

When Doubt Meets Christ

35 On that day, when evening had come, he told them, "Let's cross over to the other side of the sea." 36 So they left the crowd and took him along since he was in the boat. And other boats were with him. 37 A great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking over the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. 38 He was in the stern, sleeping on the cushion. So they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher! Don't you care that we're going to die?"

39 He got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Silence! Be still!" The wind ceased, and there was a great calm. 40 Then he said to them, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

41 And they were terrified^[a] and asked one another, "Who then is this? Even the wind and the sea obey him!"

Last Thursday I grilled some hamburgers. I don't know if I had too many on the grill or the fat content was a little high, but I had one of those grease fires. I shut off the gas and tried to get the burgers off as fast as possible. I singed a couple hairs on my arm and the burgers were well done, but everything was fine. This gave us an opportunity to give the boys a life lesson. If there ever is a grease fire like that, what do you do? Don't pour water on it. Instead, dump baking soda on it.

In our gospel reading we have doubt. Well, actually it said the disciples were afraid, but we may learn today that doubt and fear go hand in hand. Doubt in God's promises leads to fear. What do you do when fear or doubt flare up? Pour some Jesus on it. Let's see what happens when doubt meets Jesus.

I. Jesus stills a storm.

What was the busiest day you had? Jesus had his busy days. This is one of them. During the day he healed a leper. Then he healed the centurion's servant. He went over to Peter's house and healed his mother-in-law. If that was not enough, the crowds came and he healed demon possessed people and many sick. That is a full day, but he did more. He was busy teaching. During this same day he taught the people with parables like the parable of the sower and the parables of the growing seed and the mustard seed which we heard about last week.

35 On that day, when evening had come, he told them, "Let's cross over to the other side of the sea." 36 So they left the crowd and took him along since he was in the boat. And other boats were with him. That evening he decided to head to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Why walk when it will take a fraction of the time to cut across the lake in a boat? So, Jesus and his disciples, many of whom were fishermen and experienced boaters, decided to sail across the lake. But they were not alone. Many jumped into boats and followed them.

37 A great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking over the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. 38 He was in the stern, sleeping on the cushion. It is not surprising that Jesus fell asleep in the boat. He must have been tired after that busy day. But what is amazing is he slept during a storm. Lake Superior is known for its dangerous storms. Who can forget the sinking of the Edmund Fitzgerald almost 46 years ago? But Lake Michigan is the deadliest of all the lakes. More people have died on that lake because storms can come up in a very short time catching people off guard. The same with the Sea of Galilee. Surrounded by mountains, storms can appear out of nowhere. That is what happened here. The wind was so intense that the boat was taking on water. ***So they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher! Don't you care that we're going to die?"*** Panic is setting in. And there was Jesus asleep in the stern of the boat. Why did they wake him? Jesus was a carpenter by trade. What did he know about sailing a boat? What could he do they were not doing?

They came to him because he was Jesus. Soon Jesus will rebuke them for having little faith. That is true. But they still had enough faith to come to him. Everything humanly possible was tried and failed, but Jesus proved he does the impossible. They had witnessed many miracles that day, and they had witnessed many more in the months before. They believed that Jesus is the Son of God. That is why they came to him and were a little short with Jesus, accusing him of not caring.

39 He got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Silence! Be still!" The wind ceased, and there was a great calm. If man can stop storms dead in their tracks, man would do it. Think of what we can do the next time there is a tornado warning if we could control the weather? But man is weak and fragile and limited in what he can do. The disciples were learning that. When will we learn that? God has no such limitations. Only God can command a wind to stop and it stops immediately. And God did that.

40 Then he said to them, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?" Jesus was surprised that they were so afraid. And the reason is simple. They had a choice. Trust God or be afraid, and they decided to be afraid. Doubt in God leads to fear. Contrast the disciples with Jesus. Both were in the boat that was being swamped by the waves. The disciples panicked. Jesus slept like a baby. He would have stayed asleep if they did not waken him. Why did he sleep so soundly? Sure, he was tired. But that is not why he slept. Jesus is human, but a sinless human born of the virgin Mary and conceived by the Holy Spirit. He had no sinful nature which is weak. His faith is perfect every moment. Jesus the human slept because he trusted God.

