

*Jesus Calms the Storm*

Please pray with me:

Gracious and loving God we gather to worship you and study your word, to go away from here with a greater understanding of your love in our lives. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you. Amen.

“That day” as the scripture reads played out much the same as many before it. Jesus spent a great deal of his time teaching the crowds that followed him everywhere. Much of his teaching was done through the telling of parables and stories. He was also performing many miracles through the day. By the end of the day Jesus and his disciples would be tired out and needing rest. In order that the crowds couldn’t follow them and they could enjoy some peace and quiet they would often get into the boats and move out from the shore far enough to get some rest. This day it was Jesus who said “Let us go over to the other side”

Why this time did Jesus say “Let us go over the other side?” Why not, as so often happened, didn’t they simply push off from shore far enough to distance themselves from the crowd? What was different about today? Jesus must have planned on finishing the teachings of another day with a hard lesson taught to his disciples. Perhaps he had a plan to use this experience on the water as another way to show them the importance of putting their trust in him.

This was a lake they had sailed on many times. In fact, four of his twelve disciples, Peter, Andrew, James and John were experienced fishers. Before choosing to follow Jesus they made their living on the water. They were seasoned enough to know that if it appeared that bad weather was approaching they should not venture out onto the water. As they pushed off from shore they must have been comfortable that the conditions were such that they could safely journey to the other side. They were familiar with the Sea of Galilee. This sea is 680 feet below sea level and surrounded by hills. The winds can swirl through these hills across the surface causing some very violent and unexpected storms. All of this was something these men had experienced before. This storm was one that they didn’t see coming.

They didn’t have the weather channel to refer to so they could plan their trip. There was no storm warning broadcast over their radios. Had there been a warning perhaps the disciples would have roused Jesus to let him know of the approaching storm. This storm came up as a sudden and violent squall. Along with the strong wind was a drenching rain. The conditions must have been miserable. The scripture reading paints this picture “a furious squall came up and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped.” We can imagine that the boats of those days were not as safe and secure as the vessels we’re used to today. This storm was very likely beyond what these men had ever seen before. They tried to control the boat themselves as they so often had through a storm. However, even with their experience, they began to panic, fearing drowning and death.

You might wonder what Jesus was doing through all this. “Jesus was in the stern sleeping on a cushion.” He must have been in a sound sleep since he didn’t wake in such stormy conditions. The Bible specifically tells us that he was asleep in the stern of the boat. The stern is the rear of the boat. The stern is where the steering gear is and where the captain is found. I suggest that there is a symbolism here, that Jesus is the one in charge and the captain of the boat. Jesus was totally indifferent to the events around him. His disciples were struggling in what they saw as a life and death situation and he was at peace, asleep. The disciples probably had a sense of confusion. How could he possibly be so comfortable and relaxed as this storm raged around them?

We know that Jesus is asleep in the stern. The wind and waves are so strong that the disciples can no longer control the boat and the water is coming in over the bow. Frustration and anger are spreading among them. Maybe since it was Jesus idea that they go to the other side they were blaming him for getting them into this mess. Can he not see that we are in a life and death situation? Does Jesus not care about us? How can he ignore our situation and sleep through this desperate time? It seems there were two storms raging that evening. One was the violent weather surrounding them and the other was within the disciples as they tried to make sense of Jesus’ apparent lack of concern for their situation. Finally the disciples decide to wake Jesus. Verse 38 “The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” They were assuming that they were all going to die.

The Bible doesn’t say that Jesus awoke and became alarmed. He was not afraid. He didn’t feel any of the sense of panic that his disciples were feeling. In verse 39 we read “He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.” Jesus demonstrated his power over nature. He took control over the wind and the waves.

Imagine yourself in this situation. One minute in the middle of a violent, life threatening storm, and the next floating at peace in the middle of the calm sea. The disciples weren’t ready for this. They didn’t wake him thinking that Jesus would simply calm the storm. They were likely asking themselves what just happened. Was all this a dream? Their emotions were all over the place. They had just experienced a miracle. In an instant they went from fear for their lives to tranquility. Verse 41 “They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”

We can learn about the nature and power of Jesus through this story. He had been busy for the day and was tired as evening came. He was acting as any of us might after a tough day. Jesus was tired so he laid down and went to sleep. He displayed the characteristics of a human on earth. And yet in the next verse we read of him calming the wind and the waves. Only God can have this power over nature. No one else can command the wind and waves to be calm. Asleep, as any of us might one minute and controlling nature as only God can do in the next minute. This mystery is one that we strive to understand through teachings about Jesus.

