

1 Samuel 17:32-49
Psalm 9:9-20

2 Corinthians 6:1-13
Mark 4:35-41

Imagine yourself in this story. You get yourself into the boat. As you begin to cross the sea an unexpected storm blows, the waves toss you to and fro. The water begins to swamp the boat. Afraid that the boat may sink, you turn around and there is Jesus sleeping, sleeping as though he has no care in the world. Sleeping? How can he be sleeping? Come on, Jesus, are you not the least bit concerned that we are going to die? So of course you wake Jesus. Stilling the storm, he then declares, "Why are you afraid?" Why were we afraid? My God, we thought we were going to drown. The disciples seemingly trust Jesus can do something but they appear uncertain that he will do something.

Storms can scare us. When I was a little boy, storms scared me. One year on Fathers' Day, a storm blew our hog house to small pieces and caused our huge barn to tilt a bit to the north. In the midst of one storm a little boy cried for his mommy. When she came into his bedroom to soothe him, the boy asked his mom if he could get in bed with her. She said, "No, Your Dad is in the bed with me." To which he replied, "The big sissy!" I would imagine storms must be even more fearful in water. There is no place solid to go to. Your boat is being whipped around by the wind and the waves.

Many of us have found ourselves in the middle of a storm. When we hear rumors that there will be massive layoffs, be not afraid? When your doctor finds a growth and orders a CT scan, be not afraid? When a police officer is knocking on your door at 2:30 in the morning, be not afraid? Come on Jesus, there is plenty to be afraid of. At times like these, we too may want to shake Jesus up and say, Lord, are you not the least bit

concerned that we are about to perish? If Jesus were to say to us, "Don't be afraid?" we may ask, "Be not afraid?" It is most definitely easier said than done.

The church is afraid. Another Pew research study just came out not too long ago and the percentage of nones has continued to grow. The nones are those who, when asked their religious preference, mark "none." The mainline church has been in decline since 1965. For decades we fretted about why we were declining, but not the evangelical churches, but they too are beginning to decline. Churches are struggling with not enough people to maintain their ministries, buildings that are now too large for the dwindling membership and eating up mission resources just to keep maintained. Recently I was talking to a ruling elder of a church in Oklahoma that at one time was a large church. They have a large, beautiful campus. They are now down to 169 members and spend about \$100,000 just for the building with maintenance, insurance, utilities, and janitor. They are spending down their endowment. Unfortunately this story is now the rule, not the exception. The church is afraid.

Jesus never said, "There is nothing to be afraid of." That is very different from, "Do not be afraid." General Patton was quoted to say, "If we take the generally accepted definition of bravery as a quality, I have never seen a brave man. All men are frightened. The more intelligent they are, the more they are frightened." There is plenty to be afraid of: isolation, pain, illness, meaninglessness, rejection, money problems, failure, illness, and death.

We may wish that we are more like Jesus than the disciples. We wish we could sleep through a storm rather than having the storms keep us awake. I doubt if there is

anyone here who has not at least a few nights when you have not been able to sleep because of your fears. We too may ask Jesus, "Do you not care that I am perishing?"

This is not a story people who were able to discover or find their resources within them, resources that they did not know they had. The Bible is not some kind of self-help book that declares you have the inner resources to do anything you want to do, need to do, and how to find and utilize those inner resources. The Christian faith is not about the power of possibility thinking or the power of positive thinking. This is not one of those stories. Rather, it points us to another resource. It points us to Jesus Christ.

The disciples were amazed at Jesus power. All Jesus did was to rebuke the wind with a few words, "Peace! Be still!" Who is this man that can still the storm? We need to remember Jesus' ability to calm the storm. The words of the hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," comes to my mind. Often when we sing hymns, I think we do not pay attention to the words. Listen to the words:

A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing.
Our helper he, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe.
His craft and power are great, and armed with cruel hate,
on earth is not his equal.

Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing,
were not the right man on our side, the man of God's own choosing.
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is he.
Lord Sabaoth his name, from age to age the same,
and he must win the battle.

That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth.
The Spirit and the gifts are ours through him who with us sideth.
Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also.
The body they may kill; God's truth abideth still.
His kingdom is forever.

Does this mean we will never have a sleepless night? No. Does this mean we will never be afraid? No. Does it mean we lack faith when we are afraid? No. But this story reminds us that Jesus can still the storms, that in the end Jesus will prevail.

Beverly Zink-Sawyer, a professor of preaching, tells of a photograph taken shortly after Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans in the fall of 2005. It shows the devastation of a cemetery in the historic district of the city, with trees toppled, debris covering the ground, and several burial vaults broken and smashed. But in the middle of the devastation, untouched by the storm, stands a statue of the risen Christ, arms extended wide, offering a benediction of calm amid the chaos. Such is the image conveyed by this text: the image of Christ with his arms extended wide over the chaos of our lives and world, saying, "Peace! Be still!"

All power and glory, wisdom and wonder
be to the Lord our God,
who strengthens us through the word
and blesses us with peace. Amen.