

Jesus is our Storm-Stiller

- I. The Cause of Storms
- II. The Effect of Storms
- III. The Power over Storms

<sup>35</sup>That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." <sup>36</sup>Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. <sup>37</sup>A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. <sup>38</sup>Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

<sup>39</sup>He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

<sup>40</sup>He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

<sup>41</sup>They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

Tell me, when was the last time you were caught in a storm? Considering the weather we've been having lately, maybe it was yesterday. Maybe you were out on the golf course, or at a ball game, and it started raining cats and dogs. Or maybe you were on the highway and your wipers couldn't keep up with the torrents coming down, so you had to pull over to the side of the road. Or worse yet, maybe you were in a boat when a storm came up and you weren't sure you were going to make it to shore. Just this week I was talking to a former Mount Olive member named Joe Mor. (Some of you may remember him.) He was telling me about the time that he was duck hunting out on Winnebago in November when one wave swamped his johnboat and sent him plunging into the icy water. He told me that all he could think about was how much he wanted to say goodbye to his wife and children before he was gone for good.

Let's face it, getting caught in the storm is no fun. Sometimes it's inconvenient. Sometimes it's terrifying. Well, you realize, that's true not only of the physical storms we run into, but also true of what we might call the mental and emotional storms we face in life. You know, the times when we feel like the winds of life are blowing against us. We're being pelted by one piece of bad news after another. We feel like we're caught with no place to hide. Tell me, what do those storms look like in your life? Have you lost someone near and dear to you? Was your world rocked by a divorce or the loss of a job? Has a bleak medical diagnosis for yourself or someone you love taken the sunshine out of your life? Do you feel like you're struggling just to keep your head above water financially or emotionally? Are you worried about what's going to happen to your children or your children's children, as our world seems to be getting more and more godless? Let's face it, at one point or another, we're all going to have to deal with some kind of emotional storm in our lives. Situations where we're tempted to cry out, "Lord, why are you letting this happen to me? Lord, don't you care about what I'm going through?"

You realize that you and I are not the only ones who have experienced such physical and emotional storms. In our Old Testament lesson, Job experienced such storms in a major way. And in our gospel lesson, so did Jesus' disciples. You might say that the disciples experienced

two storms, one on the sea, and one in their hearts. Today we want to draw some parallels between the storms the disciples faced and the storms that you and I face in life as well. We'll consider those storms from three angles:

- I. The cause of those storms
- II. The effect of those storms, and finally,
- III. The power over those storms, as we consider this theme:

Jesus is our Storm Stiller

Our text for today is recorded in Mark chapter 4. At this point, Jesus has spent the whole day teaching crowds of people on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. So Jesus tells his disciples, *"Let us go over to the other side."* Mark records what happens next. *Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. (Mark 4:35 to 38.)*

Tell me, What is the cause of this storm on the Sea of Galilee? How do you explain why the storm hit? Well, if you know something about the environment around the Sea of Galilee, you know that the sea is surrounded by high hills, from which cool air would flow down and mix with warm air over the lake and create sudden, violent storms. Those storms were a natural product of the environment. Now, back in Jesus' day, some people thought that storms were caused by the gods of the sea like Neptune or Poseidon or Baal. Other people thought that storms were caused by God bringing justice on the wrongdoer. You think about the account of Jonah in the Old Testament. When the violent storm threatened to sink the boat that Jonah was on, what did the sailors do? They said, *"Let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity."* (Jonah 1:7). They figured that bad weather was caused by someone's bad behavior. In fact, there are people who still believe that today. I remember hearing people say after Hurricane Katrina leveled New Orleans, "Well you know why the hurricane hit New Orleans, don't you? Have you seen how people behave during Mardi Gras?"

Wait a minute. Are physical storms in this life caused by the sins that people commit? Did it rain last Sunday morning because someone decided to go fishing instead of going to church? No. Physical storms are not the result of human actions. They're not caused by our bad behavior. No, rather, they're simply a natural part of the environment in which we live. That's true not only of physical storms. It's also true of a lot of the other hardships we face in life: the flooded basement, the cancer diagnosis, the death of a loved one. None of those things are the direct result of some specific sin someone has committed. No, they are all a part of living in a broken world. The environment we live in brings with it things like death and disease and divorce and depression.

The question is, what impact do those nasty things have on our lives? What impact do they have on the way we think about God? Or put it to put it another way, now that we've considered: I. The Cause of storms, let's consider, II. The Effect of storms. In the case of the storm that struck the disciples on the Sea of Galilee, what effect did it have on them? Well, it created at least two emotions in their hearts. First, it created a feeling of fear. And for good reason. Out there on the lake, those disciples seriously thought they were going to die. I mean, think about what they said to Jesus, in the middle of the storm. Did they say, "Uh, Jesus, we're experiencing a little turbulence." Or, "Jesus, we're afraid you might get a little wet." No, they said, *"Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"* In other words, they thought they were goners! They thought that they were going to end up in Davey Jones' locker! It's no wonder they were scared.

