

Our Savior Amidst the Storm

by Mark Jarvinen

Given the frenetic pace of life, peace (calm tranquility) is an enticing but elusive word. Although most of us enjoy a reasonably good standard of living, isn't it interesting that our possessions and play-things have not provided a lasting peace. Stress overload is a fact of life for more and more people, creating a gnawing sense of anxiety. What if my job gets downsized? What if my health gives out? What if my next project is a failure? **Is there a place of calm in the midst of life's storms?** That is the longing of every heart. Today, I'd like to share an experience from the lives of Jesus' disciples that leads us to an answer. Perhaps you remember this episode found in **Mark 4:35-41** - listen as I read -

³⁵That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." ³⁶Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. ³⁷A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. ³⁸Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

³⁹He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

⁴⁰He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

⁴¹They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" (Mark 4:35-41).

I'd like to ponder with you today three elements of this word picture

painted for us by Mark.

I. THE FURY OF THE STORM.

We can easily claim to be courageous when everything is calm. We can have faith in God's deliverance when we do not face any urgent need to be delivered. When we come under extreme pressure, however, the courage and assurance from the fact that "**Jesus cares for His own**" can fade fast. In a Bible study a while ago, we considered **Philippians 4:19** - "**My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.**" In attempting to apply this verse, someone observed - "**I wonder how a believer facing the ISIS threat would relate to this verse?**" In other words, it's easy for us as Christians living in our comparatively well-protected neighborhoods, with 911 at our finger-tips, to claim this verse as a promise from God. But, what about those who fear each day for their very lives?

Throughout church history, believers have read today's text about the disciples in a boat assaulted by waves and applied this image to the Church. **Tertullian** commented in the second century that the little ship in the raging sea from **Mark 4** is symbolic of the Church in the world being buffeted by the fierce waves of **temptation** and **persecution**. What was true then is certainly true today. Churches are facing the temptation to popularize the faith by preaching a message of self-help instead of Christ crucified. Congregations seeking to be faithful to the truth of Scripture are being maligned and marginalized as bigots and haters in our age of pseudo-tolerance, which is nothing less than a subtle form of persecution. Recently, I came across a book, written by J. Paul Nyquist, entitled **PREPARE: Living Your Faith in an Increasingly Hostile Culture**. That's the world we live in.

There are many other kinds of storms that individual believers are called upon to face. For example, there's a former Olympic athlete, who competed **in both the 1992 and 1996 Olympics, who has had to overcome a significant life obstacle.**" Some of you may remember this **2-time bronze medalist diver** named **Mary Ellen Clark**, who happens to be a follower of Jesus Christ. After winning the bronze for diving in the 1992 Atlanta games, Clark dove into the pool while training for the 1996 Olympics in Sydney and experienced extreme disorientation while under water. Doctors diagnosed her with **vertigo**. She knew her days as a diver might be over. Vertigo, a condition of severe dizziness, is somewhat manageable for most people, unless their life's goal is to be a championship diver. She shared her feelings with a friend, who asked, **"What would be the worst case scenario you could imagine coming out of this situation?"** Clark replied, **"That I would never dive again."** Her friend asked, **"Can you accept that?"** Mary Ellen Clark didn't know how to answer. But as she thought about it, she was reminded of **Philippians 4:12-13 –**

"... I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I CAN DO EVERYTHING THROUGH HIM WHO GIVES ME STRENGTH."

Clark applied these verses to her life with a different twist. Could she also **NOT** do something through him who gave her strength? As a Christian, Clark knew that she could trust God for her future even if she never dove again. She found peace in that realization. Clark did in fact overcome her vertigo to take home another bronze medal in the 1996 Olympics. She became the oldest diver to win a medal in her event.

Mary Ellen Clark's storm was vertigo. For you and me it may be something quite different. It might be a **failing marriage**, an **unwelcome diagnosis**, a sudden **career change**, a **wayward child**, or even the **loss of a loved one**. The only certainty we have is that sooner or later we will all confront our fierce storm. Next let's consider ...

II. THE FEAR OF THE DISCIPLES.

The desperation of the disciples' battling the storm while Jesus sleeps serenely in the stern of the boat is a detail from our text with which we can all identify. Haven't we all asked ourselves, "**Where is the God who says He cares? Why does He seem absent in my struggles?**" Many with losses in their lives, whether it be a **job**, their **health**, their **family** or their **friends**, feel that Jesus has left them to fend for themselves. There are those times in life when, to paraphrase the words of author, **E.E. Cummings**, "**It seems as though this world has sprung a leak without any life preservers in sight.**" (Quoted by David Garland in **NIV Application Commentary** on Mark, p. 199).

That said, let's never forget that there's a spiritual battle raging all around us. **Satan** is still very much at work in the world and fear is one of his primary weapons. Fear yields a state of **despondency**, and chronic fear yields **despair**. This is part of the enemy's tactics in spiritual warfare. Satan seeks to blind the eyes of unbelievers, but if he fails in that, his **plan B** is to immobilize Christians through **fear** and **doubt**. Can we learn from the disciples' mistake in the boat (and from our own mistakes) and trust God even when heaven seems silent? After all, why was Jesus asleep in the boat? It

certainly wasn't His lack of care. Scripture is laced with episodes of Jesus' compassionate care for people, whether followers or non-followers. **Why then was He asleep?** Certainly Jesus was physically exhausted after a long, draining day of ministry. But the deeper intent of Mark, I believe, is **to demonstrate Jesus' own trust in the Father in contrast to the disciples' terror.** Jesus, after all, is God's Son, the One sent to be our Savior.

