

Mark 4:35-41

It wasn't the weatherman's fault. Storms on the Sea of Galilee were highly unpredictable. They could erupt off of Mt. Herman to the north, and without warning, come sweeping down across the lake. This was no small fisherman's pond, either. It was a good seven or eight miles across—160 feet deep. Anyone who made a living by fishing on the Sea of Galilee was very well acquainted with the dangers involved. And so when Jesus stepped into the boat with His disciples that evening they were already prepared for the fact that they might encounter a storm. But not one like this. This one was furious. It was so intense that the waves were crashing over the boat. The disciples were terrified. The boat was about to capsize and sink. Where was Jesus? In the stern...in the back, sleeping. They woke Him and cried, "Teacher, don't you care that we are perishing!" He got up, told the storm to be quiet, and everything became calm. And on they went continuing their journey to the other side of the lake.

It takes us just a few minutes to look at this story in St. Mark's Gospel. It took more than a few minutes for the disciples to actually endure that storm. But it would take them a lifetime to learn again and again the meaning of what really happened that night on the Sea of Galilee.

They were seconds away from perishing, and Jesus who had been sound asleep, rescued them with just a word from His mouth. Does God sleep? Can He sleep in the middle of a storm? Can He allow His friends and companions to endure such a horrifying ordeal and sleep through the whole thing?

That's what we'd like to know. Because that storm on Galilee may have come to a halt that night for those disciples, but there are days when it regains its power and seems to follow us wherever we go in life. And that's because we're still in the boat. Not that simple fishing craft, but the boat called the Church. Like that fishing craft the Church isn't anything too spectacular to look at—in the eyes of the world, at least. It's just people like you, who hear and follow the voice of the Good Shepherd. But the Church is a sturdy boat, and it takes us where we want to go...because it's Jesus' boat. He keeps it afloat on the sea of life.

Everyone in the world is on this sea. Mark tells us that other boats were also on the lake that evening. And so with the sea of life—everyone is on it. Most are drowning in it. Many have already perished, and most people today are helplessly floundering in its waters. And they will drown, they will perish, unless they are brought into the Church—the only boat on the entire sea that can endure the storms and make it safely across to the other side.

Do we face storms in this boat? Absolutely! We are Jesus' disciples, too. They encountered a furious storm, and we too, face storms of frightening proportions. Storms among family members. Storms at the job. Economic...financial storms. Storms of sickness and sorrow. And especially, spiritual storms that plague us with an accusing conscience.

But you're safe with Jesus. You're protected from the deep waters. In Holy Baptism He brought you into the safety of His boat, and He's taking you across to the other side. Many have already reached the other side. Some of your loved ones are there in heaven. That's

where we're heading, too. And we'll be there one day so long as we stay in the boat and let it bring us across the stormy seas.

Jesus knows the way. He is the Way. He already faced the storms of hell for you. He allowed your sinfulness to drown Him on the cross. He endured your storms for you—that's why you are safe with Him—safe in His boat.

Now there will be some who will jump overboard. They'll become offended at others of us who are also in the boat with them, and they'll jump ship. They may become offended at what they hear with their ears. This is nothing new. Many were offended at Jesus because of what He said. Our sinful flesh is easily offended. It is offended by the truth of God's Word. Some of us have the idea that because we've been in the boat for such a long time that it's our boat, and we should be able to run things our way. And we become offended at those who disagree with us. It's not your boat. It's not my boat. The Church belongs to our Lord. He died for her. He redeemed her. Therefore, we do things His way. And so, some become offended at this and jump overboard. They may think that they can swim across the sea on their own power. But they won't make it—not without Jesus' boat.

There are others who will fall overboard. They get occupied with other things in life and they fall out of the Church. They just, eventually, stop coming. They stop coming to hear the voice of Jesus and receive His body and blood for them. They may still have their names on the membership rolls, but they're really not a part of the Church because they're not in the boat with Jesus.

