

June 23, 2024

Mark 4:35-41

Stephen Crane was an American poet in the late 1800's, and he wrote a short poem that goes like this: *A man said to the universe:*

"Sir, I exist!"

"However," replied the universe,

*"The fact has not created in me
A sense of obligation."*

The point is that you shake your fist at the sky and complain about life as much as you'd like, but there are some things you simply have no control over- especially nature and the weather. We southern Wisconsinites should know this well! The year is only half over, and Wisconsin has already had its yearly average of tornadoes. There's something about these storms that's rather humbling. When you hear those sirens or get the alarms on your phones, you really don't have much choice, do you? It doesn't matter if you're in the middle of a show, or on a run, or having a party, or comfortable in bed with a 1 year old asleep in the other room, and you'd prefer to keep it that way. It doesn't matter. You have to find shelter or run to the basement. It doesn't matter what you're doing, it doesn't matter how inconvenient it is. The weather is coming, and you're the one that needs to get out of the way. Can you imagine how foolish you'd look if you actually got out of your house, addressed the clouds, and said, "Hi, do you mind? This isn't a great time right now. We're having my sister's graduation party at the moment. We don't have a TV in the basement. My child is trying to sleep. I have an early morning tomorrow- can we reschedule this storm? Thanks!" You can complain to the sky all you want- it's not listening.

And yet, today we see someone do just that. We see a man rebuke the wind and the waves like he would a child, and *it obeys him*. The wind immediately dies, the sea is like glass, and his disciples look at him, and they are no longer scared- they're terrified. Because they realize that Jesus isn't just a teacher or a miracle worker, he's not just a great leader come to set people free, He is the one who is in control of nature itself- the creator himself. **Jesus is Lord of the Storm. 1. Although he's good, he's not tame, and 2. Although he sleeps, he never leaves the boat.**

1. Although he's good, he's not tame. Jesus has just spent the entire day standing on a boat in the water so that the entire crowd can hear him- the water was so calm that his voice was carrying over and could be heard by many people on the shore. He has spent much of his time, likely for months healing, casting out demons, pouring himself into people because he clearly loves them and is willing to help them. But because he is a human being, he has limits. He gets tired. He wants to get away with his disciples, so he has them take him, without even going back on shore, along with some other fishing boats, to go to the other side of the lake, and to travel by night. Now, it just so happened that on this night, a storm was coming. It wasn't uncommon for storms to show up on the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee stands at the northern tip of the Jordan Valley, hundreds of feet below sea level- it's actually the lowest fresh-water lake in the world. It's also relatively small- seven miles wide and 13 miles tall- smaller than Lake Winnebago. About 30 miles away is Mount Hermon, the highest point in Israel- 9000 feet above sea level. So the sea of Galilee is filled with warm desert air, and the surrounding mountains have cold mountain air, and when these two meet, violent storms form rapidly without warning and make the Sea of Galilee a dangerous place to sail. This specific storm was the worst the disciples had ever seen. Remember, they were professional fishermen, they had seen plenty of storms, they were used to rough waters, so for them to think that they were going to die, it must have been a terrifying storm. And as they are desperately trying

to keep water out of the boat so that they don't sink, they are likely thinking, "wait a minute, where's Teacher? Where's Rabbi? Where's Jesus?" And they look around and they probably don't believe their eyes when they see Jesus fast asleep on a cushion in the back of the boat! How can that happen! How can you be sleeping right now! So they wake him up and ask him, "don't you care that we're going to die?" They likely expect him to pitch in and keep water out of the boat or help steer the ship, but he doesn't. He simply stands and says, "be quiet, and stay quiet," as if he's scolding a child. And the wind and waves obey him because they are his children, his creation. Immediately, without a fight, the wind dies, and the water is glass- something that takes hours to happen- immediate. And Jesus doesn't do anything special, he doesn't invoke the name of anyone, he simply says, "pipe down," and the wind obeys. And the disciples, as afraid as they were when their lives were in danger, now are terrified as they stand in the presence who commands the wind and waves and wonder, "Who is this?"

