

Sunday: Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Date: June 20, 2021

Text: Mark 4:35-41

Title:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Please pray with me.

Our gospel reading today brings us to the conclusion of a long day of Jesus preaching and teaching the children of Abraham from a boat on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. As the sun begins to set, Jesus directs his disciples to set a course across the lake. They must have been a little surprised by this request. The journey would take them into Gentile territory. The destination he gave them was the area of the Gerasenes. In fact, that is where chapter 5 of Mark's gospel identifies as the landing site following our pericope for today.

Unsettled as they might be by the destination, the disciples begin the trek across the Sea. Heading east the wind begins to pick up. Not unusual for late evening on the lake, they stay the course. An exhausted Jesus falls asleep on the cushions in the back of the small boat.

The wind continues to increase, and the waves grow larger as they attempt to make progress. Soon the waves driven by the wind begin to break over the sides of the boat. Even the experienced fishermen began to become concerned. They undoubtedly had encountered wind and waves before, but these were worse. Fear gripped the disciples as they struggled to keep going. Finally, fearing for their lives, they awaken Jesus and express their terror saying, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

Jesus arose, rebuked the wind, and told the sea to be still. The chaos caused by the wind gone, and the seas stilled, the disciples are silenced by the power exhibited by their master. They have seen the power of the Almighty God over creation, and it causes them to wonder about Jesus. Who is this? Is he truly who he says he is? Is he the incarnate Son of God? These questions swirl around in their minds and in their conversation threatening their faith in Jesus.

Jesus chastises the disciples for their doubts. If they genuinely believed he was the Messiah, they would have known that his mission could not be sunk, so to

speak, by stormy weather. His mission to seek and to save the lost sheep of Israel was not finished by any stretch of the imagination. Jesus' comments dig deeper than their knowledge of who he is. His inquiry delves into their trust in God the Father. The disciples reflect the condition of the Jewish people in their faith as they question God saying, "Do you not care that we are perishing?"

The Israelites were being challenged by the occupation of their country by the Roman Empire. They struggled with the continuing conflicts between Pharisees, Scribes, and Priests. The world around them seemed to be in chaos. The boat buffeted by the wind and the waves would be an apt analogy for their perception of the world of their day. Where was the life they expected as the children of Abraham? Was this not the promised land?

The famous painter, Rembrandt, undertook the challenge of painting the scene described in our gospel reading today. His painting is the image found on the front of our worship folder. Rembrandt vividly captures the chaos caused by the wind and the waves as they crash into the front of the boat. The water washed over the bow of the boat. Some of the disciples are wrestling with the sails as they tried to weather the storm. They struggled in their environment to save themselves. One disciple, hanging on for dear life, is seen praying to God protection. The chaos of the situation vividly captured by the brush of the artist draws us into the fearful scene on the Sea of Galilee.

The painting does not leave us to ponder the storm, the wind, the waves, and the boat filling with water. Rembrandt leads us to explore further who this Jesus is. Looking at the image, we see as one gets closer to Jesus, the situation becomes calmer. The disciples in the back of the boat, are not scrambling to battle the elements, instead they are looking to Jesus for their safety and security. These disciples are at peace in the presence of the Messiah. They are not worried by the chaos swirling around them but are fully trusting in the fulfillment of the promises of God.

There is so much to unpack in the painting by Rembrandt that reflects the world, life, and faith. We can even find good Lutheran theology in this work. I am struck by the depiction of the chaos of the wind and the waves. In Scripture the churning of the sea, the waves, and the wind were understood as representative of evil. The deep was the place of the Leviathan. The sea was not something that could be controlled, but mariners and fishermen watched the skies and the sea for

signs of coming storms. Hence the adage, “Red sky at night, sailors delight, Red sky at morning, sailors take warning.”

Into a perfect world, chaos entered through the fall into sin in the Garden of Eden. As a result, chaos has taken its toll on all of creation. As humans we are surrounded by chaos and evil. The prince of evil uses chaos to drive us away from God. As we look around us today, we see chaos authored by Satan in our nations. Chaos is constantly fostered within man, as well, as everyone seeks to do what is right in his own eyes. This was the cycle of life in the promised land at the time of the Judges, and it has not really changed. Every day we are confronted with events that reflect the disregard of others for the sake of pleasing the self. The value of every other human life is of less value than our own is played out in shootings over facial coverings, road rage incidents leaving people mourning the loss of loved ones, murder of the unborn, and hatred poured out for disagreeing with my lifestyle.

