

2 CORINTHIANS 6:1-13 (p. 938)

JUNE 20, 2021

MARK 4:35-41 (p. 815)

BLAINE

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Help our hearts to quiet Lord, to be still, like the wind and the waves that you command. Calm the storms that rage around us, and within us—or because of us. And share a Word with us now, so that we too might become “People of Faith”. In your precious Name we ask this, Amen.

“LORD OF THE STORMS”

They must have been “astonished”, don’t you think! I can’t think of a more appropriate word! They must have been standing there with their mouths open, completely in awe! I picture their hearts racing as the Adrenaline coursed through their veins, and, as water from the storm dripped from their hair! They had to be in shock! Utter disbelief! They most likely had to wait a moment or two before they even spoke! It probably took at least that long for them to catch their breath! “They were terrified,” it says! First with the storm! And then with what happened next! Maybe they waited even longer than that? Maybe they waited until Jesus laid back down on the cushion! But eventually, they turned to one other and asked, “Who is this?”

And I picture Jesus, from somewhere in the back of the boat, listening to their conversation, smiling to Himself and thinking, “Finally! Finally, they’re asking the right question”! “Who is this? Who is this ‘Lord of the Storms, that even the wind and the waves obey Him’?”

Don't you wish you were there? I mean, don't you wonder what it was like, out in the middle of that storm-tossed sea? I know it was dangerous and all—the little boat rocking in the pounding waves, water pouring over the sides, the fury threatening to suck everything and everyone under! All in the middle of the night too! But don't you wish you could have at least experienced the calm afterwards—that perfect stillness, that total peace—that pure sense of tranquility, instantly materializing with just a word from Jesus? I know the Children's Moment helped, but I wonder if we can even imagine what it was like?

The Sea of Galilee, known today as Lake Tiberias or Lake Kinneret, isn't really that big. It's about eight miles wide, and thirteen miles long. It's almost seven hundred feet below sea-level though, the lowest freshwater lake on the face of the planet. And it's surrounded by some pretty high hills. The wind there tends to sweep in off of the Mediterranean rather quickly! The locals say it's because those peaks create a funnel-like effect as air rushes over. So, with no warning what-so-ever, a normally tranquil Sea can almost instantly churn into a frenzied mess! I've seen it happen!

We had just finished dinner with a group of friends outside of the city of Tiberius, and decided to take a walk down to the shore. Galilee was as smooth as glass, like a mirror! Someone even commented on the tranquility of it all! We were all wondering aloud what a storm of biblical-proportions would look like, raging across that beautiful body of water. When suddenly, before we could even finish the thought, the wind started to freshen, and quickly picked up speed!

Whitecaps began to form on the surface, and waves started crashing onto the beach!
Within minutes, seriously, minutes, we all had to step back, away from the shore, away from the ferocious spray! Clouds suddenly rolled in! Lightning flashed across the sky!
And in the twinkly of an eye the calm Sea became a torrential fury! What kind of man could calm a furious squall like that?

Picture Crystal Lake. It's a perfect visual, and not that far away. It's about the same width as the Sea of Galilee in fact, eight miles or so from east to west. And about the same maximum depth too, between 145-165 feet. Galilee is quite a bit longer north to south. Almost four times in fact. But they even look alike, right down to the surrounding hills!

So, imagine the most absolute, tranquil day you have ever experienced on Crystal Lake. Fishing maybe, or sailing, or just enjoying the beach. Picture the warm sun and a light breeze, the quiet and the calm. Now set that next to, or in stark contrast to, the worst possibly storm you could ever imagine! Now multiply whatever tempest you currently have in mind by a magnitude of ten! And then, visualize the transition between those two scenes happening in just minutes!

You are in a boat about twenty-seven feet long, and seven feet wide at the beam. Picture a small charter boat from Frankfort Bay, but one with no deck and no wheelhouse. It's made out of cedar and oak, and held together with mortise and tenon joints. There is a keel underneath you, and a tiller in the back, and a sail in the middle to catch the wind. But the whole thing is completely open.

It would hold thirteen people easily—Jesus and the Twelve, plus four oarsmen and a helmsman. And we know all this because Archeologists have not only found all kinds of boat parts down through the years, but in 1986, they actually discovered a completely intact boat, just sort of frozen in the mud! They Carbon Dated it to the First Century, back to the time of Jesus. And the “Experts”, according to Biblical Archeology Magazine, say that the fishing economy around the Sea of Galilee, would have only supported one, maybe two Boat Builders. So, this one, time-tested boat design, would have pretty much been the norm!

