

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Third Sunday after Epiphany, January 21, 2024

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 649, 568:2, 370, 435, 347:6.

Lessons: Isaiah 43:1-3, 2 Timothy 1:1-10, Luke 8:22-25.

Sermon Text: Matthew 8:23-27.

. Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Have there been times of great fear in your lives? That has happened to most of us adults in one way or another. How did you react to that fear? What did you do?

This chapter of Matthew's Gospel records a number of miracles in which Jesus healed people. Today we read of a miracle which shows Jesus' power over nature.

Today we see the closest disciples of Jesus disciples being very much afraid, but

JESUS CALMS THE STORM ON THE SEA OF GALILEE

- 1. As Jesus and his disciples were crossing this sea, a great storm suddenly arose.**
- 2. Jesus strengthens their faith and**
- 3. He calms the storm with his divine power.**

Sudden violent storms were not unusual on the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Gennesaret, is surrounded by what many call mountains which are as high as 1000 feet. The lake was about 12 miles long and 7 miles wide. Because of its size it was prone to storms but this was no ordinary storm.

Jesus was in the boat with his disciples and Mark tells us that there were other boats along with them. There were four experienced professional fishermen among his disciples, but the disciples soon realized that the situation was totally out of their control. Even the seasoned sailors among the disciples were afraid they were going to drown. This was a "great storm", not just an ordinary storm.

This sudden, violent storm came upon them "*without warning*". The boat was being swamped! "*The waves swept over the boat.*" "*The ship was covered with the waves.*"

Picture a storm on a large lake with tornado-like force, when waves lifted up on every side, rising above the ship, breaking over it, gradually filling it with so much water that they couldn't bail it out. The wind and the waves were trying to destroy both the boat and its occupants

Can you understand how scary this was? Perhaps you have been in a boat when the wind was growing stronger and waves were growing and you became afraid. It is easy for us to be critical of the disciples' lack of faith in this situation, but how do you suppose we would have reacted?

Well, we know that Jesus is also always with us, no matter where we are or what dangers may threaten us. But can we claim that our faith is never shaken in times of trouble or danger? We must confess that our faith is sometimes pitifully weak. At such times we can learn even from Jesus' weak disciples that we must come to our Lord in prayer and rely on him for deliverance.

But Jesus slept through it. Jesus was sleeping peacefully in the stern of the boat. So the frightened disciples finally woke Jesus.

Look at the contrast: Christ was quietly sleeping in the midst of all the turmoil, unaffected by the storm which caused these strong men to quake with fear. In this event we must also comment that this shows that Jesus was true man, tired, and sleeping. He was not just some kind of a spirit, as one long-standing heresy contends.

Christ was a real, natural man who has body and soul, and really needed to eat, drink, and sleep just as we need those things.

But he was sleeping through this terrible storm.

Does God sleep through turmoil in our lives? Surely not, for the psalmist tells us ***“he that keepeth thee will not slumber.”*** (Psalm 121:3-4) But it may seem that way to us. Maybe it is we who have fallen asleep and have not looked to the Lord for all our help and preservation.

His disciples woke him probably shouting. ***“Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!”*** Luke reports that ***“The disciples went and woke him, saying, ‘Master, Master, we’re going to drown!’”*** (Luke 8:24) The fact that Luke uses the word ***“master”***, repeated twice, and not ***“Lord”*** as Matthew does suggests that they had forgotten or hadn’t really learned yet that he was the very Son of God as well as a true human being.

When his disciples wake him, Jesus calms the storm. But first Jesus rebuked the disciples for the littleness of their faith. But this is not the only time he did that. After they had just experienced the authority of Jesus’ teaching and had observed the miracles he had just performed in healing diseases they should have realized that they were perfectly safe as long as he was with them. He obviously was not frightened or worried, so why should they be?

Jesus speaks to them: ***“You of little faith, why are you so afraid?”*** Why should you be afraid? Jesus first stills the storm in the hearts of the disciples. And then he calms the waves of the sea. Christ’s first thought is for the faith of the disciples, not for the removal of the cause of their fear. Why be filled with fear, why so little faith? This was a harsh rebuke, but The Son of God is still showing his love. His own absolute fearlessness should calm their panic. Lack of faith always makes one timid. Trust in God, trust in his power and in his help, makes the believer bold in seeking to do the will of God.

This most important matter having been settled, he rose from his pillow and spoke a second rebuke, directed to the fierce winds and the waves. ***“Peace, be still!”*** (Mark 4:39) he commands them. Jesus ***“got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm.”*** (Luke 8:24) With the sound of his voice the turbulence of the winds and the waves stopped instantly. The almighty Ruler of the universe had spoken. His human voice, by virtue of the divine power and majesty given to his humanity, controlled the forces of nature.

