

# Stilling the Storm

Proper 7, Year B – Mark 4:35-41

*preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, June 24, 2012*

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

The summer between my second and final years in seminary, the summer of '94, that'd be, I took my boys, then seven and nine years old, on a long camping trip across the country. We packed our tent and all our other gear into the trunk of my little red Dodge Spirit and headed west until we got to the Pacific coast of Oregon, where we then turned south and headed back to Virginia by way of the southern tier of states. Seventy-three hundred miles and twenty-one states in thirty days. To this day, my boys still call that trip "The Great Journey." Over time, I will no doubt regale you with many stories from that trip, but this week as I reread this morning's Gospel lesson, I was reminded of a specific episode from about midway into The Great Journey.

The boys and I camped at the foot of the Grand Tetons on the far western edge of Wyoming. We got into the campground late in the afternoon, got our tent set up and started in on cooking supper – hot dogs, as I recall. One of the boys happened to look up at the mountains to our west. He pointed out for all of us what I still count as one of the most terrible and awesome and *magnificent* sights of my life. As we watched, a huge, dark, billowing wall of clouds rolled up behind the jagged peaks, made darker still as they were outlined by the sun setting behind them. Lightning flashed within the clouds, many seconds later followed by distant thunder rumbling down through the valley. When the clouds finally broke over the mountaintops, they literally engulfed them as we watched the storm approach us from miles and miles away. As they came, the clouds issued wilder, more jagged flashes and louder, sharper reports and the rain fell like a solid wall to the ground beneath them. We jumped up from the table, abandoning our hot dogs, and dove into our tent mere seconds before the downpour reached us. Soon we were surrounded by the type of storm that keeps Skippy the weatherman employed. Instead of finding a doorway or bathroom to stand in, though, instead of checking out the Doppler radar, instead of heading down to the basement with the pets and the valuables, that night the boys and I were in a tent – a few yards of nylon held together with zippers and Velcro. As the storm engulfed us, the wind whipped our tent around like a sheet on a clothesline. The rain beat down as if poured from troughs rather than buckets. The lightning seemed to come from all around us. And the thunder, with *no* flash-to-bang delay, was deafening and nearly constant.

At the height of the storm, one of the boys cuddled close and said in just above a whisper, "Daddy! Are we going to be O.K.?" "Of course," I replied, "we're going to be fine. It'll be over in a minute." That's what I said on the outside. On the inside, I said, "O my God, we're all going to be blown away!"

As quickly as it had come upon us, the storm subsided, and we all fell asleep. The next morning we were really not surprised to find the remnants of our discarded supper strewn about on the ground – along with the stove, the cooler and anything else that hadn't been with us in the tent. As we went about the business of retrieving our things, I remember thinking that for once it was probably a *good* thing that I weighed as much as I did. My bulk might have been the only thing that kept us on the ground that night.

The sudden storm that hit the disciples that day on the Sea of Galilee might have been like that. That storm *must* have been a bad one. After all, this wasn't Gilligan and the crew out for a three-hour cruise. These were men who knew these waters, men who made their livings on these waters, seasoned men whose entire lives had been spent on these waters. The storm comes up on them and without a doubt in my mind, I'm sure they figure they can handle it. This is their field of expertise, no need to bother the Master. But the winds grow stronger and stronger and the waves get higher and higher. They strike the sails to keep from being blown completely over, and then are tossed to and fro by the waves, without any

control at all. And still the storm continues to build, until the boat is filled with water until the rugged, seasoned crew is reduced to whimpers. In utter panic, they stagger to the back of the boat to find Jesus, *asleep*. They cry out to wake him, “Master have you forgotten about us?” “We’re going to drown, help us!” Jesus sits up, looks at his fear-filled disciples, looks around at the storm, and says, perhaps to all of them, “Peace. Be Still!” Then the wind fell, the Gospel writer tells us, and there was . . . dead calm.

Dear friends, I will never stand up here and try to convince you that the life of a Christian is a calm sea. Life here on earth is filled with storms, times when the going gets tougher and rougher with each passing hour, sometimes with each passing *minute*.

The storm for you may be one of physical affliction. You’ve been to doctor after doctor, had test upon test. You’ve taken all the medicines, you’ve endured all the treatments, you’ve been through one surgery after another, but still there is the weakness, and still there is the pain. When you’ve reached the point where you’d do anything, *anything* for just one month without pain – one day – one moment. When you’ve come to the conclusion that *no* life would be better than *your* life. When your suffering washes over you again and again, like waves over the side of a sinking ship, Jesus says, “Peace. Be Still!”

The storm for you may not be physical but emotional. In fight after fight, you’ve been knocked down and dragged out. Everyone, *everyone* seems to be against you. You can no longer talk to your husband or wife. The kids at school or the people at work shut you out, or worse. Any possibility of rational, focused thought seems lost in the dim past. When the ghosts of your past haunt you with anger, or regret, or guilt. When the overwhelming problems of the present have paralyzed you into indecision and fear. When all hope for the future seems to have faded away into the dark, boiling clouds of night, Jesus says, “Peace. Be Still!”

Maybe your storm is a battle of your spirit. You’ve heard it all – all the catchy tunes, all the Bible verses, all the platitudes. You’ve joined every group, been to every retreat, never miss a worship service, and yet doubts and fears fill your waking mind, and invade your dreams as well. When you labor and struggle in prayer, but for you there never seems to be an answer. When you feel as though the Father cannot, or will not, have anything to do with *you*. When you feel that you pilot the ship over the stormy waters with no help, no relief, no companion, Jesus says, “Peace. Be Still!”

I’m not here to try to tell you that life is without storms. I couldn’t bring myself to say it, and you wouldn’t believe me if I did. And I’m not here to tell you that the storms are always over in the morning; some storms last until we reach the other shore of the river. But I *am* here to tell that, thanks be to God, you can have peace even in the wildest storms, when you lean in close to the Father, and whisper, “Daddy, are we going to be okay?” Jesus speaks to us of a Father who loves us with all his being and wants desperately to help us weather every trouble, wants desperately to help us rise above every adversity, wants desperately to help us overcome every trial. Through every trouble, our Lord is with us. Over every adversity, our Lord is the strong arm upon which we can lean. Over the clash and clangor of every trial, Jesus calls again, “Peace. Be Still!”

In the face of a storm that was no longer a threat, in the dead calm following those three simple words, Jesus shook his head and asked, “Why are you still afraid?” and the disciples were left to ask, “Who is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” We who live on the other side of the Resurrection know the answer: This is the one who is the very maker of heaven and earth. This is the one who is the beginning of all things, and the one who is their end. This is the one that will see us safely to that other shore. This is the absolute *lover* of our souls, who says to us, as he said to the raging waves, “Peace, be still!”

“Why are you still afraid?” Listen. “Peace, be still!” “Peace, be still!” “Peace, be still!”