But it wasn't just fear that was gripping their hearts. There was also doubt. Doubt about what? Doubt about God. Doubt about whether Jesus, who they thought was the Son of God, cared enough about them to do something to help them out of the situation they were in. I mean, when they wake Jesus up in the back of the boat, what's the first thing out of their mouths? "*Don't you care if we drown?*"

Jesus, don't you care? Tell me, who of us has not had that thought cross our minds, if not come off our lips, when we were confronted by storms in our lives? When bad stuff happens to us, when a tornado takes the roof off our house or a hacker empties my bank account or I'm diagnosed with an incurable disease, it's easy to conclude that either God doesn't have the power to stop that from happening, or what's worse, he has the power, and he just didn't want to use it to help me. He didn't care enough about me to prevent me from experiencing the loss I'm enduring.

But tell me, is that true? Is it accurate to conclude that if bad things happen to us, or if there is evil in this world, it's either because God is impotent, that is, he doesn't have the power to stop it, or he's unloving, that is, he doesn't care about us, he doesn't mind seeing people suffer?

No! Absolutely not. In fact, both halves of that hypothesis are patently false. First of all, God is not powerless. And Jesus proves it right here in our text. When the disciples call out to Jesus, what does he do? He gets up and rebukes the wind and the waves. He says "Quiet! Be still!" Actually, those are the same words that Jesus used to drive the evil spirit out a man two chapters earlier. Jesus proves that he has power over every force of nature. At Jesus' command, Mark tells us, *the wind died down and it was completely calm*. Understand, it's not that the wind gradually died down and the storm eventually subsided. No, it's that instantly the sea was like glass. There was nothing natural about this calm. This was a miracle. This is proof that Jesus is true God, the ruler over all creation. This is proof that Jesus has: III. The Power over every storm.

But now, someone might say, "Okay, I'll grant you that Jesus is all powerful. He can still every storm. But where's the proof that Jesus is also loving? I mean, if Jesus truly loved his disciples, why would he allow that storm to hit that boat in the first place? Why would a loving God put these men through the fear of dying out there on the lake? Well, listen to what Jesus says to them, after he stills the storm. He asks them, "*Why are you so afraid, do you still have no faith?*"

Now, don't misunderstand. Jesus is not accusing his disciples of being unbelievers. It's not that they had rejected him as their savior. It's just that they failed to apply the fact that he was their Savior to this particular situation in life. Think about it, if Jesus had already promised to rescue them from an eternity in hell, couldn't he rescue them from a storm on a lake? If God had already taken care of their eternal needs, certainly he could also take care of the earthly needs. Of course he could! Jesus was lovingly inviting his disciples to put their trust in him for every aspect of their lives. He was inviting them to trust that he could not only get them to heaven. He could also get them across the lake. And he could get them there, even if as a true human being, he was sound asleep in the back of the boat!

My friends, isn't the same thing true for you and me today? God has promised to take us to heaven. He hasn't promised to spare us from the storms of this life. In fact, quite the opposite. In his Word, he tells us that as long as we live in this world, a world corrupted by sin, we're going to have to deal with death and disease and disaster and pain. How did St. Peter put it? *Dear Christians, do not be surprised by the painful trial you are suffering, as thought*

*something strange were happening to you. (1 Peter 4:12) Or the words of St. Paul, "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:22) And yet, even in the midst of those hardships, he promises that he will go with us. Remember what God said to us through the prophet Isaiah? Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine. That's what God has already done for you. He bought you back with his blood. He made you his own. And then he makes you a powerful promise. But notice, he doesn't say, "if". He says "when". When you pass through the waters, (in other words, when the storms of life hit, when you feel like the boat is sinking, then he assures you,) I will be with you. When you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned. (Isaiah 43:1-2) In other words, even if you have to go through some painful trials in life, God promises that they will not destroy you. Your soul is eternal. And your soul is in God's hands.*

My friends, the next time you are caught in a storm of any kind, be it physical or emotional or spiritual, remember who's in the boat with you. Jesus is. He's there for you. Jesus knows exactly what's going on in your life. In fact, Jesus came into this world to live as a human being just so he can know exactly what it's like to sit in a boat in the middle of a storm. Jesus came into this world to endure hardships worse than you can ever imagine. He endured the hardship of being absolutely separated from God because of your sins. And he endured that separation so that you need never endure it. Do you want to know how much your God loves you? Well, then don't look at the weather. Don't look at your bank account or the results of that last medical test. No, look at the cross of Calvary. That's where God's Son spilled his holy precious blood, so that you can know that you are not only saved for eternity. You are also safe in God's powerful, loving arms, not just for this life, but forever. May that fact put your heart at peace, no matter what storms your life may bring. For Jesus' sake. Amen.