

Sermon for June 24, 2018 - 5th Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 4:35-41(EHV)

Theme: **Yes, Jesus does care.**

- 1) *He cares enough to allow the storm.*
- 2) *He cares enough to stop it.*

³⁵On that day, when evening came, Jesus said to them, “Let’s go over to the other side.” ³⁶After leaving the crowd behind, the disciples took him along in the boat, just as he was. Other small boats also followed him. ³⁷A great windstorm arose, and the waves were splashing into the boat, so that the boat was quickly filling up. ³⁸Jesus 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?” ³⁹Then he got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” The wind stopped, and there was a great calm. ⁴⁰He said to them, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still lack faith?” ⁴¹They were filled with awe and said to one another, “Who then is this? Even the wind and the sea obey him!”

Disaster strikes: An unexpected hail storm ravages your crop. A fire destroys your house. A friend dies in a car accident. Your doctor informs you that you have cancer.

Unexpected evils like this might make us wonder: “Why is this happening to me, Lord? I am a Christian – one of your faithful followers. Don’t you care?”

With the example of Jesus calming a stormy sea as our guide, let us see the answer to that question, under the theme: **Yes, Jesus does care.** 1) He cares enough to allow the storms we face in life. 2) He cares enough to stop them. In all things he works for our eternal good.

Part One: *He cares enough to allow the storm.*

Our sermon text finds Jesus by the Sea of Galilee. He had spent much of the day preaching about the kingdom of God. How wonderful it would have been to physically see and hear him preach! Jesus’ disciples certainly considered it an honor. They were proud of the relationship they had with their Rabbi.

But Jesus, having the ability to look deep into the hearts of his disciples, knew that their faith in him still needed strengthening. Why? Because, even though they considered Jesus to be the promised Messiah, they still didn’t understand what that meant: that he was the LORD, in whom they were to trust whole heartedly.

Jesus had a planned to strengthen the disciples’ faith. We read: ³⁵On that day, when evening came, Jesus said to them, “Let’s go over to the other side.” ³⁶After leaving the crowd behind, the disciples took him along in the boat, just as he was. Other small boats also followed him.

The disciples were more than happy to obey Jesus' request – allowing him to get some needed rest in the back of the boat as they sailed on to the other side of the lake.

All seemed well, until: ³⁷*A great windstorm arose, and the waves were splashing into the boat, so that the boat was quickly filling up.*

Storms on a lake can be extremely dangerous – even for the most experienced of sailors. Old members of the congregation may remember how the massive Edmund Fitzgerald sank during an early November Gail in 1975 on Lake Superior – an event immortalized by Gordon Lightfoot in his famous folk song named after the ship.

How suddenly the situation changed for the disciples. In mere moments they went from sailing in safety, to being in peril. We can just imagine the disciples working hard trying to navigate the ship against the powerful wind - coughing up water as the lake kept spilling in to their little boat. They were scared to death! Jesus, however, *was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion.*

“How could Jesus sleep?” the disciples must have thought, “Doesn't he feel the waves and wind? Doesn't he hear our cries? We're dying here, and he is sleeping as if there is nothing wrong.” So *they woke him and said, “Teacher, don't you care that we are about to drown?”*

What the disciples did was in a sense good, but also bad. It was good that the disciples finally turned to Jesus for help. The LORD himself says: *“Call on me in the day of distress. I will deliver you, and you will honor me.”*ⁱ Sadly, they didn't ask Jesus in faith - trusting in his power and compassion to help. They woke him up out of desperation and fear – convinced that they were about to die. They even went so far as to question Jesus' concern for them!

Did Jesus care that the disciples were drowning? He most certainly did – so much so that he kept on sleeping through the storm! You see, Jesus realized that there was a far greater danger threatening the disciples than the wind and waves. The disciples, together with all people in this world, were perishing from sin and unbelief. Worse yet, they didn't even realize it.

Yes, Jesus most certainly did care about his disciples: so much so that he took on human flesh and blood in order to save us from the eternal death that threatened us because of our sins. He came to live the perfect life of obedience to God's law that we all fail to live - winning, thereby, the righteousness we need to stand before God. He came to suffer the death we deserved so that God might declare us forgiven of all sin!

This is the mighty rescue Jesus came to accomplish for all people of all time. But here's the thing: this rescue does not do anyone any good unless it is received in faith!

Jesus understood how the devil, world and the disciples' own sinful natures were trying to prevent them from believing in him as their true Messiah. This is why he allowed the storm on the lake: to test and strengthen the disciple's faith in Him. This is why he slept securely in the stern of the boat during the storm

But how was Jesus' sleeping during the storm supposed to strengthen the disciples faith? His calm sleep showed that, no matter what evils threaten him, he was confident that his loving Father would continue to watch over him - regardless of how dire things got. Jesus wanted his disciples to have this same trust in Him as well.

