

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!”

There is probably nothing that people like to talk about more than the weather.

And it makes sense. While virtually any two Nebraskans could strike up a conversation about the Cornhuskers and any two Wisconsinites could strike up a conversation about the Packers, the weather is something that *any* two people can talk about, only provided they speak the same language.

Not only that, but the weather affects each one of us every day. Whether your crops depend on it, your business depends on it, or your recreation or vacation depends on it, whether you have to work outside in it, or you have to change the temperature inside because of it, whether it determines your mood as you go to work or go home from work, or a weather disaster destroys your property or worse—the weather has a profound impact on our lives.

There is of course nothing wrong with talking about the weather. But it is wrong when we talk about the weather as if we were in control of it, or as if we wanted to be, or as if it were completely out of control altogether.

Today Jesus wants us to know that he is completely in control of the weather. And he uses that fact to illustrate an even greater point—that he’s completely in control of our lives and directs them for the best, even when it appears otherwise. “Be still!” he calls out. He calls it out to a disturbed sea. He calls it out to distressed hearts.

1.

The Sea of Galilee is the world’s lowest freshwater lake at about 680 feet below sea level and it maxes out at almost 150 feet deep. It is surrounded by hills—brown and barren hills that reach well over 1,000 feet tall on the east and, in Jesus’s day, green and wooded hills that reach over 500 feet tall on the west.

Israel is known for its afternoon east wind during April and May. That wind assisted farmers in winnowing their grain. Also around May, that east wind can sometimes turn very fierce, very quickly, in the form of the Arabian sirocco wind. That wind is intensified around the Sea of Galilee. The cool, dry east wind comes rushing over the tall hills and down into the bowl of the sea. When it collides with the warmer, moist sea air, it can quickly create storm-like conditions without warning.

It was probably an evening in May when the disciples got into the boat with Jesus to cross over from Capernaum to the Gerasenes, since we’re told that not long before that, they were picking heads of grain and eating them. After a long day of teaching, Jesus and his disciples

got into their boat, and other boats made ready to follow them. They set out for the opposite shore, about five miles away, toward one of the deepest parts of the sea.

Something else decided to set out too—the sirocco. It came rushing over the Golan Heights like a stampede of so many winged horses, down over the hills, down toward the sea, down toward the disciples. Colliding with the warm sea air, a gale-force wind began to whip up the waves and beat them against the side of the boat. Up went the boat, on the crest of one wave, then down into a valley of water, as another hill of water rose up to meet them, each one seemingly larger than the last.

Now many of the disciples were fishermen from Galilee. They had seen storms like this before. Some had been in storms like this before. They were ready. They went to work. Some rowed with all their might, making sure that the bow of the boat was perpendicular to the waves so that the water would splash to the side as much as possible. Others went to work bailing water—frantically scooping and dumping.

But the situation was quickly turning into a crisis. The waves were so large that it didn't matter which way the boat was turned. The disciples found themselves losing the battle with the water in the boat no matter how energetically they bailed it.

And there was Jesus. Tucked away in the stern. Not in the front, where he might have been protected from some of the spray and splashing water, but in the back, where he would have been exposed to almost all of it. His head was burrowed down in a cushion, which was probably more than a little damp by now. Water was beading on his face and pooling at his feet. And he was sound asleep, exhausted.

The disciples rouse Jesus and, with water stinging their faces, they shout to him in frustration and desperation, “Teacher, don't you care that we are about to drown?”

Jesus sat up, shook off his sleep, stood up, and did the last thing that anyone in the boat expected him to do. He didn't grab an oar. He didn't grab a container. He didn't hold out his hands. He didn't look up to heaven.

He spoke. Not to them. To the wind. To the sea. And Mark is the only one who actually tells us what he said—two words in Greek, three in English: “Peace! Be still!”

“Peace!” We used to own a golden retriever, and he had the annoying habit of barking whenever anyone pulled into the driveway. Now he was a dog, so I don't mind a low growl letting me know that someone was there, but the barking was ridiculous. So I eventually trained him so that, after he barked the first time, I would tell him, “Quiet!”, and he knew I meant business and would keep to quiet growling.

Saying “Quiet!” to one's own dog is one thing, and it doesn't always work. Jesus essentially says, “Quiet!” to the wind, to the sea, to two forces that are beyond the control of any of us.

But the next word Jesus says is even more interesting. “Be still!” our version says. The Greek word says, “Be having been muzzled.” The closest we can come in English and still sound English is, “Be silenced already.” The idea is the same as when you parents tell your kids, “Get ready for bed!” and they ask, “Right now?” and you say, “No, two minutes ago!” In other words, you want it done so promptly that it is as if it had already been done before you even said it. That's what Jesus tells the wind, the sea!

And none of the Gospels tell us that Jesus said it in a loud voice. He said it only loud enough that all the disciples in the boat with him could hear him.

The effect was breathtaking. The wind died down. Like a dog, the wind obeyed its Master. Like a child, the wind obeyed the One who brought it into being. And there was a great calm. Those of you who have ever stayed along a smaller lake know what happens almost every night during the summer. The lake becomes like glass. The Sea of Galilee didn't become that way that often, but it did now. The hills from which the wind had come now looked down into the sea as into a mirror. The setting sun rolled its brilliant orange carpet across the smooth surface. The disciples could even look down and see their reflections in the water pooled at their ankles.

