

“Are You a Storm Chaser?”

Mark 4:35-41

INI

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

1. There are a few members of my family who have a strange fascination with thunderstorms. I happen to be one of them. When there’s a big storm that sends us all to the basement, I generally have to be reigned in and ordered off of the front porch and away from windows. One of Isabella’s favorite movies is *Twister*, where the stars chase tornadoes across the Midwest, trying to gather scientific data about them. My mother often talks about me and her meeting in Ashland someday to “chase” a storm. (Ashland is halfway between Garrison and my hometown.) Storms certainly can be fascinating—when you’re watching them from afar, viewing them on television, or at the very least in the safety of your own home. You and I would probably not fault the disciples for being caught in a boat on the middle of the Sea of Galilee when this “great windstorm” comes upon the water. Since we all find ourselves within a pretty short distance of a big body of water, I’m willing to bet that there are some stories within our congregation of walleye expeditions gone awry when a storm blows over Mille Lacs...or one of the other lakes all of you like to fish.

2. Not everyone is cut out to be a “storm chaser”...at least not in the literal sense. And perhaps the majority of the people (like me) who think that they could be a storm chaser would actually quail in the presence of a big thunderhead. So perhaps you and I shouldn’t be too hard on the disciples for getting queasy when the clouds and winds started to blow on the Sea of Galilee. The thing is, when you’re with Jesus, there’s no reason for you to fear the storm. “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?” So maybe there’s a “storm chaser” in every Christian. Maybe all of us are supposed to have the boldness to face the storms, no matter where and when they blow.

3. Did you catch though why the disciples were out on that lake in the first place? It was, after all, Jesus himself who suggested that they get on the boat. “Let us go across to the other side,” he said. And then he gets on the boat with them and promptly falls asleep in the stern. Now all of these talks of storms and boats and rough waters are metaphors for the “storms” of our own lives. And I think all of you can think of a time when life has gotten a little “stormy.” Perhaps it was a tragedy in the family. Maybe it was the loss of a job and financial crisis. It could have been anything that caused you to wonder where God was in all of it. Not only does God allow the storms to blow in your life...sometimes he even leads you right into the middle of a stormy sea. “Let us go to the other side,” Jesus says...and you wonder if the disciples looked up into the evening sky, saw the impending stormy weather and said to themselves, “Are you sure?”

4. The Old Testament reading for today is from the book of Job—and the book of Job gives people a lot of trouble. It’s in the book of Job where we read that Satan approaches God and basically says to him, “Your servant Job only follows you because he hasn’t had any difficulties to deal with. If you let me make things hard on him, he’ll curse you!” So God allows Satan to

first take away all his children...all his livestock...all his servants, but Job doesn't curse God. Then God allows Satan to afflict Job's body...to cover him from head to toe with boils and sores, and still Job doesn't curse God. What Job does do is ask "Why?" "Why would God allow all of this to happen to me! I'd be better off if I'd never been born!" So one chapter of Job is Satan doing this stuff to him...the next 36 chapters is Job trying to figure out *why* it happened to him...and then in our reading today, God gives his answer. "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?"

5. You see, today in our readings we learn some unsettling things about God. 1) There are "storms" that blow in our lives. 2) God allows us to be caught in these storms. And 3) God doesn't owe us any explanation as to why he'd let us get caught in life's storms. One of the great myths that people believe about the Christian faith is that a good God would never want his people to suffer. How very untrue! Not only does God grant that you and I will suffer through storms in life...he *saved* his people through the greatest act of suffering ever. His Son Jesus Christ suffered and died on the cross...and that, you and I know, was how God showed us that he loved us...by sending the Son to suffer.