As Christians we are not immune to the self-centered impulses of human life. When God gave the Israelites the Ten Commandments, they were a radical departure from life as people were living it. God called on his people to love him above themselves. He also wills that we love our neighbors at least as much as we love ourselves. We are called to serve our neighbor as the hands of God, hidden behind the mask of our human identity.

Every time we sin, we are playing into the chaos of evil in the world. In violating God’s will, we place ourselves ahead of God and ahead of our neighbors. The order in the world desired by God is overridden by our desires. Each one of us contributes to the chaos in the world. We are all sinners. As such we are responsible for our part in the chaos we play caused by our disobedience.

Often, when we realize our fallen-ness, we seek to work to make ourselves acceptable to God. We strive against the wind and the waves of the storm. In trying to save ourselves, we become frustrated, fearful, and even terrified. Struggling with our sin and our failures, we cry out at God, “Do you not care that we are perishing?” Rightly we need to be rebuked for our insolence. God does care for each and every person in his creation. This cry further reflects our high opinion of ourselves, instead of recognizing we have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Yet God does not rebuke us and leave us to fend for ourselves. Our loving Father sent his only Son to redeem us and all who believe. In the depths of our

despair brought on by our sins, he reaches out to us and forgives us our sins. He calms the waves and rebukes the wind that terrifies us. He does all of this through the chaotic events of Good Friday. Evil raged against Jesus as he was tried in a kangaroo court, sentenced to death, was hung on a cross and died. From noon until about 3:00 p.m. darkness descended upon the land. The natural world reflected the chaos of evil raging against the Christ. When Jesus died, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth shook, rocks were split, tombs were opened, and many dead were raised. Satan believes he has won. He glories in his victory.

Yet on Easter Sunday the real victory is demonstrated. Satan's moment of glory was short-lived. In the resurrection of Jesus, victory over sin, death and the devil were sealed. Satan can rage as much as he wants, but he has lost. Jesus paid the price for all the chaos in the world. His atoning sacrifice bore the wrath our sins merited. As we are joined with Christ in Holy Baptism, we are freed from the consequences of the sins we have committed. All believers, through faith are made right with God, clothed with Christ's robe of righteousness, and adopted into the family of God.

It is in baptism that we are drawn to the back of the boat to be at peace with Jesus. In the presence of Christ, the wind and the waves have no power over us. We are freed from the terror of our sins. We are comforted by the one who gives us faith to withstand the storms of life. Though we feel the effects of the chaos in the world, we are not overwhelmed by it. We are not governed by the evil present in the world but are assured of our place in the new kingdom. The new heaven and new earth that Jesus will bring with him when he returns.

Rather than battling the ravaging winds of sin, let us instead turn to our Lord, ride out the storm in his presence, fed by the body and blood of our Savior. Let God deal with the chaos of evil and Satan, by his power. The words of Psalm 46, the inspiration for the hymn "A Mighty Fortress is our God" capture the power of God against the chaos, and the peace of being his prized possession, resting in his presence.

- 1 God is our refuge and strength,  
a very present help in trouble.
- 2 Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,  
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,
- 3 though its waters roar and foam,  
though the mountains tremble at its swelling. *Selah*

- 4 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,  
the holy habitation of the Most High.
- 5 God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;  
God will help her when morning dawns.
- 6 The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;  
he utters his voice, the earth melts.
- 7 The LORD of hosts is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*
- 8 Come, behold the works of the LORD,  
how he has brought desolations on the earth.
- 9 He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;  
he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;  
he burns the chariots with fire.
- 10 “Be still, and know that I am God.  
I will be exalted among the nations,  
I will be exalted in the earth!”
- 11 The LORD of hosts is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, God invites us to ‘be still, and know that he is God.’ He calls us to rest in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ to life eternal.

Amen.