So, picture it! “That day,” Scripture says, “when evening came...” After several days of teaching near the lake, after healing a paralytic, and a man with leprosy, and Simon Peter’s mother-in-law, as well as several others! After speaking to crowds and crowds of people, a mob really, one so large that Jesus had to get into one of those boats, and push off a little-ways from shore, using it as a sort of floating pulpit. “That day, when evening came,” Jesus said, “Let’s cross over to the other side.”

In other words, let’s expand our ministry. Let’s move from here, in Jewish territory, over to Gentile lands. The very first verse of the next Chapter says “they went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes”. That’s part of the Decapolis—the Ten Cities, Roman Cities! And here, Jesus healed a demon-possessed man by sending that demon into a herd of pigs. Pigs! This is clearly Gentile territory, right! Let’s shift our mission field, says the Lord, our healing and teaching, by going over to the other side of the lake. We’ll leave those who already believe in the One True God, and go to those who do not!

Let's reach out with the Good News of the Kingdom of God to those who are different! It would have been Scandalous! Right!

And it's dark too, remember, or nearly dark! Everyone is tired, pretty much spent from a long day of preaching and teaching. And yet they get into a boat, and together start to sail those eight miles or so across the lake, to get to where Jesus has told them to go! Should I pause here, to let that sink in? They get into a boat together, even though they are tired, and set sail for where Jesus has told them to go!

The Lord is curled up on a cushion in the back of the boat, sound asleep. Except for their destination, it's business as usual, right? When suddenly a furry erupts! And it's bad! It has to be, because most of these guys are Professional Fishermen, right. They have spent their entire lives out on the Sea, on that particular Sea in fact!

Peter knows to trim the sails in a wind like that! And Andrew would have instinctively grabbed the sea anchor and tossed it overboard to keep the nose of the boat into the wind! Everyone would have immediately started bailing! It would have been second nature to them! Reflex! Muscle-Memory! They wouldn't have had to even think! These guys know what they are doing! But that storm was so intense, so bad we're told, that they were all filled with outright terror and woke Jesus up in a panic! "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" How ironic, right? The Fisherman, wake up the Carpenter, to help with a Storm at Sea!

That says a couple of things to me! First of all, they are really scared! But they know where to turn when things get bad! And secondly, they realize that Jesus can help. They do! They know! Like us, they have seen some things already, and have heard even more! And Jesus, in response to their plea, with just a word mind you, rebukes the wind and the waves! And then, with a second word, He rebukes the Disciples for their lack of faith!

Have you ever experienced a storm—either a literal storm, or maybe a metaphorical one—financial, or emotional, or relational! Have you ever lost someone close to you, or were about to? Have you ever spent your last dime, and now the creditors are beating down your door? Have you ever gotten news from your doctor that wasn't good, or heard about cutbacks at work that went far deeper than were planned? Have you ever had your spouse, or your child, or your mom or your dad, give you extremely devastating news? Think back over the last fifteen months!

Storms happen, don't they! All the time, in fact! They are actually quite common! And storms come in all kinds of shapes and sizes, and often materialize way faster than you think they could! So, here's the thing. When a storm sweeps in, when you are in the midst of a ragging tempest, do you, like the Disciples, know who to turn to? Do you realize, seriously, down in the depths of your heart, that Jesus can help? "Who is it", that can calm the storms with just a word?

So, where do you see yourself in this story? The boat in this lesson, for decades actually, has been used as a metaphor for the Church. What does that say? Remember, Jesus speaks to the entire gathered crowd on the shore, but only a few actually believe. Only a handful get into the boat. And they, together in faith, head out to the other side. The vast majority, the multitudes, the curious onlookers, those who are just there to be entertained, simply choose to sit on the beach. Only a few, a remnant really, are willing to leave their “side of the lake” where the “God-fearing folk” reside, and venture out onto the unknown Sea, to share the Good News with those on the other side! Again, what does that say?

Some of these folks, even when they do decide to get into the boat, immediately lay down and go to sleep. Someone else can pull on the oars, they say to themselves. Someone else can bail the bilge water. Someone else can watch the horizon for gathering clouds! And I imagine some of those still standing on shore are starting to stare down at their shoes, wondering why they haven’t jumped in yet! Let’s face it, some came for the ethical teaching, and some for spiritual enlightenment, some, just to be entertained. But each and every one of them has been confronted with a decision! So, where are you in the story?

Did you start to follow out of curiosity at first? Or to be healed? Or fed? Or saved? Did the stories of Jesus capture your attention? Or the friendliness of the crowds make you feel welcome and good? Did you come for a blessing, maybe, or many blessings? Only now that you have received those gifts, now that you are here, have you lost sight of the Giver? Where are you in this story? How do respond, when Jesus says, “Get in the boat”?

