

Lord of the Storm

So, as we've already said, today is the first Sunday in the liturgical season of **Advent**. If you unfamiliar with the tradition – the term Advent comes from a latin word that means "coming" or "arrival". Hence, the nail-art to my side that gives voice to the hope and prayer of Advent – ***Come Lord Jesus***.

In Advent, we are invited to not just get ready for Christmas, but to **feel** and **name** our deep personal and collective ache and longing and hope for the coming of God's Kingdom and reign on earth as it is in heaven. For our bodies and relationships, for nations and cultures, for Israel and Syria, and Myanmar and Brazil, for all to know the JOY & PEACE of God's Kingdom Come...

It a season that invites us to sing, "*O Come, O Come, Emanuel – and ransom captive Israel... That mourns in lonely exile here, until the Son of God appear...*" This is our Advent prayer!

And **we need Advent** – because of how it seeks ***to pull us out of*** the insidious obsession with painting all things bright in this season – hiding our pain and putting on our Christmas best – ***and instead pulling us into*** the deeper reality of what Christmas is all about... The **NEED** of the world – of us all – for God to enter into **our Story** and set things right, and **the extravagant grace** of God **that He has, and is, and He will...**

That, in Jesus, **God has come** – and is at work, restoring women and men to Himself... And that a Day is Coming **when He will come again** – to bring the Kingdom in its' fullness...

And so in Advent we join our voices and pray – ***Come Lord Jesus... Come bring Your Kingdom and Will and Glory – on earth as it is in heaven...***

On earth as it is in heaven... Can I hear an Amen?

And to help us in this, instead of shifting away from our journey in Mark's gospel, we are **staying in it** – because Advent only becomes our longing and hope when we see and know Jesus as He is...

Which is exactly what the gospels offer us... An invitation to walk alongside the disciples as they discover who Jesus is and what His Kingdom is all about.

And like many, **our text today feels** like an **Advent text** – as we find Jesus' disciples caught in **a huge storm** – *a terrifying storm – a storm that seemed so much bigger than Jesus...*

Have you ever been there?

Ever found yourself in a storm – maybe literally, but surely metaphorically – **a HUGE storm** – in your family, in your soul, in your workplace, your body, your community, your finances – where the waves feel **so big**, and the wind **so fierce**,

and yes, Jesus is there with you, but it doesn't seem to matter – **because the storm is just so big... bigger than Jesus...**

I'm sure some of us can resonate. Likely many of us. I know I've lived through some HUGE storms in my life... And sometimes I feel like I'm there again. Maybe we need this encounter with Jesus in Mark 4 as much as Jesus' first disciples did...

So, whatever your facing, turn with me to **Mark 4:35-41** and let's turn our attention to what God is saying to us today **in the midst of our storms.**

*That day when evening came, [Jesus] said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with them. 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.***

*The disciples woke him and said to him, "**Teacher, don't you care if we drown?**"*

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

*He said to his disciples, "**Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?**"*

*They were terrified and asked each other, "**Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him?**"*

Let's pray...

Now, as is often the case, if we are to grasp of **the startling significance** of this moment on the lake, if we are to enter into it well, we need to get inside the heads of the **disciples** a bit first – what they knew of God, what they knew of

Jesus, and what this meant for how they experienced and made sense of this moment on the sea of Galilee... Because, as we'll discover, this moment must have rocked their world – and changed their whole perception of Jesus... And I hope that will become incredibly clear for us...

Now, we don't **know much specifically/personally** about Jesus' twelve disciples and their lives before becoming Jesus' disciples, but even just **a few basic facts** can help us a lot. And none of this is rocket-science, we just often don't keep this in mind as we read – and we need to...

So, first, it's worth acknowledging that Jesus' disciples were all just **ordinary Jews**. None of them were **trained theologians**. None of them had a Masters from Regent College or Briercrest. None of them were RK's (rabbi's kids). They were all just **ordinary Jewish men**.

Which meant that, although they might not have **studied** the Hebrew Scriptures as much as some, they would have known the stories of Israel and Israel's God from growing up in the synagogue, praying the Psalms, and participating in the Jewish feasts.

And **especially**, they would have known well the story of the **Exodus** - the defining event in Israel's history - where God came in compassion for His people and rescued Israel from the oppression of the Egyptians and the gods of Egypt,

parted the waters of the Red Sea so that they could escape their pursuers and led them on a journey to the Promised Land of Canaan.