But you know, Jesus' boat is a rescue boat. When someone falls overboard we don't poke fun at them. We throw them the rope of God's Word so that He can bring them back to the safety of Jesus' boat, the Christian Church.

Now in our text we see Jesus sound asleep in the stern. Does God sleep? He did. He also became hungry and ate. He cried real tears. He suffered. He died on a cross. All these things God did, for God became Man in the flesh of Jesus. But He sleeps no more. For now Jesus is glorified. He has no need of sleep, and yet, to us in the boat He still appears to be sleeping.

It's not like He's standing up on the bow so we all can see Him. He remains hidden in the back of the boat. That's where He was on Galilee, and that's where He is today. He's here with us in the Church, but He's not very obvious. We can't see Him. He's back in the stern. When little Chloe was baptized today at the font, there's Jesus. He's here. He's hidden in the Water and Word, but He's here in the boat with us in Holy Baptism. When you come up to the Lord's Table and receive the bread and wine—there's Jesus. He's here as He says He is. Not standing on the bow but hidden in the stern—hidden in and under the bread and wine of Holy Communion. As you listen to the teaching and preaching of the Word of God today—there's Jesus. He's here in His Word as He has promised to be. He's hidden, but He is here.

That's what's really comforting about this text in Mark 4—it describes Jesus as He really is—the Almighty Son of God who can still storms! But this “Storm-stiller” we find quietly riding along with us in the Church in simple things like water, bread and wine, the spoken words of Scripture.

Now why do you think Jesus does that? I mean, the Church is His boat, after all—wouldn't He want to stand up front for all to see Him? Why instead does He ride along in the back of the boat—in such an insignificant place? You know what one reason may be?—to test and strengthen our faith. Look again at those disciples. They were seasoned fishermen. They had been in countless storms before. But this one turned those experienced sailors into whimpering cowards. All they could think about was losing their lives. They lost faith. They lost all hope. Then, when it became obvious that they were going to perish, then they remembered Jesus—back in the stern, still sleeping.

So they cried out to Him. Now perhaps this was just an afterthought. Perhaps they had little faith left that even Jesus could save them. But one thing is certain—as soon as those disciples looked to Jesus, their problem was over! With two little words from His mouth the storm was gone. Now if He had been up in the bow the whole time, their faith would have never gone through this test. They would never have had the chance to grow through this ordeal, as they surely did.

Likewise with us today. Jesus doesn't get up here in the pulpit and preach to you ever Sunday morning. He stays hidden in the Word and has a sinful man like me proclaim it to you. When you come to receive the Sacrament, Jesus doesn't appear before you in the flesh. He stays hidden in the bread and wine. So also with Baptism. Even though it was Jesus baptizing Chloe today, you couldn't see Him. All you could see was the hand of His servant pouring the water on her head and speaking His Words.

That's how it is with Jesus. You see, so many people look right past Him. We often look right past Him, because we aren't looking in the stern—we're looking in the other direction. And when the storms come, therefore, we forget about Jesus. Oh, if He was up front we'd see Him. But that's not where He is. He's in the back. And so, like those disciples, many Christian people today, including us, lose faith and hope when the storms in life cloud up around us, because we forget who is in the boat with us.

Friend, you are not alone in the boat. Jesus is here with you and for you. He is here to rescue you from every storm, in His own time and in His own way. He is here to forgive every sin of yours—to quiet the storm of your accusing conscience. As He spoke to calm the storm on the sea, so He speaks to you the words, "Be at peace—I forgive you." These words are for you here and now, and with these words He calms, He comforts your troubled heart. He will never push you out of His boat because of your sins. He pardons your sins. He already died for you to pay the price your sins demanded so that you would have a place on His boat.

Even though the boat ride across the sea of life is not smooth sailing, you can ride along with confidence. You can be at peace. Your Savior rides with you. He does not sleep. He, who is the Way to heaven, will, in the safety of His boat bring you, friend, across to the other side. Amen.