

Pentecost 4 / June 20, 2021

Mark 4:41

**“And they were filled with great fear and said to one another,
‘Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey Him?’”**

The disciples were filled with fear when a storm suddenly blew over the Sea of Galilee. The wind whipped the water. The waves rose up, battered their ship and began to fill it. Quickly they reached for their buckets and began to bail water as fast as they could. Meanwhile, Jesus remained fast asleep. Do you have a bucket list? A wish list? The disciples had buckets and they wished Jesus would wake up, grab a bucket and help them bail water, before the boat was completely swamped and they sank and perished. They woke Him and impatiently cried, “Teacher, don’t you care that we are perishing?”

Jesus cared. He got up, but instead of grabbing a bucket, He rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” To the disciples’ amazement, the wind ceased and the sea immediately became calm. Odd as it sounds, despite being delivered from their fears, the disciples were now even more afraid. They looked at each other and asked, “Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey Him?” Who is this Man? They had not understood or truly appreciated the nature of His being.

Who is this Man? That’s a question we should ask ourselves, lest we become dull in our faith and complacent in our appreciation of Him. The disciples were stunned by how the forces of nature responded to His words; fully and immediately. They thought they had Him figured out. He was their teacher. He had a magnetic personality. He could do miracles, but this was on another level. It’s one thing to heal the sick and cast out unclean spirits; the prophets had done all those things by the Spirit of God. But none of them had commanded the forces of nature. The only person in their religious history who claimed authority over the seas was the pagan king Antiochus Epiphanes IV, who persecuted their ancestors in the second century before Christ. He was nicknamed ‘Epimanes’ which means “the madman.” Jesus wasn’t insane and when He commanded, the forces of nature obeyed Him; immediately and completely. Who is this Man? That’s a good question to put to ourselves from time to time. It’s easy to become comfortable in our thoughts about Jesus and complacent in our faith. We need to remember that more than a man, more than our teacher, Jesus is our God and Saviour.

Jesus asked them, “Have you still no faith?” It wasn’t a question to test their knowledge. It was a question to test their spirits. It was a question that cut them to their hearts, for it questioned their discipleship. It was a rhetorical question! The answer was painfully obvious. Despite all they had seen Jesus do and everything they had heard Him say, the disciples had precious little faith. Their faith was smaller than the mustard seed in Jesus’ parable. Their faith was a bruised reed and dimly burning wick, spoken of by Isaiah. Jesus didn’t mean they had no faith at all; after all they were His disciples. They weren’t hostile to Him, like the religious authorities, who flatly denied Him and blasphemed the Holy Spirit; claiming that He did miracles by the devil’s power.

They believed good things about Jesus. They believed He was a prophet and teacher. They believed He was the Christ and was bringing the kingdom of God. But their beliefs about the Christ and their understanding of Jesus and the kingdom God, needed to be informed through more knowledge. They needed to learn. They needed to deepen their understanding of the nature of Jesus as God’s Son and of the nature of His Kingdom as the Lord’s Christ.

Do you know everything there is to know about Jesus? We can never learn everything, or enough about Jesus. We need to continually add knowledge to our faith so that it deepens, grows, develops and becomes stronger. Whether our faith is a tiny sprout freshly germinated in the earth, or a mighty tree spreading its leafy branches, our faith needs to mature and grow. Whether our faith is small or big, strong or weak, the most important things we need to know and believe about Jesus is that He is our God and Saviour.

Jesus shows Himself to be God, by doing what only God can do; controlling the forces of nature. We try to harness the forces of nature for our protection and benefit, but all it takes is a freak storm, an earth quake or a volcano to show how little control we really have. No one but God can control the wind and the waves. By rebuking the wind and quieting the waves, Jesus shows the most important things about Himself; that He is our God and Saviour. Consider this: If Jesus can control the wind and the waves, we can be sure that He can save us from anything, including and most importantly from sin, the devil and death.

Why were the disciples afraid? First, they were afraid because they were in a dangerous situation. They were afraid, because the storm threatened to swallow up their boat and send them to the bottom of the sea. They had good reason to be afraid. There are lots of boats at the bottom of the sea. A number of years ago archaeologists retrieved a fishing boat from the bottom of the Sea of Galilee, from the same time period as our gospel. It may have sunk during a storm! From that perspective the disciples had good reason to be afraid. Just like we have good reason to be afraid when a storm arises in our lives; an accident, an illness, a bad diagnosis, grief and the threat of imminent death. Bad things happen, ships sink in storms. In the first century a boat similar to the one the disciples were on, sank in the Sea of Galilee. It wasn't the boat the disciples were in. That boat didn't sink, because Jesus was with them and calmed the storm with a word.

That's the perspective from which Jesus challenges them, saying, "Why are you so afraid. Have you still no faith?" Jesus' challenge isn't related to the storm in particular, or to fear in general; it's directed towards their faith in Him. He doesn't chastise them for being afraid. He challenges them for being so afraid, when He was with them. Jesus doesn't question or condemn their fear itself. Fear is a basic God given instinct, by which we appraise life situations and perceive danger. There are many things to be afraid of and we should exercise caution. What Jesus questions is the extent of their fear as it relates to their understanding of who He is and their faith in Him.

Their excessive fear was an expression of their small faith. Unlike other boats caught in a storm they had Jesus on board. That's why he asks "Why are you so afraid." The reason they were so afraid wasn't the storm. The reason they were so afraid was because that they didn't truly appreciate who Jesus is, the nature of His being as God's Son. They wanted Him to grab a bucket and help them bail, when He had the power to still the wind and calm the storm with a word. From that perspective they had no reason to be afraid. We have Jesus in our boat, as our God and Saviour. In that perspective, we have the blessed assurance that He will bring us through all the storms of life and safely to the harbour of eternal life.

Jesus asked "Have you still no faith?" Jesus attributes the disciples' great fear to their smallness of faith. They had faith, but it was still in its infancy in terms of growth and development. Faith is trust in Jesus as Saviour and in that it saves completely, whether it is weak or strong. Faith saves completely, because Jesus is the object of faith. But faith as a subjective experience grows from infancy to maturity, from a tiny seed to a fully grown tree. Subjective faith, like the moon, waxes and wanes. Sometimes it is strong. Sometimes it weakens. Even in maturity, subjective faith continues to grow and develop. Faith is not blindly disregarding the danger and thinking that no matter what we do, or how ill advised our action, that God will protect us. Faith is trusting Jesus as Saviour and believing that in Him, God will work through all the storms of life, to bring our salvation to fulfillment in eternal life.

In the book of Acts Luke tells of one of St. Paul's several experiences with storms at sea. St. Paul was on a ship headed to Rome, where he would stand trial before Caesar. The ship was late leaving port at the end of the shipping season. The waters of the Adriatic Sea were too dangerous in winter for travel. That didn't require divine revelation. Everyone knew that! But the ship's owner was a risk taker. He urged the captain and centurion to sail anyways. Paul advised that it would be best to stay in port and wait for Spring. They didn't take his advice. Luke records the subsequent storm and destruction of the ship. The ship was destroyed, but as the Lord promised Paul in a vision, everyone on board survived the storm. The Lord has power over storms and power to save in storms,

The Lord doesn't promise there will be no storms, or that we will not suffer loss and experience sorrow in our lives. He promises He will be with us in every storm. He promises to bring us through the storms of life and to the safe harbour of eternal life by the power of His love, expressed in the sacrifice of the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. As He said to the sea and the wind, He says to us, "Be still and know that I am God." In Jesus' Name. Amen