



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost 5

June 23, 2024

Is There a Savior on Board?

Mark 4:35-41

³⁵On that day, when evening had come, [Jesus] said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." ³⁶And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. ³⁷And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. ³⁸But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" ³⁹And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. ⁴⁰He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" ⁴¹And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?"

When digging into the Gospels, it helps to know some history and geography. This is especially true with our Gospel today. St. Mark recounts for us Christ's calming of the storm. This well-known passage has deeply spiritual implications, as we will see.

This chapter begins with Jesus teaching beside the sea. A large crowd gathers to hear Him, so much so, that He decides to get into a boat and teach from the water.

He tells a number of parables during this teaching, and by the time we get to our appointed reading, evening has come. Jesus says that it's time to go to the other side of the lake.

Now, this body of water had a number of names, among which was the "Sea of Galilee." It's about 700 feet below sea level, which makes it easy for the wind to come rushing down from the hillsides, thus stirring up powerful storms with little or no warning.

This is exactly what was happening in today's Gospel. Oddly, it would seem to us, just as it did to His disciples, Jesus was asleep in the stern of the boat as one of these quick and tempestuous storms churned up to a threatening and dangerous level. A number of these disciples were experienced at navigating these waters, yet they were overcome with fear. They made their way back to the stern, only to find Jesus sleeping peacefully on a pillow. Did they conclude from this that all would be well because their Master seemed unconcerned? No. Their conclusion: Jesus didn't care whether they lived or died.

Now, before we get overly critical of them, stop and consider what your prayer was like the last time you found yourself in the midst of a crisis. Maybe you were completely at peace. Maybe you have greater faith than the apostles did. You certainly would have a greater faith than I do. I would have been right there in the mix with them, crying for help and wondering how in the world Jesus could sleep in the middle of that mess. I, too, would



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost 5

June 23, 2024

want to wake Him up Him and ask Him why He wasn't doing anything to save us.

Well, you know what Jesus did . . . "He rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm." It's quite clear from this that Jesus, as God in the flesh, had – and *has* – control over the forces of nature. He created them, after all, so it's nothing for Him to control them. As He spoke all of creation into existence by His Word alone, so, just by speaking the words, the wind and the waves obeyed Him. That much should be fairly obvious. But . . . is there more for us here, more for the Church, in this little, yet dynamic, episode?

Perhaps there's something here about boats. This event occurs in a boat, so maybe the Lord has a deeper message that has something to do with boats. If we look at boats in the Bible, we see that they tend to protect people when in storms or floods. 1 Peter 3 says, concerning Noah's ark, that eight souls were saved by the ark as they passed through the water. The infant Moses was saved in a tiny boat made of bulrushes and hidden among the reeds. Jonah saved a boat by leaving it, as God caused a storm to arise because Jonah was running away instead of going to Nineveh to preach the Word there. James and John left their fishing boat at the call of Jesus to become fishers of men. Jesus often traveled by boat, even walking on the water beside the boat on one occasion. Jesus fills Peter's boat with fish after the resurrection to remind him of the day He called him to be a preacher of the gospel. The Apostle Paul frequently traveled by boat on his missionary journeys. So boats have played an important role in Scripture.

Now, because of the torrential nature of the Sea of Galilee, it was sometimes thought to be a spiritual representation of hell, otherwise known as the Abyss. The legion of demons that Jesus cast out of a man, for instance, begged Him not to send them into the Abyss, and yet, that's precisely where they ended up, having been sent by Jesus into a herd of pigs, which then ran and drowned themselves in the Sea of Galilee. It could be said that, metaphorically, the net used by Peter to gather the miraculous catch of fish represents the gospel rescuing souls from the depths, not of water, but of hell.

Today's Gospel centers around the torrents of the sea. Such storms represent the storms of life, by which Satan, the world, and hell are always trying to ruin us. We Christians, like everyone else, are exposed to life's storms; we're vulnerable to the wind and waves inflicted on us by the forces of evil. But you see, Jesus is in the boat. In fact, the boat represents Christ and the Church. When we're in the boat, the storms of life may knock us about, but they won't destroy us. When we're in Christ, we're kept safe from the ruin of the storms.

From a spiritual perspective, then, this gospel hits close to home. We know and believe that Jesus is right here with us, but when tempests arise, we often wonder where He is. Why is He letting this happen to me? Do I really deserve this? Does God not even hear my prayers?



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost 5

June 23, 2024

Isn't this precisely what the disciples in the boat said to Jesus? "Don't You care that we're perishing?" They were in a state of panic, yet Jesus was right there with them. And here we are, sailing on a spiritual Sea of Galilee – this world, where anything can happen, where everything can change in a minute, and when it changes for the worst, does that really mean that Jesus isn't paying attention? Does it really mean that He doesn't care what happens to you?

By no means, beloved. Storms happen in our lives simply because we live in a sinful world. Satan prowls, evil lurks, the flesh desires, and people succumb. It happens.

When it happened to the disciples, Jesus responded with a gentle rebuke. "Why are you so afraid? Haven't you any faith?"

Now, Jesus had every right to be insulted. It's always insulting when people think they know more about your job than you do. To suggest that Jesus didn't care was an insult to the love He has for all His creation. In fact, it's insulting to His very essence. Jesus *is* love; He never ceases loving you and giving Himself for you and to you. He never stops being concerned for this world and the people in it. What the disciples didn't understand was that the very reason He was in the world at all, and the very reason He was in that boat with them, was because He loved them, He cared about them. That's a good thing for us to remember, beloved. Don't allow yourself to think that Jesus doesn't care about you, about your life, about your circumstances.

And, if you are tempted to think He doesn't care, and you wonder why He doesn't do something to help you, just remember His hands, His nail-scarred hands, for Jesus stooped down from His heavenly throne, humbled Himself and hid His glory, to take on our flesh so that He could be mocked, spit on, and crucified. He went against His very nature to die with your sins on His shoulders, so that you may be given eternal life. Do storms and tempests enter the lives of God's children? You bet, but that doesn't mean Jesus doesn't care. He cares a very great deal.

And so He remains in the boat, the Church. He is even now in our midst. And, through His Word and through His holy body and blood, He has given you – and continues to give you – life, real life, life beyond your circumstances, beyond the crisis you may be experiencing at this moment, for He has given you what you need most, what will carry you through the storms, and empower you to remain steadfast in this faith and life, for it's the character and nature of Christ to bring not just a worldly calm to your life, but a peace and calm that's bigger than your life, as you contemplate what it means to be forgiven, to be made holy, to be loved from this life all the way to eternal life with Him in resurrected glory. In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen