

“Calm Spirits on Stormy Seas”

Mark 4:35-41, Proper 7-B, June 24, 2018

Sometimes we forget that several of Jesus' disciples were **formerly disciples of John the Baptist** and that some of them, therefore, were more than likely present on the banks of the Jordan River, there that day, when Jesus stepped forward into the water to become baptized by John. We certainly do know that the Apostle John was there (John 1:40).

And so it is not fair to say that when Jesus was later walking along the Sea of Galilee and called out to Andrew, Simon Peter, James and John to become his disciples **that this was, without a doubt, their first chance meeting with our beloved Savior!** No, they must have had some personal knowledge of Jesus prior to this!

Nevertheless, when Christ's calls them to become his disciples, saying: ***“Follow me and I will make you fishers of men” (Mark 1:17)***, there is no indication in the Bible whatsoever, of any of them hesitating to answer Christ's call in any way! There is no evidence of their him-hawing and dilly-dallying around before they became obedient to Christ's call.

These “would-be” disciples did not say to our Lord: “Hold on a minute Jesus, we need to go home and make a double-sided list of all the “pros” and “cons;” of all the “positives” and the “negatives,” that could easily become involved in any decision we might make to give up our lucrative careers as commercial fishermen, before we take the plunge and follow you!”

Heavens, no! For St. Mark tells us that in response to our Lord's calling them to become his disciples (and I quote): ***“Immediately they left their nets and followed him” (Mark 1:8)!*** And what follows next, in Mark's Gospel, is a **long, steady-series of compassionate acts** that Jesus then performs, not only: (1) To validate his authenticity, of his truly being the Promised Savior of the world (Isaiah 35:5-6); but also (2) A long steady-series of compassionate acts that Jesus performs in demonstration of the kind of love and mercy his Heavenly Father's has in his heart towards the whole human race!

Let me now **summarize just some, of those compassion acts of divine mercy** that Jesus performed among the townspeople, living there in that fishing village known as Capernaum.

(1) First, Jesus heads to the **synagogue**, where he preaches the Word of God to people, leaving them absolutely spell-bound and hanging on to his every Word! Why? Mark tells us: ***“Because he taught them as One who had authority and not as the scribes” (Mark 1:22).***

(2) Secondly Jesus cast out an “unclean spirit” that was living inside of this man who had come there to the synagogue in Capernaum, to worship the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that day; **relieving this poor man of his demon-possession.**

(3) Following the worship service at the synagogue, Jesus accepts Peter's and Andrew's joint-invitation to have a nice Sabbath Day meal with them and the other disciples—at Peter's home.

Unfortunately, Peter's mother-in-law, who been designated to be the "chief cook and bottle-washer" there that day, was **very sick and in bed with a fever**; which was a very serious thing indeed! Why? Because this was still 19 centuries before penicillin would be discovered as the **first antibiotic available to physicians**. But Jesus goes to the bedside of Peter's mother-in-law, takes her by the hand, raises her up and she is completely healed.

So thoroughly and completely is Peter's mother-in-law healed, that she immediately went into the kitchen and prepared a first century, Palestinian equivalent, of the kind of scrumptious meal that many Southerners here in the Palmetto State might still enjoy today: Fried chicken, mashed potatoes, collard greens, carrot and raisin salad; all to be washed down with some cold sweet tea; topped off with a serving of peach-cobbler on the side!

Jesus shows over and over again, just how much he loves the people; whom the Heavenly Father had sent him into our fallen, sinful world—to redeem!

He next heals a leper. Then he next enables a paralyzed man to walk; perhaps for the first time in this man's whole life—but prefacing that healing—with an even greater miracle, saying to that man, **even as he still says to you and me, by his resurrection power, here again today: "Son, be of good cheer! Your sins are all forgiven you" (Mark 1:5)!**

Jesus demonstrates over and over again just how much he cares and loves other people, other people without any restrictions and **no one was ever considered by Jesus, too far gone, to be saved! He even calls a hated tax-collector named Levi, alias Matthew, to become his disciple**, and furthermore socializes with many of Levi's friends, in Levi's home; that is with people who were classified by the Pharisees nothing less than the very dregs and the reprobates of first-century Jewish society!

When the Pharisees point their accusing finger at Jesus, he responds by saying: **"Those who are well have no need of a physician! But those who are sick! I have come not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Mark 1:17)**

Over and over again, many, many people, and especially Jesus' own disciples saw just how fully-stuffed he was with the divine compassion of his Heavenly Father, that very same Heavenly Father whose Word and Will he came to reveal to all humanity!

So how in the world could any of Jesus' disciples, who were right there, with our Lord in the boat that day—on the stormy Sea of Galilee, question Jesus, by saying to him: **"Teacher do you not care that we are perishing" (Mark 4:38)?**

How could any of Jesus' disciples at this point, who had been the kind of astute listeners to Jesus' teachings as they had been and the kind of close observers of Jesus' actions, as they had been, possibly have come up with such an accusatory and preposterous question like that!

It's not that Jesus didn't care, but that Jesus was thoroughly and completely 100% physically, mentally, and I'd probably say also—that Jesus was also spiritually exhausted from the kind of heavy-duty schedule he had been keeping—and that he simply needed some shut-eye!

And the fact that Jesus was able to sleep on a cushion in the back of the boat in the midst of that terrible storm—actually tells us much more about what was going on within him at that point—than does it given any indication to us whatsoever of the kind of estimated value, that he in his heart and mind was now placing on those disciples!

It took some doing, I am sure, but finally they were successful in waking Jesus up, for Jesus had been soundly asleep on a big cushion in the back of the boat!

DID JESUS NOT CARE THAT THEY WERE PERISHING?

The disciples incorrectly concluded that because Jesus was sleeping in the middle of the storm that he had lost all of his divine concern for them! And this is understandable, to a degree, isn't it?

What do you do if you are imperiled in a vessel at sea in the midst of a terrible storm and the wind is hurling the ship you are aboard, back and forth, across the water, like a ball being violently thrusted from one side to the other on a pool table?

Everyone knew that all hands should have been on deck! Anybody who was able-bodied would have done whatever he could to help bail the water out of the boat!

But Jesus was sleeping in the midst of all of this horrendous noise and terrible chaos; and on a cushion, no less, in the back of the boat!

Did Jesus no longer have any regard for his own life or for theirs?

Was he really the compassionate healer they had come to believe him to be or not?

Was he really the teacher with authority, their friend and brother, or was he some kind of imposter—in cahoots quite possibly with the demonic forces that were all close by and ready to let them all drown at sea?

SO THEY WOKE JESUS UP AND SAID TO HIM: “TEACHER DO YOU NOT CARE THAT WE ARE PERISHING?” And Jesus did wake up. Jesus rebuked the wind then he said to the sea, **“Peace! Be still!”** Then the wind ceased and there was a dead calm.

I am sure this is the last thing that Jesus' disciples were expecting to happen! But for all the scary stuff that they had witnessed in Jesus' presence, up to this day, and again in the most recent weeks of their lives—this was, BY FAR, the most frightening reality for them of all!

They were filled with great awe and said to one another: **“Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”** For he had said to them, **“Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?”**

Why are you afraid...we all have our personal, customized list of phobias, from natural disasters to more psychologically-based terrors. And we should! The world is a dangerous place and we are vulnerable human beings! We fear physical pain, illness and death.

We fear financial hardship; loss of a spouse or job; public shame. We fear for ourselves and for those we love! Millions in this world know daily the fear that comes with hunger, violence, homelessness. The windstorms keep coming! God doesn't always stop those—at least not consistently—and no amount of faith can change that!

We also fear that no one cares. Or that there will come a point in our lives when no one will any longer care for us! That no one will help to bail our boats; when our boats will start sinking and it certainly looks like we, very soon, will be going overboard!

That “NO ONE” includes God; for most of us, even the most faith-filled, there are times when God seems absent and when Jesus seems to be sleeping if he's even on the boat with us at all! Times when we ask, **“Do you not care, O God, that I am perishing?”**

But if anyone ever had the right to ask that question, it was Jesus himself, and Jesus did ask that question, calling out from the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me” (Matthew 27:46)?

And in those moments, God himself was being forsaken by God, so that you and I might have that most blessed assurance that we will never be forsaken by God!

When Jesus stilled that storm, he showed them who he was! He was One whom even the wind and the sea obeyed, sent from the One who brought order out of the watery chaos at the beginning of creation! And when he rebuked the wind and calmed the sea he also answers their question: **“YES, I DO CARE!”**

The faith Jesus calls us to is not a faith that God will calm every storm or cure us of every illness, or vanquish every evil that threatens to do us harm, or even to fix all that is wrong with our world immediately.

The faith that Jesus calls us to is the faith that yes God does care for us!

The faith that Jesus calls us to is the faith that God's grace and healing and justice surround us, even though now can see that only in part. The faith that the psalmist expresses in **Psalm 9:9, “The Lord is a stronghold of the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. And those who know your name, put their trust in you, for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you!”**

Yes, Jesus assures us, the Jesus that calmed the storm and rose from the dead, is THAT GOD CARES! IT MAY SEEM THAT WE ARE PERISHING, BUT WE ARE BEING SAVED. THIS IS THE FAITH THAT WE ARE BEING CALLED TO THROUGH THE GOSPEL!

**AND AS PEOPLE WHO ARE BEING SAVED, WE'RE CALLED TO WITNESS TO GOD'S CARE—BY CARING FOR EACH OTHER, AND FOR BROTHERS AND SISTERS AROUND THE WORLD! THROUGH PRAYER AND PREACHING, THROUGH MINISTRIES OF HOSPITALITY, THROUGH SPEAKING OUT FOR WHAT IS RIGHT AND JUST! GOD CARES FOR ALL!
AMEN**