Before I go any further, I want to make this clear: this happened. I know this is one of the more outlandish accounts in the Bible- it's one thing for Jesus to heal, it's another to give orders to the sky- and there may be people, even pastors and Christians who read this and say, "eh, probably not. This was likely a legend put in there to make Jesus' claim more strong." Here's the issue with that- this isn't written like a legend. In only six verses, look at all the details given- it was evening, Jesus didn't go back to shore, there were other boats, Jesus was on a cushion, the waves battered against the boat, and more. These details don't really add anything to the story- so why are they there? Because this is an eyewitness account, and Mark is just writing down what the disciples, likely Peter, saw. We have every reason to think this is true. And if it is really true, then we have to conclude: Jesus is completely unmanageable. He is not a tame God. We are not his managers. We don't get to control him or make him make sense to us. You see, if the disciples had disobeyed Jesus, and that's why they got caught in the storm, it would make sense. But they listened to him, in fact, Jesus specifically gave them directions so that they would get caught in a storm. And he didn't solve it right away, he slept for a bit. Jesus does the same for you and me. There are times when he takes people away from us and not only does the loss hurt, but the timing hurts, it doesn't make sense. Jesus allows people to hurt us, jobs to get lost, disasters happen, sickness and death to come, and it doesn't make sense! The person afflicted is a strong Christian didn't do anything wrong. He lives a healthy lifestyle and still gets cancer. Parents do everything right and still lose their baby. Christians do what Jesus asks them, and he still says "no" to their prayers. The life of the Christian is filled with storms that don't make sense- and often we try to make sense of it by saying, "well, God must be punishing me because I did something wrong," or "well, God must not really care." If Jesus isn't tame, if he doesn't make sense to me, if allows pain and storms into my life that he could easily get rid of but doesn't, and doesn't give me an answer why, how can I trust him?

2. Because Although he sleeps, he never leaves the boat. Can you think of another specific part of the Bible where something like this happens? A religious teacher boards a boat, and a life-threatening storm comes, and he's fast asleep, and after the scared sailors wake him, he casts himself into the sea, and it's calm? Jonah! But Jesus never threw himself into the storm! *Oh, but he did!* That's why he came. The ultimate storm, the only one that could drown you was the wrath of God for every sin you committed against him, and you deserved to drown for it! And when Jesus came, he looked into the cloud of God's wrath, and laid himself not on wooden boat, but a wooden cross and threw himself into the storm of Hell and was drowned. And when he rose from the dead, he proved that he is the Lord, not just of this storm on the sea, but every storm, every disaster, every sadness, every tragedy, and says to each of you, I've endured it for you, now let me endure it with you. You see, Jesus never promises a storm-free life- in fact,

he promises the opposite- that we are going to have storms in our life that hurt and confuse and terrify us, but not drown us, because he's never leaving the boat. He doesn't promise that he's going to give you a reason for it, which, if we're honest, wouldn't help. He doesn't promise that if we just obey him everything will go well. No, in fact, following him might cause us to suffer. Consider one the stanzas that we'll be singing in a bit: "When through the deep waters I call you to go," Yes, Jesus might call us to deep waters. He is going to call us into painful, uncomfortable situations! "The rivers of sorrow will not overflow." You will not be defeated. They can't defeat you. Not even death can defeat you. There is nothing in this world that can separate you from Jesus, there is no storm that can flip your boat. "For I will be with you, your troubles to bless, and sanctify to you your deepest distress!" Do you know what that means? Jesus may not tell you why he sends storms, but he does promise that through it he strengthens you, humbles you, and turns you into who he wants you to be, and that he suffers with you- and every ounce of pain you feel is shared by him.

Therefore, what are Christians called to do? Not sail away from storms, not curse storms, not try to make sense of storms, but to trust the Lord of the storm. That's what the disciples had to learn. Look closely at what he rebukes them for. He doesn't say, "why'd you wake me up" or "the storm wasn't that bad, relax!" No, the problem was that they thought that he didn't care. They saw everything he did for people, they saw his power and love, and they heard him when he said, "we're going to the other side" and figured, this storm must mean he doesn't care, or he isn't as powerful as we thought. And Jesus says, "where's your faith?" Faith in Jesus is not never being sad, never being concerned about storms, never calling on Jesus. Faith means trusting Jesus even when the clouds are dark and the waves are high. Faith means allowing Jesus to be unmanageable and being okay with the fact that Jesus may send me storms without asking my permission or telling why, and trust that if he loves me so much to be drowned in the storm of justice, this isn't a punishment or a sign of Jesus' indifference. Faith means praising God in the storm because he endured the ultimate storm, and promises that although this storm may rage, it won't last- it can't. Because Jesus has promised that he's taking us to the other side- the land of glory and perfection, and no storm can change that.

I'll end the sermon how I began it: poetry. Paul Gerhardt was a German Lutheran pastor in the 1600's. His childhood consisted of constant famine and destruction of the 30 Years War and was orphaned by his teens. Although he was an able candidate for the pastoral ministry, he wasn't ordained until his 40's. He had to wait. Afterwards, he was married, but lost four of his children in infancy, and his wife. At several points of his ministry he was doing hundreds of funerals per week because of the plague. He knew what storms were like, and instead of shaking his fist at the storm, he trusted in the Lord of the storm. This was one of the first hymns he wrote:

*Give to the winds your fears,
hope and be undismayed;
God hears your sighs and counts your tears;
God shall lift up your head.
Through waves and clouds and storms,
He gently clears the way;
wait for His time, so shall this night
soon end in joyous day.*