To their credit, at least these disciples were out in the boat. No doubt many remained on shore. In fact, they were in one of several boats that had set sail for the other side of the lake. They were among those who were open to and expectant of further revelation about God's Kingdom from Jesus. But in every believer's life, there will come a **crisis of faith.** We will be tested to determine whether or not we will walk by faith and not by sight. Jewish tradition teaches that when the Israelites were instructed to cross the **Jordan River** into the **Promised Land** with the priests who carried the ark leading the way, the water level was up to their nostrils before the river parted. **Will we keep walking when it appears that one more step means we drown?** Will we trust God's Word? This leads to the third element of this text ...

III. THE FAITH THAT SAVES.

Verse 39 of our text says, **"He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, 'Quiet! Be still!' Then the wind died down and it was completely calm."** What does Christ's rebuke of the wind and waves teach us about Him? A commentator named **Paul J. Achtemeier** gets right to the point in saying: ***"The subduing of the sea and wind was not merely a demonstration of power; it was a divine revelation (an epiphany) through***

which Jesus was unveiled to his disciples as the Savior in the midst of intense peril.” (Quoted by Garland, Ibid.).

We should not see in this storm a merely random cosmic disturbance, but rather the power of unseen forces seeking to undo Jesus in His Messianic role. **We see in Jesus calming the storm, one who possesses the power of God to conquer the powers of darkness arrayed against him.** Therefore, this miracle is not so much performed against nature, as it is against Satan, the enemy of our souls, whose aim it is to undermine the confidence of Christ’s followers. By recounting this miracle, Mark is answering the question that the disciples in the boat posed after witnessing this dramatic event, **“Who is this?” The answer? Jesus is none other than the Son of God, the Savior of the world, the One who is greater than the devil himself.**

Against this revelation of Jesus' true identity, we must hear the question Jesus asked of the disciples who were in the boat with him: **“Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?”** With every revelation of God comes the invitation to believe. Faith is that Spirit enabled confidence that lays hold of Jesus and his power to save even when circumstances seem to refute that trust. When the storm winds are howling around us, and the rolling sea billows threaten to sink us, will we trust?

Now lest we miss the main point of this passage, let me clarify. **It would be possible to deduce from the text that Jesus will always spare from calamity those who call out to him for help. This, however, is not the central point.** Don’t get me wrong. I believe we are invited to call out for

God's help in times of need. God is good and He loves us more than we parents love our own children. Sometimes, even often, in the confluence of His sovereignty and our prayers, God responds and spares us from calamity. That said, I suppose there were Christians who went down with the **Titanic** to a watery grave, even as there were non-Christians who were spared. **C.S. Lewis** prayed earnestly that his wife Joy, whom he had come to know and love later in life, be healed from her cancer. The Lord chose not to do so. Missionaries, like America's first foreign missionary, **Adoniram Judson**, have lost loved ones to illness and disease on foreign soil, while others are protected. **How are we to understand these things?** The why's of life are beyond my pay grade, but I trust in a God who is good and whose thoughts and ways are higher than mine (**see Isaiah 55:8-9**).

As mentioned earlier, the real point of this episode from Mark's gospel is to answer the disciples' question in **v. 41** ***"Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"*** The answer is of course **to reveal Jesus as the Savior** who does not necessarily deliver **from** all of life's storms, but leads us **through** them, whether that means to spare us, or to lead us to our eternal rest. The storm winds of life buffet us in varying degrees, such as the death of a cherished loved one, the loss of a job, or the betrayal of a friend. The good news is that Jesus is "in our boat," unruffled by our human predicament. His trust was in the Father, whose will it was our Savior's good pleasure to perform, even when it led Him to the cross.

Jesus, who slept at sea while His disciples were stricken with terror, trusted the Father to reveal His divine will and lead Him to the fulfillment of

salvation's plan. Jesus, who rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "**Quiet, be still,**" the force of which in Greek, according to Lenski, is "**Put the muzzle on and keep it on,**" is our Savior, who ultimately has already overcome all opposition, even death itself, when He died and rose again for us. Jesus went on from this miracle at sea to die on Calvary's cross, paying sin's penalty, and then rose again from the dead, breaking sin's power, which is death, until finally, He will deliver us even from the presence of sin when He comes to take us home. Jesus saves us, if not always from the perils of this life, certainly from ultimate destruction. Jesus has prepared a place of peace for us, a place of eternal rest. Confident that death is not life's final word to us, we have confidence to face all threats with courage and trust.

Who is Jesus? Jesus is the Lord of nature, powerful enough to calm the fiercest of storms according to the will of the Father. **Do you know Him?** Jesus is the Savior of mankind whose presence brings peace in the midst of chaos, **do you trust Him?** Is your stress level off the charts? **Find rest in Christ.** Is the water up to your nostrils, like it was for the priests crossing the Jordan River into the Promised Land? **Take the next step.** It is through faith in Him that you will find calm in the storms of your life. Jesus is with you in your boat. Give thanks for all that He has done. Praise Him for His presence in your life, a presence that will strengthen you for the journey and one day lead you home. **A-men.**

