

Sermon Preached by Pastor Jennifer Rose
June 14, 2015
Mark 4:35-41
“Sleepy Jesus”

Dear Friends in Christ: Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

How many of you feel a little sleepy today? I definitely feel kinda sleepy. I've been up all night with our youth while we've been having fun playing pool, watching movies, running around the church, playing games, eating junk food, and having a good ol' time. Today we've got a few of us here who have not really gotten so much sleep. I think I might have dozed a little bit during one of the movies... sometimes you gotta just take a cat nap.

And lo and behold, when you look at the Gospel reading for today, Jesus seems to be in the same boat. That's really punny. Because Jesus actually is in a boat. Jesus was out there with his closest friends, Peter, James and John, plus the other disciples. The boat was large enough to handle all of them. His three friends were experienced fishermen and they knew that this type of storm could get real ugly, real fast. According to the reading today, they were out there with several other boats. Jesus had become famous and so when he got into a boat and sailed out into the Sea of Galilee, everybody got into their boats and followed him, just as crowds today follow famous people.

They were all out there in the middle of the Sea of Galilee when suddenly along came this big gust of wind. A vicious storm hit and the waves started to get really big and the waves started coming over the side of the boat. These were experienced fishermen and they knew that this was panic time. We're actually told that Jesus was sleeping in the boat. Jesus is worn out and doesn't appear to be worrying much about the storm or their condition.

These weren't boating novices. They were experienced fishermen who weren't easily frightened by storms but this storm was nasty enough to make them afraid. They grabbed Jesus' shirt and shouted, “Jesus, wake up.” And then they spoke that classic line when they said, “Don't you care? Don't you care that we are perishing?”

You can sense their frustration. Here they are, about to die....And here is Jesus... just relaxin... laying there, sawing logs!

Jesus woke up and said to the storm, “Peace. Be still.” Suddenly, it was very calm and Jesus turned to his disciples and asked, “Why are you so afraid? Why are you so afraid of the storms of life? Don't you have faith? Don't you trust that I am with you during the storms of life? Where is your faith?”

And Jesus' question has also echoed down through the centuries, "Why do you have so little faith in the midst of the storms of life?"

Well, Jesus, that's a good question.

I'm sure you can think of some prominent storms. Hurricane Katrina. Hurricane Sandy. The tornado that struck Joplin, Missouri. The Earthquake in Nepal. The earthquake and tsunami in Japan. There's nothing quite as dramatic as these types of natural disasters to start making us question our faith a little bit.

But we've had storms that have hit much closer to home, right? A cancer diagnosis. The depression of someone we love that led to a suicide. Kids that make bad decisions. A sudden heart attack of someone we love. A tragic accident. Sometimes it seems that wherever we turn, there is some storm that we are just getting over or another one brewing. At those times in life, it is really hard to have faith.

Like the disciples in the boat, we know what it feels like to have the waves crashing over us. We know what it's like to cry out from the center of the storm and ask God to save us. There are always those who will tell us that if we are good Christians, we will have nothing but "smooth sailing", and our lives will always be prosperous and happy. This type of theology is called Prosperity Theology. I love the idea of Prosperity theology – I just don't find that type of belief to be true to what I have experienced in life. I love Jesus. But my life is definitely not perfect.

Some even say that if there are storms, it must be because God is punishing us for something. We must have done something to "deserve it." But look again at our first reading. The entire Book of Job tells us that bad things do indeed happen to very good people. But God is not punishing Job. Instead, God is with Job, supporting him through all the storms and tragedies in his life. God is always greater than any storm, and God's love will outlast any trouble that we may go through. In the Gospel, even though Jesus is right there beside the disciples in the boat, the waves are still washing over them. Having Jesus on board was no guarantee of "smooth sailing."

In the end Jesus speaks to the wind and the sea and tells them to be quiet and still. These scripture readings are all telling us the same thing: Stand back and look beyond the present troubles, and you will see that God is there with us, stronger and more powerful than anything we may encounter. God's love will outlast all our fears, and we are promised that in the end there will be peace and security.

Peace is something we crave. Peace from the storms of life – disease, economic struggles, family and relationship problems. There are storms of faith. Our comfortable ideas about God are often shaken by events in life. We may try to build a Titanic faith with all the bases covered, with black and white answers to all known questions when suddenly we hit an iceberg that wasn't foreseen. We sing "When peace like a river attendeth my way" looking to the church for stability in a hectic life and equate stability with "the way things used to be." We look to the church for stability and discover storms. We want God to affirm our plans and discover God has other plans. We want Jesus to agree with our choices and discover that Jesus asks us to examine our attitudes and fears and act according to his commandment to love one another.

We come looking for peace and find a storm. We can be like the disciple standing over Jesus in the boat, feeling betrayed as well as frightened. Our hope comes as we recognize that life is lived in the midst of the storm and know that Jesus is with us. This is the heart of what we claim as Lutherans. We put the cross front and centre in our worship space, in our worship and in our thinking. It is on the cross that Jesus meets us in the most intimate way – dying for us. It is in suffering that we find that Jesus is most certainly with us. It is in suffering that we discover whom it is that will not let us down. It is in suffering we discover that all else which we think is stable and will save us is false. It won't be our job, our pension, our ability to look after ourselves, but it will be Jesus sleeping calmly in our particular boat, whether we like it or not, who gives us the holy gift of peace.

One of our gifts to the world as Lutherans is the understanding that it is in suffering that we experience God most clearly. That Jesus meets us in the midst of our suffering and seeks to lead us through whatever might happen. Jesus said, "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it." Peace comes not from avoiding pain and suffering but in

knowing that we are not alone in the midst of it. The writer of “When Peace Like a River” wrote the hymn after his wife and children were lost at sea. People who have come to terms with cancer know that it is God’s promise of eternal life that gives them hope and peace. We are not alone, Jesus has not and will not abandon us. Jesus is there to say those words we so desperately crave, “Peace be still.” Too often the last place we look for peace is to that quiet spot in the boat where Jesus is sleeping, only too willing to answer our prayer and bring peace. He simply asks us to give up our dependence on our own efforts and look to him who is our only hope for peace.

Jesus has marked us as his own and promises that we will not be forgotten or forsaken. Should we be tempted to forget that, we have stories such as today’s to remind us. We have scriptures that remind us, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.” Notice it is *through* not around the valley. We have our liturgy that use the language of death and dying because it is only through death to so much that we can have life as God intended it for us. We sing hymns that often come out personal experience of tragedy to speak to the hope that comes through suffering as others have depended on God’s presence in the midst of suffering.

Our storm may seem every bit as dangerous as the one that the disciples faced with Jesus. The important thing for us is to remember that we are not alone. We simply need to look for Jesus in the corner of our boat. Notice how peaceful Jesus is. Notice how he is not nearly as worked up about our storm as we are. Listen to his words and find peace and hope, “Peace! Be still!” These are words for us, words that will follow us through whatever storms life has in store for us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.