

Mark 4:35-41
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Pentecost 5
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His ways

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When evening had come, Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us go across to the other side." And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

His ways

Our world is full of life-threatening peril. Serious danger. Not just scary and painful, but deadly and terrifying.

In our life on Earth from the moment we are conceived until the final days of our lives danger is not far from us. Most of us here today by the Grace of God are not confronted by or reminded of that danger in our daily lives, but it's there all the same.

We travel on roads at speeds that easily kill. Our bodies are frail and prone to many maladies. Evil infects many and their appalling acts are evidence of Evil's hold on them.

Our reading from Mark's gospel is one of the many examples of Jesus overpowering extreme danger. Jesus has been teaching in the area of Capernaum on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. Much of his ministry takes place in this region.

The sea, more accurately, the lake is large and the population, diverse. Capernaum is on the Jewish shore. Across the sea from this Jewish region it is mostly gentiles who make it their home.

This lake is large seems especially for the fishermen of that day. Their boat that night was thought to be about 27 feet long and 7½ feet wide. Large enough to carry them, but very small in a dangerous storm. Be it a lake or a sea the Sea of Galilee was a dangerous place to be that night as Jesus slept.

The geology of this body of water is unique, it's the lowest lying fresh water lake in the world. The only lake that is lower is salt water, the Dead Sea, found at 1,300 feet below sea level.

Both the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea are found in the Jordan Valley and violent storms occur in both bodies of water.

The Golan Heights in the east drop sharply into the Sea of Galilee and when cold air moves over the Heights and drops to the sea it hits the warm air floating above. When this happens just right storms turned deadly for fishing boats of Jesus' time. These storms occur suddenly without warning and bring with them high winds and 10-foot waves.

Four of Jesus' companions that night were seasoned fishermen. When the storm described in this morning's gospel erupted those four would have known, without question, that their lives were in peril. This was the kind of storm that often killed.

The four and probably all of the rest of the disciples with Jesus that night (both those sharing the boat with him and those in the other boats) would have wondered why they were even out on the sea at night. Night was a more likely time for storms.

The answer is, of course, quite clear, they were there because Jesus directed them to be and even though they had already seen much evidence of Jesus' power they still didn't really know who he was.

They still doubted Jesus. They still didn't comprehend God.

Our reading tells us that as the storm raged Jesus slept. That in itself is impressive. His companions had to wake him to get his attention.

Mark's gospel says:

‘But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said [or more probably yelled] to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”’

Of course Jesus cared, but understanding the depth of his care and love was still ahead of them.

As soon as he woke he rebuked the wind, saying,

“Peace! Be still!”

Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm and then he said to them,

“Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?”

Next Mark reports that, ‘they were filled with great awe and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”’ They were getting it, but slowly. It wouldn't be until after Jesus resurrected and then ascended that the depth of his power would finally sink in.

It did become fully known to them in the days and years ahead and they left for us a legacy of stories about Jesus. What he said. What he did. Who he was. So that we too might let his power sink into us; those of us who follow him in faith.

Our world is full of life-threatening peril. Serious danger that's not just scary and painful, but deadly and terrifying. In our life on Earth from the moment we are conceived until the final days of our lives danger is not far from us.

Today's reading is just an example of Jesus' power, but it is an example of power that cannot be challenged. God has power greater than any danger and that's the knowledge that can be so challenging to our faith.

Questions such as: why do children have to suffer? and why didn't God save my mother from such a painful death? and why did God allow Hitler's atrocities to happen?

For many, when they ask these questions, their anguished hearts harden in rebellion. They allow their minds to shut out any possibility of a loving God.

For those faithful Christians who live in the humility that God's ways are not always known to His children we hold fast to those things we do know.

Isaiah says it clearly (55:8-9),

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

We rest in faith that God's love for us is unending. We rest in that faith especially when His thoughts are not our thoughts and his ways are not our ways.

So we pray these words, “Fulfill now, O Lord, our desires and petitions as may be best for us and for your kingdom.”

His thoughts are not our thoughts. His ways are not our ways. May we each rest in this knowledge. May our faith strengthen our humility and trust in the all-powerful Trinity.

God is with us through every danger we encounter and in the end will overpower each and every one of them as He welcomes us home to life eternal.

Amen.