Sadly, the disciples did not display such trust. They viewed Jesus as their teacher and master, but not as their all-powerful God. They even questioned his love.

Sadly, when storms arise in our life, we often act like the disciples. We wonder why he allows evil to affect us, why he doesn't answer our prayers to protect us. We might even begin to wonder whether or not God loves us: what we did to anger him? Does he still care?

Dear Christian, Yes, Jesus most certainly does care. He sees the greater spiritual dangers that threaten our salvation. – dangers that we might not be aware of ourselves. He sees how the devil, world and our own sinful nature are trying to get us to love and trust in other things more than him. For this reason he might graciously take away those things that compete with him in our hearts. He allows storms in our lives to test and teach us to turn to him in all our troubles – repenting our sins and relying on him alone for salvation. And once those storms have accomplished his purposes, Jesus cares enough to stop them.

Part Two: He cares enough to stop it.

How did Jesus react to his disciples' question whether or not he cared for them? *He got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" The wind stopped, and there was a great calm.* It took two words for the wind and waves to recognize the voice of their creator and obey. Contrast this to the disciples, who heard Jesus many times and still didn't recognize exactly who he was. But now they saw.

Then ⁴⁰*He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still lack faith?"* Notice that Jesus does not berate the disciples for their lack of faith, rather he merely points out that all their fear was for nothing. Didn't they understand who he was? Didn't they see the miracles and hear his preaching? Didn't they believe that he is the all-powerful Son of God: the Messiah, who loves them so dearly that he would not allow anything to happen to them if it didn't serve their eternal good?

And let's apply Jesus' question to us. Why are we so afraid during the storms that arise in our lives? Don't we trust that God will keep his promise to work in all things for the good of those who love him? ⁱⁱ If we have Christ, what are we afraid of losing? ⁱⁱⁱ Do we still have no faith in his power and love?

Jesus never promised us smooth sailing through life. Actually, Jesus said that we should expect trouble in the world. ^{iv} Jesus allows it. Why? To strengthen our faith in him. The suffering we endure is discipline for us.

No discipline is pleasant. The storms are not easy, but Jesus just asks us to trust in him – to continue to hold on to him. He will calm the storm in his good time, and when it is all over, it may seem as if it never happened. How can we know for sure that God will do this for us? Look at the cross and remember what Jesus did there for you. If Jesus was willing to sacrifice his own life to save you from your sins, how can we say Jesus does not care? If Jesus was willing to endure death so that you might have eternal life with him and be adopted into His family, how can we imagine that God does not love us? There on the cross you see Jesus' love and care. The cross is our confidence that he will deliver us from the storms we face in life and bring us safely into his Kingdom.^v

As Jesus was with the disciples through the storm, so he is with us. He promised: “*Surely I am with you always until the end of the age.*”^{vi} Through the prophet Isaiah, Jesus promised: ⁹ *I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, 'You are my servant'; I have chosen you and have not rejected you.* ¹⁰ *So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*^{vii} With promises like these, is there any reason to fear?

But someone might ask: “What if my storm is an illness like cancer. What if my storm is either my death or that of a loved one? Why didn't Jesus calm that storm?” Who's to say that He didn't? God never promises that the difficulties we face won't end in death. They may indeed end in death, but that does not give us any right to fear or question his love. Why not? Because death is a blessing for the believer! God's Words says: ¹⁵ *Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.*^{viii} And again: *The righteous perish, and no one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil.* ² *Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death.*^{ix} What better calm is there than being at eternal rest with the LORD, where no evil can touch us? Yes, we Christians can be fearless in the face of death: confident in God's love, protection and power to resurrect us on the last Day!

The demonstration of Jesus' power and love had its desired effect on the disciples: ⁴¹ *They were filled with awe and said to one another, "Who then is this? Even the wind and the sea obey him!"* Yes, just as Moses, Isaiah, and all the prophets of old were filled with awe when God made his presence known among them, so now the disciples realize that God is with them in the boat. The awe they felt for Jesus was a proper respect for who Jesus is, and the power he holds. And who, exactly, is Jesus? Not a mere man, but God himself, for only the LORD can still the storm to a whisper, and hush the waves of the sea.^x

So we too can know from Scripture that Jesus is more than just a man. He is our Savior and God who loves us, and works in all things for our eternal good. There is no reason for us to be afraid when disaster strikes. Cling to the LORD in faith, and He will see you through the storm, for it is his love that allows it, and in love he will keep his promises by bringing every storm we face in faith to a blessed end. Amen.

ⁱ Psalm 50:15 EHV

ⁱⁱ Cf. Romans 8:28

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. Romans 8:32

^{iv} Cf. John 16:33

^v Cf. 2 Timothy 4:18

^{vi} Matthew 28:20 EHV
^{vii} Isaiah 41:9-10 NIV84
^{viii} Psalm 116:15 NIV84
^{ix} Isaiah 57:1-2 NIV84
^x cf. Psalm 107:29