“Peace! Be still!” Words spoken to a disturbed sea. Words that calmed a disturbed sea.

Friends, all the rain we've gotten the past week, the wind that regularly rips across the plains, when it hails peas, when it hails golf balls, a blue sky dotted with puffy clouds and a bright, clear sun—these all were and are firmly in Jesus's control.

2.

But I don't think we have a problem accepting the fact that there is a god in control of the weather. There are heathen tribes and nations all over the world that believe that. But to believe that Jesus controls all the weather for our good, that bad circumstances are *not* a sign that he is angry with us or out to get us, that is what our hearts wrestle with.

And so Jesus doesn't only call out, “Peace! Be still!” to a disturbed sea; he also calls it out to distressed hearts.

Go back to the calm scene we left. The disciples are looking in awe at their reflections in the sea as the sun sets. But Jesus promptly calls their attention back to him. “Why are you so afraid? Do you still lack faith?”

Again, Jesus's Greek is interesting. He actually asks the disciples, “Why are you cowards?” or “Why are you such cowards?” Now of course a coward *is* fearful. But when Jesus calls them cowards, that could be referring to one of two things.

First, Jesus could be asking them, “Why are you such cowards in the face of weather like this?”

That seems like an easy question to answer. “Well, let's see, Jesus. The wind was howling. Waves were crashing against the boat. The boat was filling up with water, and we were about to die. Any other silly questions you want to ask?”

But the disciples could not give that answer. They could not give that answer because of Jesus's follow-up question, “Do you *still* lack faith?” That implies that there was something or were some things that had happened in the past that should have prevented the disciples from being afraid of the weather. And there were.

First, Jesus had been performing amazing miracles, demonstrating that he was the Son of God.

Second, Jesus had done some very ordinary things, demonstrating that he was the Son of Man. If he was the Son of God and the Son of Man, then he was the fulfillment of the prophecies about the Messiah.

Third, Jesus had been teaching them many things. He had been teaching them that those who listen to his Word and put it into practice are his mother and sisters and brothers, more so than his actual blood relatives. He had been teaching them about the power and effect of the Word of God.

Fourth, Jesus had told them, with that same Word, before they got into the boat, “Let’s cross over to the other side of the sea.” There was a promise implicit in that Word. If Jesus said, “Let’s cross over to the other side of the sea,” then they were going to make it to the other side of the sea.

And finally, the disciples could not give an answer because they had Jesus’s own godly example putting them to shame. They couldn’t say to Jesus, “That’s easy for you to say, Jesus! You weren’t in the boat with us!” He *was* in the boat with them. The wind and the waves were hitting *him*, rocking *his* boat, and soaking *his* cloak before he showed and exercised his control over the wind and waves. And as the Son of Man, subject to the wind and sea just as much as they, he had slept soundly and peacefully, trusting in the love, care, and control of his heavenly Father.

But Jesus could have also been asking them something else with his question, “Why are you such cowards?” He could have been asking them, “Why are you such cowards when it comes to waking me up?”

“Haven’t I sufficiently demonstrated that I care about humans, especially humans who are in need? Haven’t I sufficiently demonstrated that I have the power to help them in their need? Haven’t I done nothing but demonstrate that diseases and demons and every evil brought about by sin are subject to me?”

“Why then didn’t you wake me up at the first sign of trouble? Why didn’t you call on me as your first resort, instead of your last? You thought you were being brave and manly by trying to handle it yourself, but you were only showing yourselves cowards by being afraid to come to me.

“Don’t be cowards. Have faith. Have faith in me to be still in your hearts in the face of every danger. Have faith in me to call on me for help in that quiet confidence.”

Friends, what waves are battering against you right now? If there are none right now, and if you have lived long enough, you know that that is only because you have just traversed one crest and are merely sitting between that one and the next.

The wind is always howling against the Church and her members. The sea is always battering her ship—whether through the weather, through the government, through the world around us, or through our own individual struggles with sin. And as each wave crashes down and fills the boat, the devil wants our hearts to doubt and get distressed.

When that happens, hear Jesus’s voice and promises: “Be still, and know that I am God.” You have a God who sent his Son down into this storm. His Son slept in the back of the boat, not primarily to put you to shame, but primarily as just one of many perfect acts of faith that he performed to win righteousness for us. Even when he was nailed to the cross and the sky grew black, Jesus was in firm control. He was paying for all our doubt and distress, forcing the devil to be muzzled with his accusations against us, and not just to do it now, but to do it two minutes ago.

And that blood he shed once for all he used to wash our sins away in our baptism, when he used the same water that so often threatens mankind on the sea and in the rain, combined with his Word, to seal his promises of love to us forever.

There is nothing that has happened to you, nothing that can happen to you, that Jesus does not control. And because he became true man to take our place, and remained true God to make his life and death count for us, we know that he controls it all for our best. So let your distressed hearts be still and at peace.

Jesus said, "Be still!" to a disturbed sea. And he did that to show us that we can be still in the face of the greatest dangers in our lives. Jesus is with you in the boat. He's all-powerful. He's all-loving. Peace! Be still! Amen.