Whatever the individual upbringings of these men, they would have known Israel's story, and, through this, they would have shared some basic convictions about the God of Israel...

That He is *the Creator of all things*, and *Sovereign over all things*.

That He is *a God of justice and compassion*, who acts on behalf of His people.

That He is **a long-suffering God**, faithful to His promises even when His people continually broke their promises.

And at the heart of it all, that He is **the One True God – the God over all – the only God**.

Unlike the nations around them, unlike Egypt, Israel did not worship **many** gods. They worshiped **One** God. And every day, they affirmed this as they prayed the **Shema** (taken from Deut 6:4), "Hear O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is **One**".

So that's the first thing, Jesus' disciples were all just ordinary Jews.

Second: Something else we know is that, unlike us, they were familiar with the phenomenon of **itinerant rabbis**.

Because of our historical and cultural distance, we often think of Jesus as an anomaly (one of a kind) – but he wasn't (at least not at a basic level).

In Jesus day, there were **many** rabbi's, revered Jewish teachers, who traveled throughout Palestine, taking on disciples and training them to continue in their teachings.

This was not a foreign idea to the disciples. This was something they were very familiar with. They had a reference point for a rabbi like Jesus.

And with this, they would have also heard of, or possibly even encountered individuals – maybe rabbi's – through whom God worked powerfully. Individuals endowed with the ability, or authority from God, to heal diseases and perform powerful acts.

Which is what Jesus was increasingly perceived as already at this point in the story: ***as a great teacher with great power.***

This is how Jesus is remembered by **Jewish historians** – Josephus for one.

Ok, so that's the second part. The disciples were familiar with the world of rabbi's, and even miracle-workers.

Thirdly (and lastly) – it's worth remembering that, prior to following Jesus, 4 of Jesus' disciples were **formerly fisherman**.

Simon and Andrew, James and John were all men *who knew the seas and how to read the wind*. They'd probably each had their fair share of stories about that **ONE BIG FISH that got away**, and storms so wild that the fish were **pleading** to be caught and put out of their misery.

You know how fishermen can be...

And yet not that long ago, Jesus had shown up on **their** shore, found them working with their nets, and called **them** – to leave it all behind – and to come be His disciples.

Which would have been an incredible honor – one that everyone would have understood to be worth jumping at.

Few people were revered in first century Jewish society **as much as a rabbi** – and Jesus was already earning a reputation as being *no ordinary* rabbi.

Crowds were flocking to him. His words had authority – people were talking about it everywhere – and it wasn't just his teaching. But **by his word**, he healed the sick and crippled, and **by his word**, he cast out demonic spirits.

And so, along the way, as they spent their days with Jesus – watching and listening to all that he said and did, the disciples must have had **many moments** where they found **their mouths hanging open** – in **bewilderment** – as they watched and listened, and tried to make sense of it all.

The things He said! The things He did!

More and more, they must have begun to wonder if He was **more** than just a rabbi, or even a miracle-worker – *maybe He was even a prophet.*

This is how the disciples must have increasingly perceived Jesus...

At least, *until this moment on the Sea of Galilee...*

And so, after a long day of teaching the crowds, in **Mark 4:35** Jesus tells them it's time to head across the lake. "*Let us go over to the other side.*"

In truth, they'd already been on the boat for most of the day.

Such a large crowd had gathered to hear Jesus that he and his disciples had hired or borrowed a boat and anchored just a few meters out – so that everyone could hear him.

But when evening came – Jesus told them they should head across the lake – to the other side.

At some point along the way, Jesus, obviously tired from it all, sits on the seat at the stern of the boat and drifts off for a nap.

I'll be honest, I love this glimpse of the humanity of Jesus.

Even Jesus needed a nap sometimes. [As someone who battles an under-functioning thyroid, I appreciate this!]

Now the Sea of Galilee is an interesting **geographical site**. It's shaped like an upside-down pear, 8 miles wide, 13 miles from N to S, and about 680 ft

below sea level. As many scholars point out, "the high hills around it are cut with deep ravines that act like great funnels drawing violent winds from the heights down into the lake without warning" (Mounce 78).

And this proved to be one of those *without warning* moments.

In v.37, we read, "*A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped.*"

In Matthew's telling of this same story, the storm is referred to in greek as a "*seismos*". It's the word for *earthquake*. Literally, "*a shaking*".

A shaking on the sea. **Seismic action** on the lake.

