

“Faith to Calm Storms”

Mark 4:35-41

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Prayer for Understanding Almighty God your word is a fountain of truth, a wellspring of love and living water for our souls. Helps us to drink deeply of your living, quenching word. Amen

Before we hear the story of Jesus calming a storm, we will explore the context. Jesus is at a favored location, the seashore. It is the end of a long day. Jesus is provoking strong reactions from nearly everyone with whom he comes into contact. His own family members question his mental state, his neighbors greet him with a hostile welcome, and the religious leaders and politicians are plotting ways to kill him. The crowds are astonished at the authority of his teaching, his healing of disease, his mending of relationships, welcome of outcasts, compassion for everyone, and redeeming grace for all. At the end of this period of sustained teaching, healing, and redeeming, is the story of Jesus calming the storm. Jesus is asleep when a storm blows up. One would assume that with professional fishermen sailing the boat they would handle the turbulent weather effectively, not needing the assistance of a carpenter. Believing that the boat is about to sink, the disciples perceive the sleeping Jesus to be indifferent to the peril of the raging storm and the fragile boat. When the disciples awaken Jesus, he calms the storm.

Understanding the Old Testament images of raging waters is helpful. The power to control the seas and subdue storms belongs to God. Safe passage through the waters connects with the Exodus, God assisting humanity in journeying from slavery to freedom. Storms are also used as metaphors for the destruction our sinful behavior generates as a community. In the Old Testament, violence, hunger, slavery that is extreme income inequality, segregation, isms are all storms generated by the corporate sin of humanity. Jesus calms the storm using the same vocabulary as when he heals. A more literally translation is storms, violence, brokenness, sin "be muzzled." Jesus muzzles our storms, so we are free to enjoy abundant life, to love and to serve.

Throughout the Old Testament, the gift of peaceful sleep is a sign that one is following God's will, loving, and serving to bring heaven to earth for everyone. In contrast, fear is a sign that one does not believe they are a beloved child of God. Fear is a sign that one feels alone, that love is inadequate to calm our storms. The disciples use the words humans often use to address God when fearful, "Do you not care?"

Mark 4:35-41 **“As evening came, Jesus said to his disciples, “Let’s cross to the other side of the lake.” So they took Jesus in the boat and started out, leaving the crowds behind (although other boats followed). But soon a fierce storm came up. High waves were breaking into the boat, and it began to fill with water. Jesus was sleeping at the back of the boat with his head on a cushion. The disciples woke Jesus up, shouting, “Teacher, do you not care that we are going to drown?” When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Silence! Be still!” Suddenly the wind stopped, and there was a great calm. Then Jesus asked them, “Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?” The disciples were filled with great awe and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”**

Some of the storms that are battering us are violence, inequality, hunger, disease, climate change, racism, division, hatred, judgement. How does this scripture help us move from fear to loving service with invigorating peaceful sleep?

At times we will be overwhelmed by storms. The disciples had earlier in that day and for weeks assisted Jesus in calming every kind of storm, feeding thousands, welcoming people from other races and religions into community, bringing joy to those suffering mental illness, welcoming women as equals, caring for children, celebrating weddings, healing diseases, making whole every kind of brokenness, forgiving sins, even bring people back to life who died. Jesus compassionately loved everyone, and Jesus named, confronted, and rebuked the storms of sinfulness, judging, excluding, self-righteousness, indifference, seeking to control others, hoarding resources, hate, hurtful speech, violence, over working, apathy in loving heaven to earth. The disciples were called to calm storms. Jesus taught how to calm storms. Jesus modeled how to calm storms. Jesus peacefully slept for he was doing God's will, loving and serving. The disciples got overwhelmed by the size and number of storms fearing that God is not providing them with enough love to calm every storm.

We are battered with numerous storms today. Jesus is stilling asking all of us. Do you still have no faith? Why are you afraid when you have the love of the Holy Spirit within you to love extravagantly in the midst of every storm, to calm every storm with love, to sleep peacefully? Do you still lack the faith that assures you that love is supreme and will calm every storm, wipe away every tear, make every relationship vibrant, make whole every brokenness,

perfect every imperfection, redeem every loss, resurrect every death, and preserve every form of love, joy, and delight for all to enjoy for eternity? Do you still lack the faith that believes God is working through you, and everyone to calm every storm? Do you still lack the faith that believes that your love is making the cosmos more glorious for everyone and will be exponentially multiplied for eternity? Do you still lack the faith to love every person and to name, confront and rebuke racism, disregard for creation, violence, judgement, inequality?

