

This month, we have been covering some examples of Jesus's miracles and teachings. Today we turn our attention to the account of Jesus calming the storm, as the Evangelist Mark records it in Chapter 4 of his Gospel:

**MARK 4:35–41.** (EHV)

On that day, when evening came, Jesus said to them, **“Let’s go over to the other side.”** After leaving the crowd behind, the disciples took him along in the boat, just as he was. Other small boats also followed him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves were splashing into the boat, so that the boat was quickly filling up. Jesus himself was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. They woke him and said, “Teacher, don’t you care that we are about to drown?” Then he got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, **“Peace! Be still!”** The wind stopped, and there was a great calm. He said to them, **“Why are you so afraid? Do you still lack faith?”** They were filled with awe and said to one another, “Who then is this? Even the wind and the sea obey him!”

This account follows on the heels of Jesus teaching most of the day, first along the Sea of Galilee, and then, when a large crowd gathered, in a boat on the sea, some distance from shore, so that his voice would carry to the whole crowd and so that more of them could see him. When evening came, Jesus told his disciples to take the boat over to the other side—both to get a break from the crowd and also because he had some important ministry to do on the other side.

Mark makes sure to point out that the disciples took Jesus along in the boat, “just as he was.” There’s a lot packed into that phrase. First, there was nothing special about his appearance that would indicate what he was about to do. It was just plain old Jesus, so to speak. Second, Mark himself makes clear part of what he means by “just as he was” when he goes on to say that Jesus ended up sleeping on a cushion in the stern, so soundly that the windstorm that arose didn’t even wake him up. “Just as he was” means “similar to the condition we would be in, if we had spent most of the day teaching a large crowd.” Jesus was exhausted. This shows us that Jesus was truly 100% human, and it’s another example showing how and why Jesus is able to sympathize with us (cf. Heb. 4:15).

The Sea of Galilee was and is the world’s lowest freshwater lake and it maxes out at almost 150 feet deep. It was roughly thirteen miles long and seven miles wide, sunk in a deep trough with brown and barren hills on the east, where Jesus and his disciples were heading, and green, wooded hills on the west, where they had come from. In the spring in Israel, the regular afternoon east wind could sometimes turn very fierce, very quickly, in the form of the Arabian sirocco wind. That cool, dry east wind could intensify around the Sea of Galilee. If it came rushing over the tall eastern hills down into the bowl of the sea and collided with warmer, moist sea air, it could quickly create storm-like conditions without warning. One such furious squall now came up as Jesus and his disciples were crossing to the other side in the evening, and it was so strong that the waves were splashing into the boat and the boat was quickly filling up.

Yet there was Jesus, with the boat rocking, with the wind howling, with water spraying all over, with the disciples calling to each other and frantically bailing water, sleeping soundly on a cushion in the back of the boat.

They finally woke him up. “Teacher, don’t you care that we are about to drown?” After everything they have seen Jesus do thus far, they don’t doubt that he has the ability to solve their problem. They aren’t so sure that he wants to. They aren’t so sure that he cares.

Like I said, Jesus’s apostles didn’t doubt that he had the ability to solve their problem, but even if they had been expecting him to solve their problem, which they weren’t, I don’t think they were ready for how he did. Jesus did something incredible.

Have you ever seen a hunter or shepherd with well trained dogs? The dogs can be super excited and going all out in one direction, but then the owner calls out a single command, and they instantly change direction, or stop on a dime, or even start coming back to the owner, willing to give up the chase, if that’s what he wants. If there are any forces that we consider outside of our control, it is the forces of nature, especially when we are right in the middle of them. Yet Jesus gets up and speaks to the wind and the sea as if they are nothing but his well-trained dogs. He rebukes the wind: “Enough!” He says to the sea, “Peace! Be still!”

And it’s not like the windstorm dies down just enough so that the apostles can catch up on bailing water out of the boat. No, it stops dead in its tracks. “There was a great calm,” Mark says. The sea was suddenly a setting for a photograph, if such a thing had been invented yet, and you never would have guessed that there had been whipping wind and dangerous whitecaps just a few seconds ago.

Yet even though this was the first time the apostles had seen a human control the weather like this, Jesus says to them, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still lack faith?”

The apostles had seen Jesus heal many people of many different sicknesses and ailments. They had seen Jesus cast out demons from many people. They had been listening to Jesus teach all day, telling parables to illustrate the power of his word. If they had been listening to Jesus as well as the wind and the waves just had, they would have been convinced not only that Jesus could do what he just did, but they never would have doubted that he cared about them.

In Daniel 7 and Revelation 13, the prophet Daniel and the apostle John both see visions in which beasts representing various powers of secular government come up out of the sea. We can guess why the Holy Spirit might draw the comparison between the sea and secular government. The sea is vast and mighty, with many different fish and other creatures inhabiting its waters, with many currents and unplumbed depths. In this place it is calm and beautiful, in that place it is rough, in another place there are storms and icebergs that will destroy the sturdiest boats and ships. Sometimes the winds and weather patterns are predictable, other times completely unpredictable. One world power seems to rise out of nowhere, another people thought was invincible suddenly falls and dies out, leaving hardly a memory. When world powers are warring and raging, it can seem like a storm on the sea, completely out of our control, completely out of anyone’s control.

But as this Gospel account shows us, that’s not true. Jesus is in complete control, even when he seems to be sleeping.

The main part of a church, where people assemble for worship, is called a nave, a word that comes from the Latin word for *boat* or *ship*. Sometimes naves are even designed to look like the hull of a boat or ship, only upside down, which is kind of how the nave of Trinity Lutheran in Winner is designed. These terms and designs are meant to remind us of accounts like this, that

Christians are in the boat with Jesus, that we are traversing the sea of life with him, that he is in control and that he cares.

Yet even with all these reminders, oftentimes the wind and the waves listen better to Jesus than we do. We hear a piece of local or national news, we are threatened by or become victims of a natural disaster, something unexpected happens to our health or the health of a loved one, or something unexpected and unwelcome happens in the visible church, and we suddenly become like the apostles in the boat—scrambling and barking at each other, frantically bailing water, and shaking and yelling at Jesus, “Don’t you care that we are about to drown?”

At times like that, it’s good to come back to this account. It’s good to see that Jesus is in complete control—of everything. And that would be terrifying if Jesus were cruel and tyrannical. So it’s also good to see that Jesus cares, yes, that he is in control and knows what he’s doing and cares for us even when he appears to be sleeping. It’s good to see that he is truly 100% human and can completely sympathize with us, but it’s also good to see that he is truly 100% God, our King, our Savior, our guide. The apostle John also saw a sea in Revelation 4, in front of God’s throne, but it was a sea of glass, as clear as crystal, because God’s kingdom is peace. By his life, death, and resurrection for us, Jesus has paid for our sins and brought about peace between us and God. By his life, death, and resurrection for us, Jesus has won us a home in the perfect peace of heaven. That in and of itself would be enough to calm us amid life’s troubles and turmoils, even if it were nothing but chaos here on earth. But Jesus is also governing, guarding, and guiding the affairs of the earth even before he brings us safely there, making sure even the bad works for good for those who trust in him and love him.

What Jesus said to the wind and the waves, he also says to us in Psalm 46: “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”