

Mark 4:35-41 *On that day, when evening came, Jesus said to them, "Let's go over to the other side."* ³⁶*After leaving the crowd behind, the disciples took him along in the boat, just as he was. Other small boats also followed him.* ³⁷*A great windstorm arose, and the waves were splashing into the boat, so that the boat was quickly filling up.* ³⁸*Jesus himself was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. They woke him and said, "Teacher, don't you care that we are about to drown?"* ³⁹*Then he got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" The wind stopped, and there was a great calm.* ⁴⁰*He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still lack faith?"* ⁴¹*They were filled with awe and said to one another, "Who then is this? Even the wind and the sea obey him!"* (EHV)

Did you see it? – That blockbuster movie from almost 20 years ago now: the Perfect Storm? I did eventually see it, but originally I read the book. It was incredible. In fact, it was the only book I have ever read that literally made my palms sweat. One thing is for certain, though, it gave me an appreciation for being in a boat out on the water in the middle of a violent storm. The story is about a group fisherman sailing in a ship called the *Andrea Gale* in the middle of the worst storm of the century - three massive storm systems converging on one point directly over this lone fishing boat. Because they were hundreds of miles from land, they had no choice but to *ride the storm out*. Not to ruin it for anyone, but, sadly, they didn't survive.

You know, we face all kinds of storms in our lives. I'm not talking about tornadoes and hurricanes, though. I'm talking about the problems and challenges that we face every day. We don't have a choice, either, but to *ride those storms out*. Only we have every hope of surviving through our Savior, Jesus. Because even as we struggle with our fears, we can be confident that God will do what is best for us and in the process we'll grow in

our faith...just like the disciples grew in theirs on the Sea of Galilee so long ago. (Pray)

Mark begins his account of this amazing story, *when evening came, Jesus said to them, "Let's go over to the other side."* *After leaving the crowd behind, the disciples took him along in the boat, just as he was. Other small boats also followed him.* Jesus had just spent the entire day preaching and teaching about the kingdom of God. All day he had been sharing such parables as the parable of the *Sower and the seed*. It had been a long and tiring day. Now all Jesus wanted to do was spend some time alone with his disciples. The only escape from the crowds, however, was to cross the lake. Fisherman that they were, the disciples took charge and headed out on the water for the other side. Jesus, tired *just as he was* from the day lay down to rest in the back of the boat.

But then things turned ugly. Mark records, *A great windstorm arose, and the waves were splashing into the boat, so that the boat was quickly filling up.* The Sea of Galilee is notorious for sudden squalls. It sits nestled down in the high hills surrounding it. The hills form valleys down to the lake. Violent weather fronts are known to come screaming down these valleys, causing some heavy weather and rough seas with little or no warning. A sudden squall was not unusual. But this storm was different.

The gospel writer Matthew described the storm with the force of an earthquake. Mark and Luke describe the force of the storm as that of a hurricane. But whatever words you use to describe it, everything adds up to a terrible heaving and churning and crashing of the water. Things were not looking good for the small fishing boat out on the water.

You know, sometimes I think we sell the disciples short. We kind of figure these were simple men with simple lives. We think that you know – judging by the obvious things they missed, sometimes right in front of them, and the things they said - that maybe they weren't the sharpest knives in the drawer, if you're familiar with that expression. Think what you will, but in this case, these men were not blundering around,

they were experts. They were fishermen. They knew boats, they knew nets, they knew fish, they knew the water, and they knew how to take care themselves when they were out on the water. These were experienced men who thought they knew what they were doing. But nothing they did seemed to help.

Again, the fury of the storm: ***the waves were splashing into the boat, so that the boat was quickly filling up.*** The disciples were determined to *ride the storm out*...on their *own*. They were trying to handle it. They were trying to stay afloat. They were doing all that they could but the boat was swamped with water and was sinking - certainly, a desperate situation out on the Sea of Galilee.

Do you ever feel desperate like the disciples? Do you ever feel like you're in a storm, trying to ride it out? But no matter what you do you can't seem to get out of the storm. The bills are piling up. Your car payment is late. Your little one has a virus she just can't shake. Your spouse was just diagnosed with cancer. The company is making cutbacks and you don't know what is going to happen next. What is going to happen if I lose my job? From where will the money come? How will my family survive?

Those are all major problems. Then again, you may not be facing anything so serious. Yet even the little problems the devil likes to stack up against you. And like the disciples, we think that we can handle anything that comes our way. We think that we can tough it out and ride out the storm of problems. We try desperately to stay afloat on our own. After all, we're experienced. It's part of our American society to think that we can do anything. From little on we're taught that we can accomplish anything if we just put our minds to it. We're problem solvers. We do it all the time. We're good at handling things on our own, being independent. I can do it! But finally, we realize that we can't ride out the storm. We're being swamped. We become desperate and fear sets in.