In Mark's account, he uses a different word - *lailaps* (*lah'-ee-laps*) – **a sudden storm, a squall, a whirlwind, a tempestuous wind.**

And not just that, but a **MEGAS lailaps!**

The NIV translates this well as *a furious squall.*

So, **without warning**, something like an *earthquake* erupted on the water.

Their boat was being **tossed around**, dropping down into the trenches of the pounding waves, water being thrown across the deck.

Maybe they themselves were being thrown across the deck!

However it was happening, it was enough to make these disciples think **they were about to die**. This storm would be their end.

And **remember**: four of these disciples were **seasoned** fisherman.

They'd been through storms before.

A few waves and a strong wind might have been a *welcome sight* - like coming home. But this was no *few waves* and a *familiar wind*.

This was a *megas lailaps*. This was a *seismos*. This was an *earthquake* on the water – a *furios squall*.

I'm picturing the final scene from "The Perfect Storm", right?

They thought they were about to die...

And in the midst of it all, *what is Jesus doing?*

He's asleep on a cushion in the stern of the boat.

Jesus is knocked out, undisturbed, at rest in the midst of a furious squall... What's up with this?

Something – and we'll come back to it. But whatever it means, the disciples were not about to let Jesus sleep.

I'm sure they wondered how he could be sleeping through all this.

What does he know that they don't?

With shouts, they woke him, *"Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"*

"Jesus, don't you care if we drown?"

Stop there for a moment and hear what they are saying – what they are thinking... feeling... fearing...

One: *That this is it.* They are about to be *destroyed*. The wind and the waves are just too big. The boat is too small. *It's over.*

And **two**: Jesus doesn't seem to care!?

At least that's what they feel and fear.

Have you ever felt like that?

Have you ever found yourself in the midst of a storm – a furious squall – and felt what these men felt? Feared what these men feared?

"Jesus, don't you care if we drown?"

At this, Jesus gets up and instead of grabbing a bailer or turning to embrace them; Jesus turns away from his disciples and **addresses the wind and the waves.** V.40.

*"He got up,
rebuked the wind
and said to the waves,
"Quiet!
Be still!"*

*Then **the wind died down** and it was completely calm.*

With just a word of command from Jesus – **instantly** – the wind stopped and the sea was **completely calm**, perfectly still, like glass...

Imagine that moment for the disciples!

Still **white-knuckling** the railing of the boat, drenched by the waves that have been smashing against them until that very second when - **everything - just - stops?**

I wonder if it all happened so fast that, **though the lake was flat**, the boat was still leaning up on one side... all the disciples pressed back against the other side of the boat, mouths open, staring at Jesus, spinning with what had just happened – **what He had just done – and what it meant!**

And then he addressed **them!**

Jesus, the One who just addressed the wind and the waves, now turned **to them and said**, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

And understandably, **they were terrified**. In absolute awe. Staggering. Dumbfounded. At a loss. They asked each other, **"What kind of man is this?"**

Who is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"

Their minds, their hearts must have spun.

They would have had had **no reference for this!**

Up till this moment, they had come to know Jesus to be a rabbi who taught and acted with authority – incredible authority.

And they were **starting** to think he may be some sort of prophet –
through whom God was speaking and acting...

But... But no man... No man can control the wind and the waves!

No one – ***but God Himself?... Right?***

Their heads *and hearts* must have spun with the same thoughts.

Only Yahweh – only God – has power, authority over the seas!

Who is this?

It would have made no sense to them.

And for a Jew, the seas weren't just another dimension of the physical creation; they also represented **the forces of chaos**.

Remember **Genesis 1 – "in the beginning"**, when the earth was still formless and void, the Spirit of God hovered over ***what?*** Over ***the waters***.

In Babylon, where Israel lived in exile for years, and where Genesis was brought into its final form, the Babylonians worshiped, among others, a god named ***Tiamat***, who was thought to be a **chaos** monster, the god of what? Can you guess? The god of ***the waters***.

But according to Genesis 1, YAHWEH – Israel's God was ***over Tiamat***. YAHWEH – Israel's God was ***over the waters...***

And the **Psalms** declare this again and again – that God – Israel's God – is **over the waters** – mightier than the thunder of the great waters (Psalm 93 declares). Both literally and spiritually.

Psalm 65 is another great example.

There we find God worshiped as 'Saviour' **for this very reason** – because He formed the mountains, and '*stilled the roaring of the seas, the roaring of the waves*'.

No man had authority over the waters.

Jesus' disciples knew this.

Only **God Himself** is sovereign over the wind and the waves.

