

Mark 4:35-41 – The Wind and the Waves Obey Him

Miracles come in various shapes and sizes. Some are small and isolated: Jesus' healing Peter's mother-in-law of a fever. Some are fun and almost frivolous: Jesus making 180 gallons of wine at a wedding run dry. This one is of "titanic" proportions, you might say. Jesus calms a storm on the sea of Galilee with two little imperatives. The wind and waves obey Him.

After a day of teaching, the disciples load Jesus into one of their boats (at least four of them are fishermen, after all) to go across the Sea of Galilee, presumably to get a break from the crowds. They put Jesus in the boat "**just as he was,**" which is a rather odd way of putting it. "**Just as He was,**" perhaps suggesting that He was tired, near exhaustion, with heavy eyes and dragging feet, which would explain why He fell asleep so quickly on the trip. Other boats went with them, too, indicating that this miracle had plenty of eyewitnesses who could later corroborate this story with their "yes, I was there too."

A great storm arose. That wasn't surprising given the mountains that ring the Sea of Galilee and its penchant for sudden evening storms. The boat was little and full of people; the waves were tall, beating against the side of the boat and filling it with water. If you've ever been on a small boat in a storm, you know the feeling of smallness and insignificance as you bob up and down on the water with no frame of reference, no land in sight. Darkness makes it even worse.

It's "all hands on deck" time, and everyone starts bailing water from the boat as the wind and waves continue to toss it around. And where's Jesus in all this commotion? He's sleeping in the back of the boat with His head propped up on a pillow. That's right, sleeping. You would think that the Lord of creation would have a bit more "situational awareness" than this, wouldn't you?

Let's savor a few details. Jesus is in the back of the boat, where the rudder that controls the boat is. He's sleeping on what might very well be the captain's cushion, the place where the captain of the boat sat to guide the rudder. So not only is Jesus asleep, He's getting in the way, sleeping on the place where the captain is supposed to sit. If you stretch your imagination just a bit, you might see Jesus with one arm draped over the rudder as the boat bounces around the waves. Jesus, Savior, pilot me.

If I'm writing stories to concoct a "Jesus myth" I wouldn't write a story like this. I wouldn't include other boats and other people who could verify this story and potentially contradict it. I would make the disciples more manly, more heroic, standing strong against the wind and the waves. And I'd put Jesus in the front of the boat, large and shining in the darkness, maybe with a staff in His hand extended out over the waves like Moses before the Red Sea, maybe a few lightning bolts coming out of His staff for a little special effect. I would not have a bunch of cowardly disciples in a boat with a sleeping Jesus who is apparently oblivious to the situation. But then, I'm not writing the story.

Well, of course, a sleeping Jesus is about as useful as a missing or dead Jesus. He's dead weight on a sinking ship. So the disciples do the natural thing and wake Him up. Wouldn't you? Of course, you would! We need all hands on deck, and I know it's been a long, hard day of

teaching in parables and all that, but if you don't wake up, Jesus, this boat's going down faster than the Titanic. **“Teacher, don't you care if we perish?”**

There's the big question lurking in the middle of this miracle like a dark, ominous cloud of doubt. **“Don't you care if we perish?”** Or are You just going to sleep through the whole thing? The entire thing turns out to be a big object lesson in trust, which is what makes it a didactic miracle, a teaching miracle. If you've ever taught anyone, you know there are a variety of ways to do it. You can lecture. You can offer up little puzzlers like the parables. And you can create “teachable moments,” experiences that drive home a point. This is definitely a teachable moment – darkness, wind, waves, sinking boat, sleeping Jesus. What do they believe about Him? Do they trust Him?

Do we? Do we trust Him when our little boat is being buffeted and our lives appear to be in peril and we're bailing with all our might but the water is coming in faster than our buckets can toss it? Our arms are aching, our hearts are pounding with panic, and Jesus is nowhere to be seen. He may as well be asleep at the right hand of God for all we know. Do you trust the Jesus who sleeps through the storm and who seems comfortable amidst the chaos? Do you trust the Jesus who leaves you with nothing but a Baptism, a Word, a bit of bread and wine, and a promise? Or do you want more? Do you want to “wake Him up” and put Him to work? Do you trust that this sleeping Jesus on the cross is sufficient to cover you on the Day of Judgment, that in the silence of His death the chaos is ordered, the storm is calmed, judgment is averted?

Job and his friends wondered about these things as Job sat in sackcloth and ashes, scraping the sores on his body and contemplating the loss of his family, his property, and literally everything he had except his wife who encouraged him to **“curse God and die.”** His three friends weren't much more help, tormenting him with a theology of glory that went something like “get right with God and God will get right with you.” Finally, God intrudes into the noise in a whirlwind and asks a bunch of rhetorical questions like, **“Where were you when I laid the foundations of earth?”** and **“Were you around when I shut in the sea and set its boundaries?”** and offers no concrete explanation for anything except to say, “I'm God and you're not God, and that's good.”

Whether it's a sinking ship or a bouncing airplane or a life thrown into chaos by cancer cells or a bad economy, there are those moments where all you can do is trust the One who died on a cross and rose from the dead, which is all the disciples had at the moment they woke Jesus up from His sleep with their “Lord, don't you care” question. And the answer to that question is spoken from the cross, “Yes, I do care. It is finished.” And so that they would learn to trust Him in the sleep of His death and their death, Jesus awakes and rebukes the wind and sea the way someone says “Be quiet” to a barking dog. Two little words, and the wind and waves obey Him.

I would add in passing that no “laws of nature” were violated in the performance of this miracle. Gravity still held things down, and buoyancy still kept the boat afloat. Storms quiet down all the time, sometimes rather suddenly and we don't cry out “it's a miracle.” What is miraculous about this event is that storms don't ordinarily cease by someone talking at them like some storm whisperer. But when the voice is the One who is the creative Word, the one who was there in the beginning when the foundations of the world were laid, when the chaotic waters were tamed, when sea and dry land were separated, all it takes is a couple of words to straighten everything

out again. He is the Lord of creation and the wind and waves have no choice but to obey their Maker.

Jesus has a question for His much relieved, soggy disciples: **“Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”** That rings in our ears too, in our moments of doubt and disbelief. Why are you so afraid? Don't you yet believe? And the honest answer is **“Lord, I believe, help Thou my unbelief.”**

The storm is quieted; their fears redirected. **“Who is this, that even the wind and sea obey Him?”** Good question. They don't fear the storm anymore. Or the waves. Or their own death. Now they fear Jesus the Lord, which is the beginning of anything that can remotely be called wisdom. And trust. Calming storms is child's play for the Creator. Jesus can do it in His sleep. Conquering death takes the sleep of death on a cross. And having awakened from that sleep, He says to His disciples and to each of you: **“Do not fear. Peace be with you. Your sins are forgiven. Your death is conquered. When wind blows, and the waves crash, and your boat goes down, remember, I've already gone down into death for you and you've already gone down to death with me in the water of your Baptism. You are safe in my death. Do not fear.”**