Remember, these men were experienced on the water. They were comfortable that they had seen it all on this lake and could handle anything that might happen. It was a lovely evening and they were simply going to sail to the other side. Besides they had their beloved Jesus with them. He who they loved so much. But the storm came and caught them in the middle of the lake. The disciples were comfortable knowing that Jesus was along with them but when a storm arose they were quick to question whether Jesus cared about them.

We also can draw on our life experiences and put our trust in the lessons that we've learned. Most of the time our wisdom, experience and insight will get us through and serve us fine. We likely won't experience any such physical storm as the disciples went through. The storms in our lives tend to be more emotional. The stress of an illness suffered by either yourself or a friend or family member. The loss of a job and the uncertainty of how to support your family. A failure at something you had put much effort into and now wondering how to move on from here. The grief of dealing with the death of a loved one. Storms can come at us from many different directions and be anything from a gentle breeze to a raging hurricane.

Perhaps we'll think that God isn't caring. Why would he let such things happen to you, to your neighbour and friend? Is he asleep in the back of the boat? Is he not paying attention to you? Is he not answering your prayers?

Of course God cares for us. We don't read in the Bible that everything will always go smoothly for us. We know that there will be times when we go through stormy weather. Jesus never lead us to believe that we were in for smooth sailing all the time. What we do know, is that Jesus is with us all the time. He is beside us when all is well and he is there to comfort us and help us over the rough parts. We must remember that Jesus is there to call on as we deal with times of crisis. When you feel that your situation is hopeless and you can't see your way through, call on Jesus. If you're feeling overwhelmed or maybe nobody cares, call on Jesus.

The disciples were in the midst of a terrible storm and didn't ask to be saved but rather asked Jesus if he cared. In a very practical way Jesus did calm the storm and save them. He commanded the winds to "be calm". This lesson can be applied in our lives today. When in the midst of the next storm you're struggling through, place your trust in Jesus. Whatever the situation, whatever the time, call on him for his comforting touch and guidance. The winds may not instantly cease blowing but when in his hands, we can better deal with the situation.

These men forgot that they had Jesus with them in the boat. As the storm worsened they allowed themselves to get more and more concerned until they were panicking and believing they would die. It was at that point that they turned to Jesus to awake him. How could they forget that he was with them? There he was physically lying in the back of the boat asleep. We can't see Jesus lying in the boat. However we can see the results of believing he is in our lives. We can see signs of his love and care surrounding us every day. He is with us in our family life, at work, during leisure time, in the midst of our relationships and dealing with our finances. Jesus is always in the boat with you.

We all go through storms. I have experienced storms in my personal voyage with Jesus. Seventeen years ago, a phone call to my work, telling me that my father had passed away suddenly, threw me into the middle of a raging storm. Instantly, my emotions were running rampant as I dealt with this terrible news. Like the disciples, it was easy to forget that Jesus is with me. It was easy to allow concern, grief even anger to take over my thoughts. An effort was required to remember that Jesus was there to comfort me. Sometimes this effort is greater as the storm worsens. Why can't I simply be prepared for the storm and be comfortable in trusting that he is beside me? He is not just in the boat along for the ride but he is fact the captain on this trip. The sailing gets smoother when I remember that I'm not in charge but I should take my direction from the captain, Jesus.

Think of the innocence of a toddler. A young child that still thinks in the moment and isn't concerned with consequences of their actions. Watch them at the play ground as they eagerly climb to the top of the slide and without a moment's hesitation let go and gleefully enjoy the ride down the slide. Listen to them as they shout from the top "Catch me mommy." They don't wait for an answer. They simply trust that mom will be at the bottom of the slide. Mom will make sure that the ride ends well and the child won't be hurt.

It's with this same complete trust that we're to invite Jesus into our lives and trust that he will be there to catch us at all times. Allow him to take the captain's seat in your boat. Place your trust in Jesus believing that he is with us the entire voyage. After calmly settling into the passenger's seat you can follow his lead and enjoy the trip. Amen.