

Holy Textures

Understanding the Bible in its own time and in ours

Mark 4:35-41

Year B, Season of Pentecost

Sunday Between June 19 and June 25 Inclusive

3rd Sunday After Pentecost 2009

Read the passage: [The Message](#) or [The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#).

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Jesus peacefully sleeping at the back of the boat in the midst of a raging storm has gotta be one of the all time great images. This is what it looks like to trust in God's caring no matter what the circumstances.

The drama of this story hinges on four questions, with a concluding exclamation:

1. Teacher, don't you care if we drown?
2. Why are you so afraid?
3. Do you still have no faith?
4. Who is this?

5. Even the wind and sea obey him!

A fierce storm has suddenly arisen. The waves are high enough to wash over the side of the boat; filling it with water; and threatening to sink it.

Alarmed and in fear of their lives, the disciples rush to the back of the boat - and find Jesus sleeping! Notice that their understanding of Jesus' sleeping is that he doesn't care if they drown. But Jesus isn't asleep because he doesn't care. He is asleep because he trusts in God's caring.

Just a few short hours ago as they set sail with fair winds and calm seas, the disciples were not anxious about whether Jesus cared. But they - like us - and UNlike Jesus - identify caring with circumstance. We confuse gifts with the Giver: If circumstances are good then God is good and cares for us. But when circumstances change for the worse?

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And so Jesus' questions to them - and us - Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith? - reveal a deeper truth:

Deep down our trust in God's caring is really quite shallow.

Do you *still* have no faith? No, actually, even now, even after all you have taught us Teacher, we still have no faith. We only have "fair weather" faith. Faith that vaporizes with the first hint of fear.

But mercifully, even though we have no faith, no trust-in-God's-caring-no-matter-what-the-circumstances, Jesus does respond to their fear, and orders the wind and sea to be quiet, to be still.

***Personal aside.** Please don't get distracted by this "miracle." There is currently no scientific explanation. But that does **NOT** mean the story is imagined, or exaggerated, or "unscientific" and therefore not real / true. Science has not yet given us its final explanation of the universe. And my personal opinion is that in the not too distant future (assuming there will be a not too distant future), science will finally start admitting there is scientific evidence for non-material realities that even material realities like the wind and the sea obey.*

The question here - "Who is this?" - echoes the same question asked back in Chapter 1 when the first thing Jesus did in his public ministry was to drive out an unclean spirit. (Verses 21 to 27) And again in Chapter 2 when Jesus forgives the sins of the paralyzed man. (Verses 1 to 12)

Just as with the cases of the unclean spirit and the forgiveness of sins, the issue here is Jesus' authority / ranking / status in the spiritual realm. Since all living things - all moving things - are animated by spirits, Jesus here demonstrates his authority over powerful spirits - the spirit of the wind and the spirit of the sea. They obey him, therefore Jesus must have higher authority.

However, the real question to ask of this story is **NOT**:

Who is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?

For us, the real question is:

Who is this, that even raging, life-threatening circumstances do not disturb his sleep?

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The real miracle of this story is **NOT** Jesus calming the storm. The real miracle is Jesus' calm while the storm is raging. His calm is not simply the suppression of fear. His calm arises from within his faith; from within his trust in God's caring - no matter what the actual circumstances.

Thus, the moral of this story is **NOT**: run to Jesus when you are in a crisis and he will make the storm go away. Rather the moral is: run to Jesus when you are in crisis and learn from him the source of his calm.

Do the wind and the sea fill us with fear and terror? Then how ought we respond to the one whom they obey? **NOT** with greater fear. Quite the opposite. With awe and reverence. With - perhaps, finally, now - faith, and trust-in-God's-caring-no-matter-what-the-circumstance.

David Ewart,
www.davidewart.ca