Jesus' rebuke told the disciples they had nothing to fear. Even if Jesus was not in the boat, they had nothing to fear. Even if it capsized, they had nothing to fear. Was it because they knew something we don't? Was it because they were told they would be fishers of men and that hasn't happened yet so there was no way they would have died that evening? Maybe. But I think it is deeper than that. Even if they had drowned, they had nothing to fear.

II. Jesus stills our hearts.

When our children were born, we had this nice crocheted, framed bedtime prayer we hung in their room. Every night we would recite that prayer with them. "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. Guide me safely through the night, and wake me with the morning light. Amen." I remember those nightly prayers fondly. I hope all Christian parents do that with their kids. But that is a little different from the version I grew up with. I did a little research. Apparently, there are as many as 14 versions of this prayer out there. The one I remember was first written in 1750. This is how I remember it: "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take."

I know, we want to insulate and protect our children which means maybe not talking about death a whole lot. But I like the 1750 prayer better. Yes, we let the child know that we can die anytime, but what happens? The Lord takes our souls to heaven. What confidence we can give children when we talk that way. God will either protect them during the night or take them to heaven. Win/Win. The Apostle Paul understood this. Awaiting the verdict to his trial and knowing he could be executed, he admitted that he didn't know which would be better. To go on living means more Paul could do for God and his fellow believers. But it would be better if he would die and be with Christ.

And that is why Jesus was so surprised at the fear among his disciples. They wanted the first half of the children's prayer, that the Lord would deliver them. But they did not consider if better if God used the storm to take them to heaven. So Jesus said, "**Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?**" Their fear showed they did not trust God. God could spare them as he did in a miraculous way. But God never promised he would keep all danger from us. Nor did he promise that he would not use a disaster or accident to take us to heaven. Faith leaves it up to God. It trusts that God has not forsaken us or is sleeping on a cushion or doesn't care. Faith trusts God even if he lets danger or cancer or an accident take us. "And if I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take."

And we have such confidence because of Jesus. ⁴¹ **And they were terrified and asked one another, "Who then is this? Even the wind and the sea obey him!"** Remember, Jesus and his disciples were not the only ones on the Sea of Galilee that evening. Some of the crowds boarded ships and were following him. And when they saw this Jesus stand up and command the wind to stop, and it stopped immediately so the Sea of Galilee was as calm as glass, this made an impression. "**Who then is this? Even the wind and the sea obey him.**" We already determined that no man can control the weather like that. Only God can. So this miracle proved that this Jesus is God.

Good. But if that is all we know about him, that he is God, we would still be guilty of sin and still worthy of judgment and still bound for hell. We need to see more in Jesus. We need to see him also as our Savior. This text proves Jesus is human. He occupied space, a small cushion in the stern of a boat. He was tired and fell asleep. But he is also God who commanded the storm to cease. If this Jesus can calm a storm with a simple command, nothing is impossible with him. And this God-Man did the impossible. He took our sins upon himself when he was nailed on the cross. He could and did make his life as the one sacrifice for the entire world. Only God can make his death pay for the guilt of all sin. Only God can command the grave to release Jesus as he rose again. And do you doubt he can open your grave? He will.

Most Bibles have these little headings before certain stories or texts. Many would put the heading, "Jesus Calms a Storm." That is true. But I think we could easily have put the heading, "Jesus Calms our Hearts." Yes, he rebuked his disciples as he can rebuke us any day for being afraid and full of doubt. But he also shows us what faith is capable of, and with this stormy night on the Sea of Galilee, he shows us we have nothing to fear even when faced with death. So don't be afraid. Trust Jesus. "And if I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take." Amen.