

NEW BEGINNINGS LUTHERAN CHURCH

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost – June 23rd, 2024 (11:11 am)

HE WON'T LET YOU PERISH

Psalm 124

Job 38:1-11

2 Corinthians 4:35-41

Mark 4:35-41

The Word of Christ Bestows Peace on His Creation through His Forgiveness of Sins

In his anguish and affliction, Job must be reminded that, as a finite creature, he is in no position to question the Maker of the heavens and the earth. Job's "words without knowledge" are unable to penetrate the wisdom of the Lord (Job 38:1-2). For the Lord has "prescribed limits" and "set bars and doors," so that "here shall your proud waves be stayed" (Job 38:9-11). That's how He humbles us unto repentance. But also by His powerful Word, He calms the "great windstorm" and the waves "breaking into the boat." He does not permit the chaos of this fallen world to overwhelm us or bring us to despair. By the Word of His Gospel, He speaks "Peace!" to us, which bestows the "great calm" of His new creation (Mark 4:37-39). Therefore, do not be afraid, and do not receive this grace of God in vain. "Now is the favorable time," and "now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:1-2).

What scares you? I mean – what really, really frightens you? Can you remember a time in your life – some moment – when you were more frightened than you've ever been at any other time in your life? What was it that caused that fear? How did you feel? More importantly, how did you respond?

Fear is an issue in today's Gospel lesson from Mark, but it's not the most important issue. Mark interestingly presents his Gospel – we, the readers, know what's going on, at the end of the story; we know who Jesus is; but the disciples do not. They have moments of partial understanding, but they don't get the whole picture. They just keep on missing the point throughout the whole Gospel. And Jesus continually expresses his frustration with them – frustration because they just don't get it. They don't recognize what's going on around them.

In today's lesson, Mark tells us that Jesus had the disciples take him in their boat and set out for the other side of the Sea of Galilee. So, imagine being in a small boat out on the lake, when a storm hits suddenly.

Mark says Jesus manages to sleep through this pounding storm. Here are Jesus' disciples; they are doing exactly what Jesus has asked them to do, and now they are in mortal danger. And what's Jesus doing? He's SLEEPING! Doesn't he care?! Just when they

need him the most, Jesus is not around! You can hear the accusations in their voices: ***“Teacher, don’t you care that we are dying?”*** (Mark 4:38).

You’ve heard similar accusations in the voices of others. How many times have you heard someone say, “I’ve always been a good Christian – why is God letting this happen to me? Where’s God when I need God?” Or maybe you’ve heard someone say, “How can God let such terrible things happen in the world?”

But you see; that’s just what Satan wants. Those words of the disciples reflect just how far the disciples really are from understanding who Jesus is. In a moment of crisis, their faith fails; a gap is created between them and Jesus – and Satan steps in to fill the gap. We are those disciples in the boat out on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus did not create that storm. Nor did Jesus leave the disciples alone. Jesus was always right there.

Are the disciples wrong to be fearful? NO! Their fear is normal and it’s to be expected. Just consider this for a moment. At least four of the disciples are experienced fishermen. They understand the lake. They understand its perils. They had most likely experienced storms before and had come through them successfully. So, if they were afraid of what was happening, it must have been one incredible storm. So, we need to be understanding of their fear, and we need to understand that it was not their fear that was separating them from Jesus. What separated them from Jesus was their lack of understanding of who Jesus was. Additionally, the separation was compounded by the way they approached Jesus in their fear.

Did they go to Jesus, wake him, and say, ***“Teacher we need some help here; we know you can calm this storm; we know you can save us.”*** No! What they did was accuse Jesus of not caring. Just the same as we accuse God of not caring when we ask, *“Why is God letting this happen to me?”* or *“Why does God let such awful disasters – or wars – or famines – why does God let them occur? Doesn’t God care?”*

But is it even possible that Jesus does not care? How could he possibly NOT care?! He’s in the same boat with them; the same boat that’s being swamped! BUT – you might say – he’s the Son of God; he doesn’t have to care; he doesn’t have to worry. The disciples have to first recognize that Jesus is not some ordinary human being who just happens to have these unusual abilities to preach and to heal; they have to understand and acknowledge through that understanding that Jesus IS the Son of God.

Mark is witnessing an incredible turning point here in Jesus’ ministry. Until now in Mark’s Gospel, Jesus has been “performing miracles.” But he’s not performing “miracles.” All those

healings and those "miracles" — they're signs, not miracles. They're signs pointing to Jesus as the Messiah, as the Son of God. But the disciples are seeing them as "miracles."

Mark is presenting here to us an incredibly powerful sign. Had the disciples requested Jesus, ***"Teacher, save us as we know you can,"*** it would have been an acknowledgment of their understanding of who Jesus is.

The disciples aren't sure — they don't believe — that Jesus can save them. So, what happens? Does Jesus rebuke them? No, Jesus calms the storm. ***"Peace. Be still!"*** he says. ***"Peace. Be still!"*** But there are six more words that are implied but not spoken here, ***"Peace. Be still. . . and know that I AM God!"*** At his command, the winds calm; the waves settle; and the storm passes. The calming of the storm is a sign pointing right back at Jesus. ***"Know that I AM God."*** He doesn't have to say the words; the silence of the calming storm screams the words.

But then again, we know the ending of the story; the disciples do not. We know without a doubt that Jesus is the Son of God. The disciples do not. You'd think that after a sign like this, there would be no room for doubt. But listen again to the end of this lesson: ***"They were greatly afraid, and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'"*** (Mark 4:41).

Is it any wonder that Jesus is frustrated with the disciples? After all that, they still say to one another, ***"Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"***

Well, Mark's Gospel is a mirror into which we have to look. And what we see looking back is ourselves. So, if we point a finger of condemnation or even of criticism at the disciples for their lack of understanding, we're pointing right at ourselves. We ARE those disciples in the boat. We ARE those disciples when we demand, ***"Where is God when awful things happen in our lives." WHERE IS GOD? God's right there in the boat with us. God's right there amid all the suffering.***

There's a story told — oh, let me be honest; it's a joke — of a man Fred who tried to ride out a flood in his home. As the water climbed higher, Fred climbed the steps to the second floor. Looking out his window, he saw his neighbor paddle up in a canoe. The neighbor shouted, "C'mon Fred, climb in and I'll get you to dry land." Fred waved his neighbor off and said, "How could God let this happen, why doesn't he save me?" The water continued to rise, and Fred climbed to the roof of his house. Pretty soon, a helicopter flew up to his house and the pilot offered to pull Fred in." Fred waved the helicopter off, and muttered, "How could God let this happen, why doesn't he save me?" The water continued to rise, and Fred drowned. When he got to heaven, he said to God, "How could you let this happen; why didn't

you save me?" And you know what God said? God looked at Fred and said, "I sent a canoe, and I sent a helicopter. Why didn't you trust me enough to get in?"

All we have to do to accept God and Jesus into our lives . . . is nothing. God has saved us. God is right here with us. God is right by our side — not just when things are good or when things are bad — God is right by our side ALL the time. God walks by our side. God rides in the boat with us. Don't wonder why God isn't doing something about the bad things that happen. Don't accuse God of not caring. Just ask, and then listen. God says, **"Be at peace. Be silent . . . and know that I AM God."**