

# *Ascension Lutheran Church*

*Pastor Godkin's Sermon for the week of June 21, 2009*

## Peace, Be Still (Mark 4:35-41)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text is from the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel according to St. Mark:

“A great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But He was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke Him and said to Him, ‘Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?’ And He awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be Still.’”

This is the text.

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, What are you afraid of? There are many things to be afraid of. People are afraid of heights, spiders, snakes, and so on. People are afraid of the dark as well. When I was a boy I remember being afraid of going down into the basement of the house at night. It was dark; there were creepy sounds. Every little noise seemed like someone was lurking there in the dark.

We all get scared sometimes. If we look at the disciples in the boat they also were afraid. The waves were crashing over into the boat. The storm was fierce. They thought they were going to drown. But there was another fear as well that was even deeper than the sea that was tossing them around. They were afraid of the One they should have trusted, God Himself.

We can experience both of these fears but they are fears that Jesus addresses when he speaks a powerful Word. He says, “Peace, be still”.

When the storm hit the disciples that night on the Sea of Galilee they were in a panic, they thought they would die and they were desperate and afraid. In their confused state of mind they accused Jesus of not doing something to help them. They said, “Don’t you care that we are perishing?” What a question to ask the Saviour of mankind!

The picture we have here is the disciples full of angst and desperate for their lives in the face of a terrible storm. And where do we find Jesus? He took the storm as an opportunity to teach the disciples about the peace He gives. We find Him at the back of the boat catching some zees. Despite the raging storm, Jesus is not worried. He is the picture of peace. The disciples mistook this to mean that He didn’t care. How mistaken they were. As a consequence, they mistrusted the One that could and would help them.

Friends, fear pops up all the time doesn’t it...We get anxious about the changing things around us. We get frustrated at having no control. When we’re afraid we often turn defensive. We accuse and blame others and take things out on them. When we fear illness and death, we often turn our frustrations on those who try to help – family,

friends, doctors and nurses. When we fear that a relationship is starting to unravel we might distrust the person and blame them rather than bond with them.

When our stress hits the roof, sadly there is a temptation to turn on God as well. An illness lingers for months or even years, loved ones die, family and friends get hurt, the economy goes south. Like the disciples, we're tempted to ask God, "Don't you care?" The Lord's name is cursed every day in the world. It is a tragedy. People are angry and they vent against God. But the truth is, God is the One who helps; He is the One who gives the peace and the strength we need.

On the one hand, the disciples had good reason to fear. They thought they were going to die in a horrible storm. But on the other hand, they had the Son of God in the boat with them. They had the Almighty at their side. And no storm is too big for Him to calm. It's true life is full of scary things: wars, famines, murders, health concerns, and uncertainty about the economy and our financial security and so on. But through all these storms and changes in life we have the changeless Christ, who is the same yesterday, today and forever. He was in complete control in the boat and we can rest assured that in every crisis in life He is in control of those too.

No storm is too great. Our Lord is the Master of all things. He spoke to the wind and sea as if they could hear. He said three words, "Peace! Be still!" and the wind and the sea were calmed immediately. Jesus spoke and this raging and terrifying storm was subdued in a flash. Nature had no choice but to obey its Creator.

Jesus' speaking "peace" had another effect – on the sea and also on the disciples. His Word has power that we can't even begin to comprehend and it saved them from drowning. The "peace" that Christ speaks can calm our fears as well. He speaks "peace" into our lives by His atoning sacrifice on the cross. The sin that separated us from our Creator was laid on Jesus and by His death and resurrection He has reconciled us to God. He has brought us peace in His presence. This means we can be assured of His constant care. As Jesus says, "I am with you always" (Mt. 29). The Lord says, "Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you" (Heb. 13).

The disciples felt a relief and a sense of peace after the storm was brought to a calm. But then, strangely enough, another fear grabbed hold of them. This one was even greater than the first. It says, "They were filled with great fear and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey Him?'" They wondered essentially, 'Is this Almighty God in our boat?'

They felt in a real way that they were in the presence of the Holy One of God who had power over nature and all things. They suddenly had a profound sense of their sinfulness in the presence of the Almighty. They sensed that such a mighty Presence could destroy someone who was less than holy – as they knew they were. Without the peace that Jesus gives by His atoning sacrifice the presence of Almighty God would consume us. We would perish for our sins. As Hebrews 12 says, "God is a consuming fire."

Thank God for His grace in Jesus Christ so we can know Him as Saviour who chose not to consume us but to redeem us and to bear our sins on the cross.

On this Fathers' Day we celebrate the gift of fathers and in the cross of Jesus we see the heart of our Heavenly Father who cares, and provides what we need, who delivers from the storms of life, who has Baptized us, who has made us His children and through the trials and tribulations of life He leads us to remember our Baptism, that we are His own and He will lead us safely through whatever lies ahead.

Friends, are we afraid to have God too close to us? Sadly, sometimes we act that way. Do we fail to pray or worship fervently because we are afraid that God may not be eager to hear from us? Do we shy away from Bible study because we fear the presence of the Almighty in our life?

For all these fears, the thing we truly want is peace. Jesus' speaking peace to the storm is also His speaking forgiveness to us; as He does in every Divine Service in Absolution, in the preaching of the Gospel, in the Sacrament of the Altar, in Baptism, and in the Benediction. He invites us to know that He is present as Saviour – He is holy and Almighty, and he is full of grace and mercy.

Yes, Jesus is the Prince of Peace. Storms in our life may not be stilled right away; they may remain for awhile. But there will surely be an end to all trials when Christ returns, when there will be a new heaven and a new earth, when the redeemed creation will be revealed in all its fullness. In the meantime God invites us to look to Christ for His peace and strength. There is no fear with our Saviour. As it says in First John, "Perfect love casts out fear." Christ Jesus is in control, over nature and over every aspect of our eternal welfare. And with God for us, how can anything prevail against us?

As the hymn says, "Be still, my soul; the Lord is on your side; Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain; leave to your God to order and provide." All praise be to God that we now have this peace, the peace that surpasses all understanding. Amen. The peace of God that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.