At what point fear hit the disciples, Mark does not say. But eventually they recognized that nothing they did helped and they were foolish for trying. They were helpless. They were in danger of losing their lives. They were terrified and desperate. And

they had only one chance. You guessed it: ***Jesus himself was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. They woke him and said, "Teacher, don't you care that we are about to drown?"***

Funny isn't it? We want say to the disciples, "Well, duh!" But aren't we exactly the same? We face problems everyday of our lives. We come up with one kind of hair-brained solution or another and we continue, thinking that we have handled things. But as is usually the case, the storm grows greater and stronger and it is only when the storm becomes too great for us, when our stress level has sky-rocketed, when we are completely helpless and desperate do we finally realize the desperate situation we are in. Then where do I turn? Then, finally, I turn to God, who has been there the whole time, and ask for his help. We've all been there. We've all done it. We've all sinned. We don't look to God for help.

And that doesn't just apply to the problems we face in our daily lives. It applies to sin itself. When the temptations of sin are swirling around us, when the Devil is raging against us, when we're struggling to follow the example of Christ and flee from temptation and sin, where do we turn? Do we drop to our knees and pray for strength? Do we immediately flip to an appropriate Bible passage? Do we ask God to help us ride out the storm of sin we're facing? God be praised, sometimes we do. But many times we don't. And that's sin. And like it or not, because of that sin, we deserve to die and spend eternity in hell. We would be lost. The storm would have got the best of us. And like the disciples in the boat, we have but one hope to be saved - Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We pick up the story, again, in verse 38, as the disciples continue to Ride the Storm Out, ***Jesus himself was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. They woke him and said, "Teacher, don't you care that we are about to drown?"*** It's unbelievable, isn't it? The storm is raging, the waves are crashing, the wind is shrieking, the disciples believe that they are already drowning ...and in the midst of it all, there is Jesus, calmly, quietly, peacefully taking a nap on a cushion in the back of the boat. When he wakes up there is no startled surprise at the violence of the

storm. There is no fear. Jesus knows what is going on. He's in control. He is going to use this situation to help the disciples grow in their faith. And this is help they needed.

The words of the disciples show it, ***Teacher, don't you care that we are about to drown?*** The doubt is evident. It is as if they are challenging that Jesus cares about what happens to them. They still aren't putting complete trust in God who is lying in human form on a cushion before them. They are at their wits end. Everything they've tried has failed. They are sinking and helpless. And yet, at the same time, they show evidence of faith that Jesus has the power save them. And so, experienced fishermen turn to a carpenter for help. The disciples lay everything in the divine hands of Jesus.

Then [Jesus] got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" So simple: three words in English, only two in the Greek. And yet weren't they enough? On their own – seemingly insignificant, yet, spoken by the Savior of the world, they are powerful. So much so, that the effect is immediate.

The wind stopped, and there was a great calm. Have you ever tried stepping outside during a storm and tried to stop it? ***Peace! Be still!*** No. That would be foolish. Nature doesn't listen to a human being. You'd just get wet! But here, Jesus, a true man, spoke and nature obeyed. Why? Because he is also true God. Because he is Lord of all, all things are under his control and bow to his authority. Jesus spoke and immediately everything stopped. The wind died down, the sea calmed, the disciples were safe – all at the words of Jesus. If that doesn't build faith, I don't know what does.

But Jesus isn't done. ***He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still lack faith?"*** Jesus isn't accusing them of being unbelievers. Rather, he gets them to humbly examine themselves. Jesus gently calls the disciples to realize that they had sinned by trying to ride the storm out on their own and not looking to Jesus for help. In a moment of weakness, they had doubted. They had no excuse for their sin.

But through the storm, Jesus had strengthened their faith. For with awe and

wonder the disciples confessed, ***They were filled with awe and said to one another, "Who then is this? Even the wind and the sea obey him!"*** They had come to recognize Jesus for who he is, the Son of God who not only saved them from the storm but who would also save them from their sin.

Jesus asks us the same question when we are trying to ride out the storms in our lives all on our own. He comes to us through his Word and asks: ***He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still lack faith?"*** It's easy for us to lose sight of Jesus as our problems swirl around us, as the devil allows us to see only ourselves for help. We end up not being able to see past our problems to our Savior because we too often allow our problems to become bigger than him as we try to ride it out on our own. And if we're not careful, we might even allow our problems to get the best of us, give up, and die spiritually.

But through his Word, Jesus calls us back to focus on him, to look to him to give us strength to *Ride the Storm out*. Every problem, every temptation, every sin - no matter how great - we can place into the divine hands of Jesus, our savior. With one little Word he can eliminate our problems. With his power he can strengthen us to battle temptation. With his life he has taken our sins away. Because of the promises he makes to us in his Word, we can be confident that he will bring us safely through whatever storm we face, strengthening our faith in him until he brings us home to be with him forever in heaven.

No, you don't have a choice but to ride the storms of life out. But in Christ you can be confident that even as you struggle with your fears, God will bring you through. And even as he leads you through the storms of life, he will cause you to grow in your faith, drawing you ever closer to him. With the hymnist we pray:

*Precious Lord, take my hand,
Lead me on, let me stand;
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn.
Through the storm, through the night,
Lead me on to the light.
Take my hand, precious Lord;
Lead me home. Amen. (CW 451:1)*

