

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

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In today's gospel lesson, Mark continues his emphasis on the miraculous power of Jesus. He is tested by, and proves victorious over, ever more challenging situations of need. There are ten recorded individual miracles in chapters 4 through 8. Each group begins with a lake miracle and contains a feeding miracle. In this particular cluster, they are linked in a geographical sequence focused upon the Sea of Galilee which is actually a fresh-water lake, and one which is prone to sudden storms. Here, Jesus leaves the place of lakeside teaching on the west bank and crosses over to the other shore.

This particular episode comes directly on the heels of all of Jesus' special teaching to his disciples on the nature of the kingdom of God and "his characterization of that kingdom as couched in hiddenness and secrecy, and of its requiring a special gift of hearing to comprehend." So, it comes as no surprise if the journey to discipleship and the course of our own sojourns in this Pentecost season should at times be fraught with unexpected dangers or risks" just as we find in the parable of the *calming of the seas*. The story can be read on more than one level. On one, we find Jesus' power being demonstrated in a miracle joining the earlier miracles of healing. On the other, it can serve as a parable of discipleship. In fact, it begins with a call or invitation that "mirrors Jesus' call of his first disciples to follow him --- 'Let us go across to the other side.'" When circumstances descend quickly into chaos upon the arrival of the storm, the cry of the disciples ("do you not care that we are perishing?") is "the ultimate cry of fear, of doubt and abandonment" so often repeated throughout scripture. Mark is notable for the degree to which his accounts echo some of Israel's Psalms. Facing a storm on the sea, sailors "cried out to the Lord in their trouble." Then the Lord stilled the storm "and the waves of the sea were hushed" in Psalm 107. Or Psalm 65 in which God silences "the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples."

We find Jesus presented her in an even more unusual set of circumstances than those previously encountered involving the restoration of suffering human beings. This is because in this case, we witness "a divine power writ large" and in such a way as to prompt those witnessing his work to inquire: *who is this man who does such extraordinary things?* The lake of Galilee is subject to sudden storms which can be quite violent. Jesus is initially asleep which is a detail which shows a sharp contrast with the panic of the disciples. This recalls the example of Jonah in the Old Testament who was also remarkable in being asleep in a storm. The contrast between calm assurance and overpowering fear is therefore meant to recall an earlier occurrence in the life of the people of Israel. Whereas Jonah was summoned to pray for divine intervention, however, Jesus is somehow expected to know what to do himself without prompting. Here, in contrast with Matthew's account, Jesus acts first and only later asserts his authority by rebuking the wind as if it were an animate being and "addresses the lake as if it were an unruly heckler."

The approach taken by Jesus here recalls exorcisms or magic in which a demon is rebuked. Mark's use of a particular verb tense in Greek emphasizes "the total transformation achieved by Jesus' intervention." The disciples, expert fishermen, did not look to natural causes for the abatement of the storm but rather saw in it another example of the extraordinary authority and obedience demonstrated by their Master. At the same time, the disciples once again show that they lack faith in the face of challenging circumstances even though their response to the miracle is "the appropriate response of humans faced with a display of divine power or glory." When they woke Jesus, it was in the hope that he would provide some saving action, but the scale of that action here overwhelms them. And this appears to be the overall point of the story --- its demonstration of the divine authority of their Lord and Savior. In acknowledging the remarkable obedience of the wind and water, here the disciples, so frequently depicted in the New Testament as weak and lacking in understanding of the most basic messages of Jesus, show that they are preparing "an answer which goes beyond a functional view of Jesus as the Messiah" by asking "*Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?*"

Jesus also continues in this part of Mark's account with his practice of teaching through parables. In this case, those "parables" are conveyed through stories of miracles. The contrasts are striking: *Jesus' power over wind and wave VS. the disciples' lack of faith; Jesus' power over demons VS. the townspeople begging him to leave their neighborhood; Jesus' power over sickness and death VS. the woman being praised for her faith after the healing.*

The trip across the lake represents the Gentile mission for Mark. The Sea of Galilee serves as a key transit point in the first half of Mark's account. "By crossing the sea in a boat, Jesus ventures outside Jewish territory to the Gentile cities of the Decapolis (a group of ten cities on the eastern frontier of the Roman Empire in the southeastern part of the Near East which formed a group functioning as autonomous city-states dependent on Rome)." Although Mark gives evidence of not fully understanding the geography of the area, his purpose is not to describe geography but to explain that "Jesus has burst the boundaries which excluded non-Jews from God's people." The storm at sea represents the storms in the early church as the disciples attempt to carry forward the mission of Jesus "to make disciples of all nations." In Mark's use of the term "rebuke," we get a sense of the view of most Jews about the uncontrolled power of the sea.

The Jews were not a seafaring people, a vocation they left to their neighbors, the Phoenicians. In ancient myth, the god of the sea was often the god of chaos. Most large bodies of water can almost instantly turn from calm to deadly. The fact that we cannot control the water is what leads to fear and misunderstanding. Because the Jews had little real-life experience with the sea, it came to symbolize for them the dark power of evil. Since the term "rebuke" is used most frequently in the New Testament in confronting demons, we can see the connection between a large body of water with its power to

overwhelm and the unseen but real power of demonic forces. The ability to control what appears to be uncontrollable is the key to understanding what Mark is depicting here: the divine nature of Jesus which alone can account for the ability to manage what is normally not within the power of humans to influence, much less direct. God's sovereign power is being unleashed; that is, God's kingdom is at hand. And this power is now living in Jesus, and acting through him, defeating the forces of chaos by assuming the role of God's agent.

In the end, "the promise of this text is *not just* that Jesus is with you. Notice that Jesus does not say '*YOU go over to the other side*' but rather '*let us go over to the other side.*' Jesus was there all along, no matter what Jesus was doing, whether that be preaching about parables or sleeping on a pillow. The promise of this text is *also* that there is something on the other side that Jesus knows about --- and needs to get us to. Of course, the reality...is that the other side is not all that rosy, it has its own set of challenges." But when your location changes, so does your perspective and that of others as well. When your location changes, so do you. Actually, that's how change works. So, the act of faith is getting into the boat in the first place. The act of faith is believing that experiencing another side is not only possible but even essential.

Thanks be to God. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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