

# St. Matthew's Church

## NEW YORK CITY

### CAUGHT IN THE STORM

Mark 4:35-41

Third Sunday after Pentecost, June 21, 2009

It was indeed “a dark and stormy night” in this familiar occurrence described in today’s Gospel. What a comfort this Bible Story has been to all of us in the Christian Family. The keeping power of Christ over His people is a truth, which we all need to understand and believe, for it is life changing.

As we take up our story, this is what Jesus’ disciples needed to understand and make part of their lives, and that is what His calming of the Galilean storm teaches. For us, this is a peek at the process of understanding the power of Christ, a peek into what has been life-changing for thousands upon thousands through the Church ages.

Leaving the crowded house He went down by the sea, where amidst a great press He began teaching in parables. So vast and bumptious was the throng that He got into a boat and taught the rest of the day from it in the hot sun. Finally, with the approach of evening, Jesus, exhausted, gave he order to pull out, which verses 35 and 36 describe: *“That day when evening came, He said to his disciples, ‘Let us go over to the other side.’ Leaving the crowd behind, they took Him along, just as He was, in the boat. There were also other boats with Him.”* A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat.

**In Christ There Is Calm:** The Sea of Galilee is fairly small and rests 628 feet below sea level and is about 14 miles long, from North to South; and eight miles across. It is surrounded by high hills and mountains gouged with ravines. It is said that the west winds can rush over the peaks and, in a funnel like effect, make the sea choppy and rough with little warning. Such a storm came suddenly, “without warning” (Matthew 8:24) as Jesus and His

disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee. It looked as though the boat was going to be swamped, so the disciples woke up Jesus and asked for help. Jesus, sleeping in the stern on a coxswain's pillow, was likely exhausted from tending to the sick, the lame, the blind, and the demon-possessed. He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" and there was a dead calm. He then asked them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" (Mark 4:40). The calm that ensued was not a gradual subsiding of the storm, but rather a sudden and complete calm. His disciples were filled with great awe and asked one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" Divine authority demonstrates God's power over the winds and waves. Jesus, using that authority, clearly indicates who He is. Here is a beautiful poem by Henry Van Dyke:

O Maker of the mighty deep  
Whereon our vessels fare,  
Above our life's adventure keep  
Thy faithful watch and care.  
In Thee we trust, whate'er befall,  
Thy sea is great, our boats are small.

We know not where the secret tides  
Will help us or delay,  
Nor where the lurking tempest hides,  
Nor where the fogs are gray.  
We trust in Thee, whate'er befall,  
Thy sea is great, our boats are small.

Beyond the circle of the sea,  
When voyaging is past,  
O bring us home at last;  
Thy sea is great, our boats are small.

We have a remarkable insight into the Incarnation. Though in a moment Jesus would calm the storm with an extraordinary display of power, he first slept in a weary body. In this grand display the opposites of weakness and omnipotence do not clash, but coalesce in a beautiful harmony too magnificent to be the product of human imagination.

The words of Psalm 107:28-30 are wonderfully prophetic: "Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and He brought them out from their distress; He

made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. Then they were glad because they had quiet, and He brought them to their desired haven.” All power belongs to Jesus our Lord. Paul would later explain this in his Colossian hymn: **He is the Creator:** “For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities” (Colossian 1:16). All things were created by Him. Very speck of cosmic dust in the universe is His creation ...everything! **He is the Sustainer:** “He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together” (Colossian 1:17). Scientists spend thousands of hours every year plumbing this mystery. He is the atomic glue of the universe. **He is the Goal:** “All things were created by Him and for Him” (Colossians 1:16). He is Creator, Sustainer, Goal, and Savior of the soul!

This miracle points to something deeper than the calming of one particular storm. Where Jesus is, the storms of life become calm. We have our storms, and they come fast; and I’m not talking about cold fronts, inversions, or low-pressure movements. Our storms are the telephone call that rings in the night, telling us of someone in the family who has been involved in an auto accident. They come as a crisis in the home, where a marriage is ready to break because of the unfaithfulness of a husband or a wife. Our storms are the harsh words between parents and children. They are the diagnosis of a terminal illness.

If it is true that “in Christ there is calm,” does this mean that all you have to do is to call on Jesus and all your troubles will disappear? Some people expect this. They consider God some sort of miracle pill; take this, close your eyes, and all will be well. That would be nice, but all too often we open our eyes and the troubles are still there. They have not vanished. The clue to understanding “calm” lies in the questions of Christ, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” The problem is not so much with the big storm, but the lack of faith. Look not at the storm but to Jesus. All of us living on Planet Earth are learning this “storm theology” first hand. Our prayer should be, Lord, let me ride the storm to you!

**With Christ There is Courage:** Why are you afraid?” Jesus asks. Why do I get butterflies in my Stomach? Why do my knees begin to shake? Why do I develop a sudden dry throat and sweaty palms? Why do I feel sick inside? What kind of faith casts out fear? It is a faith that believes the Scriptural revelation about the power and love of Christ. Do you believe in His power? Do you believe in His love? This kind of faith, conquering faith, sees that

He is in the boat with us. The Early Church picked up on Mark's intended symbolism: Christ in a boat with His followers on a stormy lake is a picture of the Church in the midst of the world. Early Christian art often depicted the Church this way in paintings and mosaics. Christ shares the boat with us. Because of that, the boat will never sink!

Fear is endemic to the human situation. Perhaps today you are fearful. Perhaps you fear life in general, which you will not be adequate for the challenges, which are coming. It is a sort of amorphous fear, but it is real and continual. Maybe you fear some unspoken problem, which has no apparent solution. The winds are howling, and no hope in on the horizon.

What should you do? Understand and believe that it is through storms, afflictions, hardships, and challenges that you grow. Without them, you would be captive to the terrible tyranny of self. Understand that Christ wants to develop you through the storms ahead. Know that He is completely capable of delivering you with a word. He is the same Christ who calmed the storm. Know that He is in the boat with you. He is in you. Exercise this faith and lay down your fear. For when this faith is active, fear vanishes!

The word and the promise of God can help us deal with our fears. Believers through the ages have taken courage in words like these: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psalm 27:1). The most familiar Psalm of all offers this reassurance: "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff...they comfort me." (Psalm 23:4).

The Lord offers this promise: "Fear not. I have redeemed you, I have called you by your name; you are Mine. When you pass through he waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned" (Isaiah 43:1-2).

Christ's birth was announced with this reassurance to the shepherds: "Do not be afraid; for see...I am bringing you good news of great joy for all people." (Luke 2:10). The Good Shepherd also had a word of assurance for His sheep: "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12:32).

**Under Christ There is Confidence:** It was a dark and stormy night. If your conception of Christ is small, puny, and ineffective, then your faith is going to be small, puny, and ineffective; and the nights will seem even darker and stormier. If you believe in a Christ who lives and rules eternally, who has power over nature, and who rose from the dead, then your faith is going to reflect that kind of a vitality. Don't limit Christ to being just a friend. He is more than that. He is the Lord! He is the Son of God! As our vision of Him increases, so does our faith.

In Christ here is calm. With Christ there is courage. Under Christ there is confidence. Jesus calls all of us who are in the boat to follow His course. Today, with eyes wide open, will you commit yourself to sailing where He directs? Will you commit yourself to following Him when the inevitable storms come? Those who keep their sails pointed in the direction that Christ dictates will encounter contrary winds. But they will also experience the wind of the Holy Spirit in their sails, bearing them on in power, healing, and blessing to a needy world. Amen.