



**June 25, 2006**

Preaching: Rev. Ronni Sue Verboom

3RD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Mark 4:35-41

## “We never would have made Him up”

So- what do you think about that Gospel reading? Pretty impressive stuff, huh? That Jesus was quite a guy! Just sleeps like a baby in a terrifying storm and only wakes up when his disciples panic, weak-kneed cowards that they were. Don't they know they've got PROTECTION? Jesus is RIGHT THERE in the boat with them. He just opens his eyes, takes in the whole scene, spits out three words and ZOING! The storm is STILLED. That's that. Jesus doesn't flinch a muscle. He's cool. He's not worried. He's got everything under control. And the disciples get the message, right? “Hey, this guy's something special. We'll stick with him and go right to the top.” And today, if we stick with him, the same will be true for us, right? Peace, safe and easy. It's pretty clear what this story's all about.

Am I being silly? Exaggerating? Maybe. But this is actually close to the interpretation of this passage made by various Christian scholars and authors. Traditionally the miracle of the stilling of the storm has been understood as a message about the power of God in Christ and the peace found through faith in him. Christ is seen as a super-heroic figure.

Let me quote William Lane:

***What is true of the God of Israel is true of him....He doesn't leap tall buildings in a single bound, but he silences a hurricane with a single rebuke.***

Lane states that the disciples' lack of faith is a failure to trust God's saving power present in Jesus. They witness this miracle and are still afraid. They should just trust him!

Other commentators stress that if we just accept Christ as Lord and trust in him we will find peace in all of life's storms.

Consider the words of William Barclay:

*When the disciples realized the presence of Jesus with them the storm became a calm. Once they knew he was there, fearless peace entered their hearts..... It is something which still happens and which can happen for us. In the presence of Jesus we can have peace even in the wildest storms of life.*

William Lane agrees: *It is not surprising that in early Christian art the church was depicted as a boat driven upon a perilous sea; with Jesus in the midst, there was nothing to fear.*

Now I don't want to challenge the idea that faith in Christ can bring peace to the believer. Trusting Jesus CAN and DOES bring peace. I DO want to challenge the notion that THIS is the message of the miracle of stilling the storm recounted in Mark's gospel.

The story shows us Jesus has GREAT authority and power. But is that such a peace-inspiring message? He does calm the sea and save the disciples' skins. But he's not exactly saying, "There, there my dears, everything is going to be all right now." If, as many interpreters lead us to believe, Christ's role is to keep us safe and peaceful on stormy seas, why isn't he soothing and loving here? He seems to be really annoyed by Peter and the gang. It seems they've disappointed him, let him down. He is not pleased. Why? Is it because they were supposed to KNOW what a great wonder-worker he is? What did Jesus expect of them, that they disappointed him so?

To get a clearer picture of what's happened here, let's look back in Mark's Gospel to see what Jesus and his followers had been up to.

Just before setting out in the boat, Jesus had been teaching and speaking in parables about the Kingdom of God. He told people how great things can grow from tiny beginnings, small as a mustard seed. He explained that the cares and desires of this world can crowd out the growth from that little seed.

Before telling these parables, Jesus had been on the road, healing and eating and drinking with riffraff. This caused quite a storm among the Pharisees and proper folks of his day. But he kept it up, and the storm reached such a fury that "The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him." (Mark 3:6)

All this preceded the boat trip. Does that help us understand Jesus' disappointment with his friends at all?

As they left in the boat, Jesus was exhausted from talking to the crowds and ministering to them. He needed sleep. Then the wind rose and the waves crashed into

and over the boat. The disciples got hysterical, and were finally able to wake him. He told the wind and waves to hush up. They did.

Jesus' actions revealed his power, but do they show us anything else?

Considering the events that led up to this miracle, I think Jesus' actions make a statement about what it means to be obedient to God in this world. Jesus expected his disciples to understand that a life faithful to God **ACTUALLY STIRS UP STORMS**. A person faithful to Christ will need to **FACE STORMS**. Obedience to God can be life threatening: Pharisees and Herodians may very well go looking for a hit man. Jesus' earlier teachings warn us that life tempts us to look for an easier way. Our desires and cares choke the growth God intends.

Read this passage from Mark carefully. The disciples' response to this wonderful stilling of the storm is **NOT WHAT WE EXPECT**. They were **NOT** comforted. They were **NOT** full of trust in Jesus' power to protect them. They were **AFRAID**. (Literally, the Greek says: *They feared a great fear.*) What kind of person can **DO** this? They thought he was a great teacher, and even a healer. And he was. But he was more. And he expected more from them. And that was terrifying.

Believers face two temptations with this story.

One is to accept the commentators perspectives. Barclay states, regarding the disciples: *fearless peace entered their hearts*. The Bible just doesn't say that! We disregard what the story **REALLY** says, and think of Jesus as a God who will wrap us safe and warm in a furry bunting. He will protect us and that's all there is to faith.

Another temptation is to allegorize the story—to say it gives us images of God's power that are primitive and symbolic—like ancient Greek myths. Then we just don't give it much more thought. It's so far from our daily experience that we don't see how it might relate to our lives today.

These temptations are a huge problem for us if we really want to be Christ followers-- -- because the stories in the Bible are there for a reason. They are there for us to read and ponder and learn from **SO THAT** we will **LIVE DIFFERENTLY- LOVING GOD AND NEIGHBORS AS THE REASON FOR OUR EXISTENCE-** not getting good grades, winning awards and honors, making money, buying cool stuff, impressing others, achieving **SUCCESS**.

Sometimes it seems to me there are two types of people today:

—the religious people who profess certain beliefs, but don't take them so seriously they actually are willing to **FACE STORMS** for their beliefs—to even **STIR UP STORMS** for their beliefs—or to live in a way that is radically different than the way they'd live if they **WEREN'T** religious---

And

-- the people who say God is someone we make up- to make ourselves feel better, to help us in the harsh realities of the universe. And these folks generally live valuing those things our culture values- and have no interest in FACING or CREATING storms for the sake of others.

Friends, this passage from the Bible calls both groups to some re-assessment.

First, if we think people made God up to help us feel better, we can't really explain Jesus---- because he's not focused on making us feel safe. He's focused on us learning to navigate in storms, because true faithfulness to his teachings WILL stir up some storms. WE NEVER WOULD HAVE MADE HIM UP. He demands and expects TOO MANY THINGS WE TRY TO AVOID! WE NEVER WOULD HAVE MADE HIM UP.

Second, if we profess to love and follow Jesus, we have to ask ourselves, how are my life choices different because of my faith in Christ? What makes my life different than it would be if I WASN'T a Christ-follower? If we can't find any aspect of our lives that is different from how we'd live as non-believers, we may be kidding ourselves about being a people of faith.

Friends, when the good teacher reveals himself to be the powerful Lord of the wind and waves, will we have the guts to stay in the boat with Jesus?

(Closed with explanation about our opportunity to sponsor a refugee family again, through World Relief. Ask for volunteers to help—leaving their names and contact phone numbers.)