There are “other boats” you know, mentioned in today’s text, boats that are following Jesus, only not too close! Are you in one of those, maybe? Are you the Captain of the little vessel that you’re in, or at least the First Mate? Are you pulling on an oar, or simply along for the ride? When Jesus called, did you race down to the shore immediately, and leap into the boat with enthusiasm? Or did you mill around for a while, testing the water with your toe before finally wading in? Is that where you are now, still only standing waist-deep? Or have you made the decision? Are you “all in”? I sure hope so! But tell me, in all honesty, now that you are here, how much time are you spending snuggled up with the Lord? It, sort of makes you stop and think, doesn’t it?

Storms are going to happen! You can count on it! Your little boat is going to get tossed about! And the crack of thunder, and flash of lightning are going to shake you to your very core! There will come a time when, just like the Disciples, you will be terrified! I can promise you that! I know! I go through storms myself! And I can tell you that when I am self-reliant, I really get buffeted by the waves! It’s dark and fearful, and not pleasant at all!

But when I turn to the “Lord of the Storms” for help, instead of trying to navigate all by myself—when I turn to the One who has actually been in my little boat all along, waiting for me to do just that—it’s downright amazing how fast things settle down! When I stop and acknowledge who is in charge, who commands the wind and the waves, who is actually Lord—I am awed by how fast my world suddenly stills!

You see, the storm that night, out on the Sea, wasn't really the problem. No, the problem was the lack of faith by the Disciples! Jesus even asks them, point-blank, "Why are you so afraid"? And I can't help but wonder if His command for "peace," to "be still," was not-so-much directed at the storm, but rather, directed at them! What do you think?

Paul, talking to the Corinthians about ministry, in our first reading today, includes "troubles and hardships and distress, beatings and imprisonments, riots and hard work, hunger and sleepless nights". He includes these as common occurrences! It sounds like a series of storms, doesn't it? But he goes on to quote the Prophet Isaiah, to remind the Followers of Jesus, us as well, that God has proclaimed, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you". Then he goes on to say, "now" is that day!

We will all have storms sweep into our lives! We will all have times when black clouds blot-out the entire horizon, and darkness creeps in around us! We'll have family storms, and health storms! We'll have money storms and relationship storms! We'll have storms that blindside us, storms that come without a single moment's notice! We will even have storms that put our faith to the test! We will! But if we can just remember who our Lord really is, the One that even the wind and the waves obey, we can ride them out! We'll be okay!

Viktor Frankl was an Austrian Doctor, a Professor of Neurology and Psychiatry at the University of Vienna Medical School. He authored several books, including the famous “Man’s Search for Meaning,” a book that the Library of Congress calls one of “the ten most influential books in America”! He received twenty-nine honorary doctorates from universities all over the world!

But prior to all that, Viktor Frankl spent three years of his life in Nazi concentration camps, including Auschwitz and Dachau. And one of the most memorable things he ever said, at least for me is, “a weak faith is weakened by predicaments and catastrophes, whereas a strong faith is strengthened by them”.

So, where are you? Where are you in the midst of the storms? In the boat, or not? Still on the shore, wondering why? In what do you trust? Or more to the point, in whom do you trust? That’s really the question, isn’t it? Don’t just answer it though! Think about it! Then answer it honestly, at least to yourself. Who is in charge in your world? Who’s in control, control of even the wind and the waves, especially in control of the wind and the waves? Do you realize, truly, that He is already here in the boat with you? And all of God’s people said, Amen!

PASTORAL PRAYER

Oh Lord of the Storms, and Lord of Peace, we come to you just as we are. You settle the waters and quiet the winds. You give life where none existed before. You are the maker of Heaven and Earth. Even the wind and the waves obey your command! You are truly an awesome God!

Father, too often we forget these facts, and sail our little boats on our own merry way. Too often we head in directions that you would not have us go. And too often we are too fearful to even sail at all, let alone ask for your help. Please, forgive us for each of these times. Forgive us when our faith has been puny and small. Forgive us when we have relied on ourselves, instead of on you. Forgive us when we have failed to be still and know that you are God.

Thank you, Lord, for the many blessings that you have given us this past week. Thank you for healing of troubles and pain, of bodies and minds, of issues and problems. Thank you for guiding us down the streams that you would have us take, across vast stretches of open Sea. And thank you for blessing us with your Spirit of Truth.

Lord, once again we approach your Altar of Grace, confident of your love. Once again, we ask for your Blessings, on our lives, and on those around us. And once again, we lift up before you those who need your touch. Please be with.....

Father, with confidence we make these pleas and petitions to you, for we know how much we are loved. With gratitude we place these requests before you now. And in Jesus' Name, and with the prayer that He taught us, we come humbly before you praying, Our Father...