Jesus rebuked the winds and waves. Jesus’ almighty power as the son of God went along with the words that he spoke. The wind and the waves had to obey the one who had created them and had established all the laws of nature. ***“Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.”***

It took the words of Jesus before the wind ceased and there was a great calm. There was a great calm immediately! You know that this just doesn’t happen “naturally”. It normally takes time for waves to stop after the wind stops blowing. But God tells us that it was completely calm. Nature knows the voice of him who is their ultimate master.

This instant calming of the storm amazed them. ***“The men were amazed and asked, ‘What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!’”*** This miracle obviously served to increase the faith of his disciples.

When the sea was calmed, the people in the other boats also would have been rescued and their lives saved. But we must not misuse this idea. We must not take unnecessary and uncalled-for risks. To do such a thing is to misuse faith. When Satan tempted Jesus to jump off a pinnacle of the temple, Jesus told him ***“Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.”*** (Matthew 4:7) In fact, it was Jesus’ idea to cross over to the other side of the sea. It was not their own idea, nor did they know such a terrible storm was brewing.

In this miracle we see the power of Jesus. He has complete control over everything, although at times it may not seem so to us.

Are we faced with fears today? Everything is in God’s hands. That is true of all the promises our Lord gives us in the inspired Scriptures. Every threat he has made to punish wickedness and unbelief will most certainly be carried out. Every promise he has made to forgive and bless and save penitent sinners cannot fail to be fulfilled. Our salvation is sure, because we have Jesus’ word for it, and it depends entirely upon Jesus’ suffering and death as our substitute and not upon any merit or worthiness in us.

We have an advantage over all the people who were in the boat with Jesus or in the surrounding area. Jesus' disciples did not yet fully understand who Jesus was. We know by faith that Jesus is the Son of God and that he willingly died for our sins, rose again on the third day, and ascended into heaven 40 days later. He has promised that one day he will come again and raise all the dead and take us and all believers to himself in heaven. Our arrival at our heavenly destination is just as certain as was the disciples' safe arrival on the opposite shore of the Sea of Galilee.

They marveled that ***“Even the winds and the waves obey him!”*** But if they knew all the scriptures, they would have remembered Psalm 107.

Psalm 107 begins this way: ***“Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.”*** and includes these words: ***“Others went out on the sea in ships; they were merchants on the mighty waters. They saw the works of the LORD, his wonderful deeds in the deep.”*** Then a few verses later we read: ***“He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed. They were glad when it grew calm, and he guided them to their desired haven. Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men.”*** (Psalm 107:1, 23-24, 29-31) Had his disciples never learned or never heard this psalm of praise and thanksgiving to God? If so, they must have forgotten it in the excitement of the storm.

So it is with us. Unless the Word of God is ingrained in us, unless we have memorized Bible passages and even hymns, we don't always call them to mind when we are stressed, when we are troubled, when fears threaten to engulf us.

But we must also expect to encounter storms on the way.

In Scripture the sea is used as a symbol of the restless and sinful world. Just as Noah and his family, which at the time were the only living human beings, were tossed about on the waters of the great flood so Christ and his disciples were tossed around in this little ship. And the Church of Christ has to this day resembled this small ship, with the waves of the world raging wildly against it yet never prevailing and overwhelming it. This is because Christ is in it. We can be reminded of Psalm 46, which is the basis for our great Reformation hymn “A mighty fortress is our God”. ***“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.”*** (Psalms 46:1-3)

With this miracle Jesus proves his almighty deity, that he is also Lord over wind and sea. For no mere human would ever be able to quiet the sea and cause the wind to cease with a word. Divine power is necessary to stop the turbulence of the sea with one word. Christ is not only a real man, but also true God. The effect of this miracle upon the disciples and upon everyone who afterwards heard of the story, since the sudden quieting of the sea must also have been noticed from the shore, was to fill them with amazement. What kind of man was this and where did he come from? They now had further evidence for his divinity, as well as for his loving care for those whom he has called as his disciples, whose every fear he is glad to dispel, whose every prayer, even when their faith is weak, finds careful consideration before him.

At least three times in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus had told his hearers not to fear. Now he has displayed his great power in showing they should not fear anything. We have seen Jesus' great power in this miracle. And Matthew closes his gospel with these joyous words: ***“All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.”*** (Matthew 28:18 KJV)

May we always look to Jesus in times of fear, of trouble, of danger, of restlessness. May we rely upon him for all our help, spiritual as well as physical! Amen.

Revised from a Ministry By Mail sermon for February 15, 2015.