

Calm Amidst the Storm

Exodus 14:10-15 and Luke 8:22-25

Luke 8:22-25

²² One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake." So they put out, ²³ and while they were sailing he fell asleep. A windstorm swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger. ²⁴ They went to him and woke him up, shouting, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" And he woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm. ²⁵ He said to them, "Where is your faith?" They were afraid and amazed, and said to one another, "Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?"

This is the word of the Lord.

The disciples ask a good question: Who is this? Though they've been with him for about a year at this point and have seen some pretty amazing things, they continue to ask, "Who is he?" Jesus himself will ask them this very question after almost three years: Who do you say I am?

And I appreciate that this question lingers in the New Testament. Because it tells us that a disciple's understanding of who Jesus is grows. It isn't static. It's a dynamic thing, learning more about who Jesus is, and who I am, and who you are, as we follow him. As more time is spent with him, and more is revealed, our understanding grows. And perhaps our amazement. Like with the disciples.

So as we journey with Jesus through Luke, let's let that question linger: who is Jesus? When we get to Holy Week, that question will come to the forefront as we enter the drama of Jesus' week in Jerusalem at the Passover.

I'd like to lift out two observations from this amazing sailing adventure, and then look briefly at the Exodus account, which is similar in nature:

1. Jesus isn't afraid. He isn't scared. If there is anything we learn about Jesus from this story—in addition to the fact that he is powerful—it's that Jesus is the most non-anxious presence in the world. I mean, who sleeps in the back of a boat during a storm when the boat is starting to get swamped?!? He was so cool and calm that he could continue his nap while the boat was being tossed around and getting swamped with water. And, even when he is woken up by the disciples he doesn't freak out ("oh my gosh, look at this storm; we're all gonna die!!").

Jesus isn't afraid. This holds true throughout his life. He isn't scared **about** anything, or **of** anything or anyone. Read through the gospels—he never wrings his hands over something that **might** happen, or worry about some person who **might** be upset, or who **might** be sick and might die. Jesus is remarkably free of all of that.

I know, I know, he's Jesus and we're not. Of course he isn't afraid—he's God incarnate. But we also know and believe that he was fully human, just as we are. And to that extent Jesus shows us what a *human* response can be to the fears that we all face—because he faced them too. That's the point of the incarnation, of God becoming human. When we get to the end of Holy Week, we will see a very human Jesus who becomes shaken, dejected, and afraid. Was he unflappable then? Well, he certainly wasn't stoic; yet he faced betrayal, fear, and death with a kind of faith and courage that trusted that he was in God's hands, and that all was being worked out according to God's will.

So, Jesus can become our teacher and show us how to face storms and fears with faith, and with strength and courage. Not just from this event, but throughout the witness of the gospels, and through prayer.

Along with that is the assurance that this faithful (unflappable) Jesus is *with us*. The risen Christ is with you and me. So, whatever it is you are facing in your life, remember that Jesus is with you, and he isn't freaked out by it, upset by it, or overwhelmed by it. Jesus isn't looking at your life and your circumstances and going, "Oh my heavens, what are we going to do about *that?!?*" There isn't anything he hasn't seen before and handled before. He is calm, and he is powerful to *bring* calm and peace. The not-freaked-out-God is with you.

And believe it or not, Jesus isn't looking at what's happening in our world or our country and wringing his hands about that either. God has seen some pretty messed up national and international situations over the course of human history. And there has always been an ebb and flow to the developments of human history. Cycles of moving forward, and then what looks like moving backward, to go forward again. Now, he clearly cares, and cares about people. The point is, Jesus isn't freaked out by what's happening in our lives or in the world. It's new to *us*, but not to God.

Think about it: that same Jesus who was asleep in the back of the boat during the storm 2,000 years ago is with you in the storms of your life, and has the power to calm them. That is reassuring. One of my favorite lines in all of the hymns and songs that have been written is from the song we're going to sing in a few moments: "Be still my soul, the waves and winds still know his voice who ruled them while he dwelt below." That's a brilliant line.

So, Jesus is not afraid. And this not-afraid Jesus is with us. And he is powerful. We cannot eliminate the causes of fear in our life (storms will come! Jesus said, "In this world you will have trouble") but we can believe that Jesus is present with us in each of them, and we can trust him to bring calm, and to teach us how to be calm and have peace. Which leads to the second observation:

2. Jesus's response to the disciples. Jesus seems to scold them. Did you get that sense from his response to them? Jesus may not be afraid, however he is a bit feisty. He stills the storm, he calms their fear about the storm. That's reassuring. But then he kind of rebukes them with a question: where is your faith? In the other accounts of this story from Matthew and Mark's gospels, they record Jesus asking an additional question: "Why are you afraid?"

Makes me wonder, what did Jesus expect them to do? Did he expect *them* to still the storm? Was he grumpy because they woke him up out of a deep sleep by frantically yelling in his ear?

I mean, was it completely unreasonable for them to be concerned and afraid? Think about it, most these guys in the boat with him are seasoned fishermen and boaters. They're not afraid of a little bad weather—it happened a lot on the Sea of Galilee—squalls would come up without warning; that wasn't unusual. So this storm must have been unusually *big* and *bad* to scare these guys the way it did. I mean, their boat was getting swamped. So their fear makes sense to me in terms of the storm. They could drown. That was a real possibility.

So what's up with Jesus' questions?

Here's what I think Jesus is saying by asking these questions:

I think what he expected from his disciples was that they would indeed wake him up and expect he would do *something* to make them safe, yet that they would have enough faith *that Jesus cared about them* that they wouldn't be so freaked out in the process. Their lack of faith here was not in his *ability*, but in his heart; their lack of faith in his care for them. Does that make sense?