And yet here, **before their very eyes**, Jesus, their rabbi, who'd just gotten up from a nap, stood and addressed the storm, rebuked the wind, commanded the waves – and **at His word** they were **silenced, hushed, still**.

I love how Eugene Peterson describes it in the Message. He says that "*the wind ran out of breath.*"

"Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

I wonder how long it took them – for the grace of this *frame-bending experience*, this *fear-erasing revelation of Jesus* to really sink into their hearts and minds and bones?

They'd been with Jesus for a little while now.

They'd watched him heal the sick and cast out demons...

They'd stood beside him in the synagogue as he declared the gospel – that the kingdom of God was at hand in Him – and then revealed it...

They'd been there when demons would confess that Jesus was "the Holy One of God".

And yet, in the face of the storm – the **huge waves**, the **tempestuous wind**, the **furious squall** – Jesus still seemed rather **small** to them.

At least, in comparison to the storm.

Yeah, he was *with them*, but ***look at the waves!***

Look at the WAVES!

And yet in that moment, as these men stood face to face with Jesus in that boat – with the sea all around them now calm as glass, with water still dripping from their garments – it began to dawn on them that **though the**

storm was real and big and strong, *Jesus was so much bigger and greater than they had ever imagined...*

They had known the reality and power of the storm, but they had had no idea the reality and the power and the authority of the man in their boat – Jesus.

And so *of course they were afraid.* Undone by the sight of the huge waves. *Their faith was little because Jesus was little!*

Or so they thought.

But they were wrong! As they learned that day, they were **so wrong.**

Jesus was so much bigger, so much greater, so much stronger than the storm. *More than they had ever imagined...*

As I'm sure they have later said themselves, the disciples **needed** this experience on the sea – in the storm.

In truth, this is what conversion is all about – this ongoing encounter with Jesus *that doesn't dismiss or downplay the reality of the storms*, but that continually, incrementally, and at times **exponentially** expands our vision of Jesus – deepening our grasp of the reality of Jesus – enabling us to see that *Jesus is bigger... that*

Jesus' voice is more powerful... that Jesus' presence is more than sufficient.

I read once that faith is "a courageous confidence that Jesus is equal to the occasion."

But I think the disciples would disagree.

Jesus is not JUST equal to the occasion.

He wasn't just equal to the storm.

He was and is Lord over the storm.

Lord over all.

Which doesn't mean that Jesus always calms the storm.

In Acts 27, we read an incredible account of a **15-day storm** that the apostle Paul faced with great faith. And Jesus never calmed the storm. In fact, they were utterly shipwrecked.

And yet Paul faced it with **confidence** that Jesus was over the waters...

And so *he hung on with hope – because He knew Who was holding on to him – in and through it all...*

And I think you know where this is going: **So, what about us?**

What about you?
What about me?
as we find ourselves in the storm...

Jesus' words to the disciples are His words to us, "Why are you so afraid?"

Do you still have no faith?"

I'm sure I've often thought of Jesus' words here as a rebuke, and yet more and more I hear them as **a gracious invitation** from Jesus – to stop fixating on the storm, and instead to fix my eyes – and our eyes – on **Jesus**... That we might discover again and again, or like never before, that *He is bigger than the waves, that He is more powerful than the wind, that He is greater than the storm.*

That **He is – Lord over it all.**

And so again, today, as we begin into Advent, amidst the very real storms of our lives and world, Jesus invites us to come and place our trust, and find our rest, in Him today... **Jesus, Lord over the Storm...**

Let's pray.

Invitation to the Lord's Supper -----

As we come to respond, I want to come back to this question of **Why**
Jesus was sleeping?

And part of it has to be that **He knew what they didn't know** – that the storm had nothing on Him... **That He was Lord over the storm...**

But with that, Mark, the gospel-writer, seems to be intentionally describing Jesus here in a way that, for those who know the Old Testament well, is intended to make us think of **Jonah** – the disobedient prophet who centuries before Jesus, finds himself asleep in a storm out on the sea.

And in the heat of the moment, when roused, says to his terrified companions, ***"Throw me over. Because if I die, you will live!"***

And although in our story in Mark, no one gets thrown over – Jesus saves them with a word; if we were to continue on in the gospel, we'd discover that Jesus does ultimately conquer the storm by willingly being thrown into it – on the cross.

At the cross, Jesus faced the Ultimate Storm for us – the Storm of Sin, Death and Curse. And He does it for you – and for me – that through His sacrifice, we would be saved.

All the more reason to come put our trust in Him today...