6. I guess what Jesus expects of the disciples and what he expects of you and me is that you and I would come to a different understanding of the "storms" we face. In essence, God has made each and every one of us a "storm chaser"...someone who instead of being sheltered from storms, encounters them and faces their sheer might and power. If someone ever told you that when you became a Christian it meant that life would then become easy to handle, then my friend, someone sold you a false bill of goods. But maybe...just maybe...you and I are set in the middle of storms so that you and I can be asked the same question that Jesus asked the disciples. "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" All of these storms that blow about in our lives have something to do with faith and learning to trust in Jesus.

7. Sometimes when I'm studying a text before a sermon, I come across something so good that I just have to quote it...well, that was the case this week. I have a book that has quotes on different texts in Mark's Gospel from the early Church fathers. I was reading what some of these earliest leaders of the Christian Church had to say about this text and I encountered this gem from St. Augustine, the fourth century Bishop of Hippo. He writes regarding Jesus' calming of the storm: "When you have to listen to abuse, that means you are being buffeted by the wind. When your anger is roused, you are being tossed by the waves. So when the winds blow and the waves mount high, the boat is in danger, your heart is imperiled, your heart is taking a battering. On hearing yourself insulted, you long to retaliate; but the joy of revenge brings with it another kind of misfortune—shipwreck. Why is this? Because Christ is asleep in you. What do I mean? I mean you have forgotten his presence. Rouse him, then; remember him, let him keep watch within you, pay heed to him...A temptation arises: it is the wind. It disturbs you: it is the surging of the sea. This is the moment to awaken Christ and let him remind you of those words: 'Who can this be? Even the winds and the sea obey him.'"

8. Every single one of us has Christ within us. The storms in our lives are there to remind us that Christ is within us—the only one who can chase a storm away. When you are tempted to sin—that’s a storm. When you are afflicted with disease—that’s a storm. When you don’t know how to make ends meet—that’s a storm. When you don’t know what the future holds—that is a storm. There are endless sorts of storms in life that you and I could name, and the one who holds the power over those winds and waves and storm clouds is right within us, received by the Word and the Sacrament. Let’s look at it this way...the disciples do something both regrettable and commendable today in our Holy Gospel. They became afraid. That shouldn’t have happened! They should have had faith! But when they became frightened, they roused Jesus awake. That was the right thing to do. You have storms in your life...and they probably give you grief, sadness, and fear. They shouldn’t! You should have faith!!! But if you do have grief, sadness, and fear, then awaken the Christ that lives in you. Hear his Word...eat his Body and drink his Blood.

9. Yes, every single one of us is a “storm chaser.” Those storms come upon us and you and I can’t avoid them. But Jesus gives us a whole new way to look at storms, doesn’t he? Instead of the storms of life washing us away, they become opportunities to see Christ and to be reassured that he is indeed in our lives. Now today is Father’s Day (Happy Father’s Day, Dads) but there’s another big day in the Lutheran Church that also comes in late June. Next Thursday, June 25th, is the 479th anniversary of the Presentation of the Augsburg Confession. On that day, the German princes were summoned to appear before the Emperor, Charles V, and were told to outlaw their preachers in their kingdoms from using German Bibles, letting people receive the body AND the blood in the Lord’s Supper...basically they had to stamp out all the Lutheranism in their churches. Supposedly Martin Luther addressed the princes before they went there and said to them, “Satan invites us to preach in hell. Is this a trap? Or our greatest opportunity yet?” Now if you were a German prince and were being threatened with having your head chopped off, I think that might be considered a stormy moment in life. And yet God protected those princes and used that moment to allow the Augsburg Confession to be read—a clear proclamation of the Gospel that Jesus Christ and his death alone is our salvation.

10. God worked through that “storm”...and he gives us every assurance that he will work through the storms in our lives as well. You and I don’t know how or why...and we may end up like Job asking a question that God will not answer. But you and I do not need to “be afraid” of the storms that blow in this world. When Christ is awakened in hearts of faith, he has authority over the winds and rains of our lives. His death and resurrection conquer the world for us. And all of us are fit to be “storm chasers!” In Jesus’ name...Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.