Notice their statement to him (*shouting*, as Luke tells us) when they wake him up: "*We are perishing!*" In other words, "Don't you care? Aren't you aware of what's going on here, that our lives are in danger?" In fact, in Mark's version of this story that's exactly what the disciples say, "*Do you not care* that we are perishing?" I think that's what Jesus was getting at with his questions. The disciples were probably not questioning Jesus' power or ability, but his heart. They woke him up because they knew he could do *something*. They had seen his miracles before this. Now, the result they got seemed to be "exceedingly abundantly, beyond all we can ask or imagine." But they knew he could do *something*.

The problem is, they questioned his heart. You can imagine them saying, "If you really cared about us, you wouldn't have stayed asleep; you would've been aware of the situation, woken up, and done something. And since you didn't wake up to do something right away, we're not sure you really care."

Does this sound familiar to you? Have you ever said something like that to God? I sure have. It usually goes something like, “Since you’re not dropping everything, hurrying up, and fixing my situation RIGHT NOW, that means you don’t care.” Silly, isn’t it? But it’s sometimes how we react in the moment.

And I think at the heart of fear for us—that is, when fear begins to settle in and mess with our thoughts and emotions—at the heart of fear is the question, “Does God truly care about me?” “Lord, will you really do something about what’s going on in my life?” “Do I matter to you? I’m perishing here!” And the faith that Jesus asks us to have in the midst of our storms and our fears is more than just faith that he *can* do something, but first and foremost, faith and trust that *he loves you* and cares about you.

So... more important than Jesus making the storm go away was his desire to have his disciples trust his heart and his goodness. And, more important than Jesus taking our problems away is learning to have the disposition of heart and mind that takes steps toward trusting in our God’s love for us in Jesus Christ. Storms will come and go. Circumstances change. God never changes, though. His heart goes out to us, and to all, in the storms of life. And when we let God be God in the midst of them, answers will come, and solutions will happen. Maybe

not as amazing as what the disciples got. But whatever solution comes, it's because of God's care for us.

Let's wrap this up by going to the Exodus story for a moment. Here is another story that includes water that people could drown in; and the peoples' response to it, and God's response to them.

Here are a people just set free by God; they have experienced salvation; accompanied by miraculous signs and wonders no less (10 plagues, the pillars of cloud by day and fire by night to guide them); the people have seen God's wonders; yet they now feel the heat of the pursuing Egyptians behind them, and are stuck with the Red Sea in front of them. And what did the people do? They freaked out! (like we probably would, and like the disciples in the boat did)

And then they did what any people of faith would do in that situation. They complained! To Moses. Even though it's very clear up to this point that everything was God's doing; *God* got them out of Egypt; *God* was leading them; *God* told them to go to this specific location at the edge of the Sea—if they had GPS it would've shown the exact coordinates of that location that God gave them. But Moses was the flesh and blood person they could look at and say, "This is your fault." Moses is going to get a lot of this complaining as they make their way through the wilderness. The people wanted to go back, even though going back

meant slavery. “But they fed us decent food back there; we had nice beds to sleep on; we could be nice slaves.” Their response in the Exodus reading is almost funny: “Weren’t there enough graves in Egypt?” I love the Message translation: “Weren’t the cemeteries big enough...?”

Well, in a touching scene Moses stands in the gap and tells the people: don’t be afraid. God will make a way. And he tells them, “Stand firm.” In other translations it says, “Stand still.” That sounds ridiculous in this situation. But stillness here doesn’t mean “do nothing;” it means silence the voices of fear within; still the inward agitating and quiet yourself down. Be firm in your resolve to trust that the Lord will fight for you, he says. I love that line; the Lord will fight for you. You only need keep still (inwardly quiet in mind & heart) and you’ll see it. Quiet yourself so you can see and hear clearly.

When we’re in the grips of fear we can’t see or hear clearly, can we? We lose vision and perspective. So we need to quiet our hearts and minds in order to trust, and even see that God really is at work. God has been with you up to this point, he’s not going to abandon you now!

Moses could’ve said a whole lot of other things to the complaining Israelites. He could’ve said, “Fine; go back to Egypt; see if I care.” No, Moses is a good leader; he sees that they are afraid and he keeps them encouraged. And, he

himself has faith on their behalf. He trusts that God will act and he invites them to follow. That's faith! And true courage: taking action in spite of fear. Having faith in spite of fear.

Then God himself intervenes and tells Moses to tell the people: go forward! Get moving! Move on! Don't become paralyzed by how awful you think your situation is, or by uncertainty. Don't let fear immobilize you. God will make a way.

And he did. We know how this story ends. Or, rather, begins. This is just the beginning of their story as a free people. The Israelites pass through the Red Sea, the pursuing Egyptians are gone, and God's people land safely on the other side, and *begin* their time of journey in the wilderness, and of learning to live as God's free people.

Friends, let me borrow Moses' words, and say: don't be afraid. No matter what is going on in your life, God will fight for you. Jesus cares for you. God will make a way—in your life, in the world. God will set us free from whatever feels like captivity to us right now, or what feels like an overwhelming storm. We need to try to still our hearts and minds as best as we can, and go forward as best we can. Because God is doing a new thing in the world. It's unclear exactly what that is, but because it's God who is doing it, the result will be good.

Psalm 46 prayer exercise:

- ¹ God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
- ² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;
- ³ though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.
- ⁶ The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter;
God utters his voice, the earth melts.
- ⁷ The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.
- ⁸ Come, behold the works of the LORD;
see what he accomplishes 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 shields with fire.
- ¹⁰ "Be still, and know that I am God!
I am exalted among the nations,
I am exalted in the earth."
- ¹¹ The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Be Still My Soul