If you are frantically bailing water in a losing battle against a massive storm. If you are exhausted, wiped out, demoralized, unable to do anything. If it seems like God is doing nothing, asleep, that God does not care about you. Then you are like the disciples and like every person at some point in their life. God is with you. God will never leave or abandon you. Nothing can separate you from God's love. God will calm every storm. Even if you are unable to do anything. If you cannot even speak, only groan and churn with emotions. The Holy Spirit will translate that into a prayer. God remains with you. God will calm every storm.

Examine your thoughts and actions. You are loved by God. Some of your thoughts and actions are a storm, sinful, hurting others, yourself, and the environment. Words are extremely powerful. Words can calm storms. Conversely, words can create storms. Words can hurt, divide, and injure. Examine your words. Tame your tongue of any speech that is not life giving, uplifting, affirming, and grateful. Examine your lifestyle. Are you sharing? Examine your listening. Do you actively listen with compassion? Are you indifferent? Perhaps there is an issue that does not negatively affect you, however that issue is hurting some people. You are part of the storm if you do nothing to transform the situation until no one is hurt and all are healed. If you benefit from privilege and are not actively helping someone without privilege, you are part of the storm.

As you actively strive to stop storm producing behavior, turn 180 and strive to calm storms. This is called repentance. A recurring sermon of Jesus and God's followers is: "Repent and believe the good news!"

If you are in a season where you have some energy and resources, then God is calling you to calm storms. Love is freedom. God loves us completely, therefore God gives us freedom. Perhaps Jesus is sleeping to give the disciples, space, freedom, opportunity to calm the storms that we generate. If you are in a storm, and it seems God is sleeping, then perhaps, God is giving you freedom, and the resources, to join with others to calm the storm. Perhaps God is revealing love through God's patience waiting for us to calm storms.

When your life is light on storms. For just a moment recall what it felt like when you were in a storm. Look around for people struggling in storms. Perhaps recalling your struggle will help you help them. Who calmed your storm? What did they do and not do? Perhaps similar actions will help others with their storms.

Pastor Michael Lindvall draws a distinction between the phrase, "There is nothing to be afraid of" and the Bible's frequent phrase, "Do not be afraid." The first, "There is nothing to be afraid of" is inaccurate because there are things to be afraid of. The second, "Do not be afraid," so central to our faith story, does not suggest that there is nothing worthy of fear, rather that God is with us, God is faithful to us even in the face of fearful things, God is partnering with us to calm storms and God is transforming our fear into love. Saying "There is nothing to be afraid of" is denial and reveals that one has blinded themselves to storms. Until we name and acknowledge the full scope of storms violence, hate, judgement, racism, inequality, disregard for the environment, our frightening reality, we are powerless to calm the storm. To solve a problem, we need to name and agree on the problem we are striving to solve. Saying "Do not be afraid," is a statement of faith believing every problem will be solved, every storm will be calmed. Fear of storms, motivating anger for storms, can be beneficial if it moves us to loving action. Jesus' question to the disciples, and us, about faith is challenging us to lovingly act, to serve, to transform every storm into peaceful, tranquil, joyful, life giving, playful water.

In his eulogy for the victims of the 1963 Birmingham church bombings, Martin Luther King Jr. offers a challenge. Speaking of the victims, he says, "The victims say to each of us, black and white alike, that we must substitute courage for caution. They say to us that we must be concerned not merely about who murdered them, but about the system, the way of life, the philosophy which produced the murderers."

God is calling us to do more than calm storms. God is calling us to join together in dismantling the toxic status quo upon which is a flashpoint for future storms. We should not rest when our life is storm free. We should not play it safe. We should not avoid storms. We should confront and calm every storm. We should transform with love the factors that cause storms. We should create goodness that generates love, joy, peace, and abundant life. Martin Luther King Jr. said: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." Injustice to another is a threat to justice for you.

Perhaps there is a second lesson from Jesus being asleep while the disciples were losing their battle against the storm. Often two different concepts can both be equally true. Jesus' sleep is a sign that he is following God's will, loving and serving to bring heaven to earth for everyone. And Jesus sleep is a challenge to us to wake up and help in

calming the storm. Are we living in a time when a lot of people are asleep? Asleep to preventing violence. Asleep to ending racism. Asleep to ending Covid-19. Asleep to damage to the environment. Asleep to inequality. It is frustrating when only a few people are lovingly serving to calm a storm. All of us should strive to be awake and actively engaged in calming every storm. We may feel overwhelmed. Every loving action enhances life for eternity. Sometimes we will fail. So, we should learn from our failure and try again and again until every storm is calmed.

Jesus woke up, rebuked the storm, established great calm. The disciples were filled with awe. From then on, the disciples strived to calm storms. We are called to calm storms. Amen