that comforts us] and the [same word] that will preserve us through the watery chaos even now.

We are called to understand that we are to learn from Jesus' sense of calm during the storm and to understand that the real miracle is not that Jesus calmed the seas, but that the real miracle is that God has wrapped God's arms of comfort, love, and hope around us and is leading us to the other side.

With us two words, Jesus provides a new hope for those on the storm tossed boat and to those who read this passage today. He provides them and us with a glimpse into the new creation that will once again separate the chaos of our lives into order. Jesus shows us that God is in control and that God will always be in control.

Peace, Be still and the storms are calmed. Peace, Be still and there is order. Peace, Be still and we learn to trust God in the face of the storms in our lives. Peace, Be still and we know that God is in control.

May we always the calm that comes after the storms as we continue our journeys of faith. Amen.

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