

“Be Still My Soul”

Mark 4:35-41

During this Pentecost Season, through the reading of the Gospel lessons, we are going to follow the disciples along their journey with Christ. In last week’s Gospel lesson we already witnessed the manner in which Jesus is going to teach His people: He will only speak to them in parables, except for the 12 apostles to whom He explained everything in plain language when they were alone.

But as we will witness, even though the apostles had everything explained to them in plain language, they still did not understand who Jesus was or what He was going to do for the sake of the world.

For this week and the two weeks to follow, we will witness two common themes: the people’s lack of faith and the power and authority of the Lord’s Word. In today’s Gospel, as St. Mark recorded it, the disciples and Jesus were caught in a storm on the Sea of Galilee. The waves were crashing over the sides of the boat, and with Peter, Andrew, James, and John all being professional fishermen who would have been very use to the wind, waves, and sudden storms that are characteristic of the Sea of Galilee, this must have been a very bad storm for them to be as frightened as they were.

These experienced men, who grew up fishing on the Sea of Galilee (lived there their whole life) were faced with this mighty tempest and were very much afraid. Normally, you can see land. The “Sea” of Galilee is only 3 miles wide and 5 miles long. But then again, that is enough water in

which to drown. But evening has already come. They are on the water in the dark.

When we were in Israel, sailing on the Sea of Galilee, our guide explained to us how bad storms pop up. There are mountains to the East (known as the Golan Heights) which are snowcapped well into the spring of the year. The cold air pours down and mixes with the warm air near the water and (BOOM!) you have a storm. As the storm came upon them, they most assuredly put into use all of the knowledge and skill that a lifetime on the boats had given them; but all of their efforts were futile and vain.

It was only when it seemed that hope was lost, their efforts had failed, and their doom was certain that the disciples searched out the Lord. To their amazement, and with some indignation, the disciples found the Lord peacefully asleep on a cushion in the stern of the boat.

At this point in the disciples' development, they were still relying primarily on their own sense and abilities. And, with the question they ask the Lord after rising Him from His slumber, we see that they did not understand who Jesus was or what His purpose was for coming into the world. They were still blinded by the incorrect belief that the world is governed by fate, and that events such as storms happen by chance. They asked, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" They panicked, and they frantically tried to communicate their panic to Jesus.

Sometimes our prayer and thinking follows the same pattern. In times of trouble, we frantically try to communicate our panic to God, as if He were not in control and did not know what was happening in our lives. We often cry out, "We are in a desperate situation, headed for disaster. Are you asleep?" We may not use those exact words, but the sentiment is often there.

There is nothing wrong with being frightened when you are confronted with difficult or troubling situations. But to lament or be angry as if all hope were lost; that is a problem. Instead of rushing to communicate your panic to God, you need to allow Him to communicate His calm to you.

The storm was not the only thing that Jesus calmed that night out on the water. Just as the storm was told to be quiet...to be still, so too were the disciples. The disciples were raging and out of control. They had no confidence in God. They had no understanding of Christ.

The disciples needed the understanding and confidence of Catharina von Schlegel who wrote the beautiful words of the hymn we will sing during the distribution of communion: (As we will not be singing this hymn during our Saturday evening service, I encourage you to read the words of that hymn.)

“Be still, my soul; thy God doth undertake
To guide the future as He hath
the past.

Thy hope, thy confidence, let nothing shake;
All now mysterious shall be
bright at last.

Be still, my soul; the waves and winds still know
His voice who ruled them
while He dwelt below.”

Obviously, the disciples would be unfamiliar with this hymn that was written by a German woman living in the 18th Century. However, the disciples should have drawn comfort from these words of another song, Psalm 107, that would have been familiar to them: “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say this . . . [Some men] went out on the sea in ships; they were

merchants on the mighty waters. They saw the works of the Lord, his wonderful deeds in the deep. For he spoke and stirred up a tempest that lifted high the waves. They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths; in their peril their courage melted away...Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress. He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed.”

If the disciples had understood the Old Testament, they would have had confidence that God was in control all along, and it is God who guides the future as He has the past. And since God was sleeping in their boat, and His time to die had not yet come, fear should not have overtaken them.

Some may say, “Well, that’s easy for you to say. You weren’t there. A boat in a storm in the dark is a scary place.” But Jesus called their fear a lack of faith.

What does that say about us as we approach the wind and waves of our lives? To panic and lose hope can only lead to disaster for your spiritual lives. You need to approach the difficulties of this life with the confidence of Catharina von Schlegel, say to yourself: “Be still, my soul,” and allow God to communicate His calm to you through His Word and through His Holy Spirit.

One of my favorite prayers for myself or for those who I know are struggling is that I pray for a quiet mind.

No matter how confident or accomplished we think we are, all struggling and fighting against the sea of trouble is vain and futile. Allow God to communicate His calm to you. Only through Christ can your soul be still. Amen.