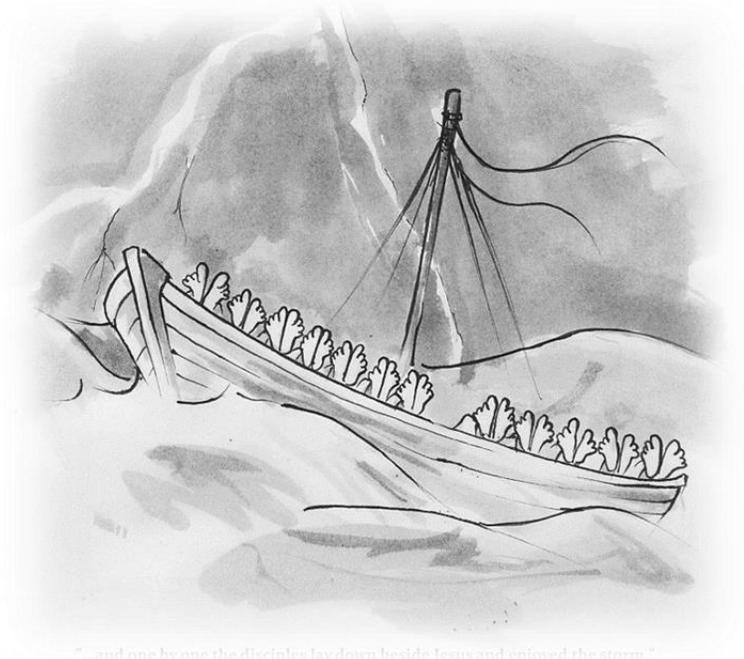


6/21/2015

# “Jesus Tries to Nap”

*Mark 4:35-41*



*“...and one by one the disciples lay down beside Jesus and enjoyed the storm.”*

“...and one by one the disciples lay down beside  
Jesus and enjoyed the storm.”

### ***Jesus Tries to Nap***

I wasn't sure what to call this sermon. "Jesus Takes a Nap" Or, "Jesus Sleeps through a Storm – Almost."

"...even the wind and the sea obey him," exclaimed the awestruck disciples.

Moments earlier they had found themselves smack dab in the middle of the Sea of Galilee -- which is no small pond -- in one of the biggest, most terrible storms they'd ever experienced. Out there on the open water, with the waves crashing over the bow, the storm threatened to capsize them - their tiny ship was tossed....

They were terrified - understandably. They were completely undone. They were beside themselves at the prospect of sinking, and drowning! They bailed as fast they could, to no avail. They wrestled with the wind whipped sails. With white knuckles, they clung to the sides of the little vessel for dear life.

And Jesus? Jesus was fast asleep. In the stern – that's the back of the boat – the poop deck if you will – not just napping, but on a pillow! – Jesus apparently travelled with a pillow! If it weren't for the roar of the wind, you they could probably have heard him snoring! Not those loud monster snores -- Jesus wouldn't snore like that -- but those soft, almost pleasant, little breaths like when the sleeper is totally relaxed.

And finally, in terror and desperation – because that's when we turn to Jesus --the disciples shout at him, "Don't you care that we're all gonna die!?!?" and Jesus wakes up. He rebukes the wind and commands it to quiet down.

"Peace! Be still!" Jesus says to the sea, I think. Because right there Jesus reminds me of my mother when we children were getting too rambunctious: "Be still!" she would say. And I wonder if Jesus wasn't scolding the disciples sideways as much as he was scolding the wind and the sea. You know, "Be still, and know that I am God...?"

Now I have a question for you 21<sup>st</sup> century readers. This is terrific story telling. Great hyperbole, a fantastic metaphor for the uncontrollable storms of life that swirl around us – I get all that. But are we really going to believe that the wind and the sea, knowing what we know about meteorological forces, actions, and reactions – are we supposed to believe that the wind and the sea have any agency of their own -- any choice whether to actually obey a given command – or not?

Some people will read this story and believe it wholeheartedly as a literal event that happened just the way it says it did. That's great! For this story there's no harm in it. Some people will tear into it theologically and scientifically, with all of the education and intellect at their disposal. Great! Take those big brains of yours and have at it!

The point is – no matter how you take it – We need to take it as pointing to something more – something beyond the words on the page. Even if it happened just as it says it did, the very event itself is pointing to something greater.

Jesus was always doing something incredible and miraculous, right? Teaching even when he wasn't teaching. Healing the sick, causing the lame to walk, turning water into wine, allowing the man who was blind from birth to see for the very first time ... It's amazing! But they all point to some greater lesson.

But did you notice that Jesus seems almost reluctant to use these super powers? He doesn't want to get up from his nap – He's all cranky and he kinda barks at the disciples, "Why are you afraid? Don't you have any faith?" This kind of power isn't the kind of power that Jesus came to demonstrate.

It is, however, the kind of power that he had to relinquish – that he emptied himself of. One of my favorite passages is the one in Paul's letter to the Philippians, chapter 2, that says,

*"Though he was in the form of God...he emptied himself – he humbled himself even to the point of death on a cross..."*

It's the same power he rejects when he refuses to be tempted in the desert. The same power young Jesus rolls his eyes and uses when his mom tells him at the wedding reception that they're out of wine... "Mom!" -- I added that part -- "My time is not yet come," he says, and does it anyway, because, well, because his mother asked him to.

The author of Mark spends this entire chapter talking about or retelling parables. There's the Parable of the Sower, the Lamp under a Bushel, the Mustard Seed! In verse 10, when the disciples ask Jesus about his parables, we read,

*"To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables..."*

*<sup>13</sup> And he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables?"*

“Everything comes in parables...” Then right before today’s passage the author writes this sentence:

*“With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; <sup>34</sup> he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.”*

If scripture is literature – and it is -- wouldn’t that be great way to introduce yet another parable?

Maybe this story about Jesus and the wind and sea is parable and maybe it’s not. But, before we get all caught up in Jesus’ superpowers, let me point out that maybe this story isn’t about that. Maybe this isn’t a story about Jesus’ ability to control the weather (although it would prove to Mark’s readers, the non-Jewish, Christian readers in Rome, that he truly is the Son of God, right? Because according to ancient Greek and Roman beliefs, only the gods could control the weather).

However we might enjoy it, and would really like it if it were, this story isn’t about Jesus’ superpowers. It’s not about Jesus taking control and everything suddenly, miraculously, being OK – even though we’d really like that, because maybe, deep down, we don’t really believe that ‘God-with-us’ is enough. One guy said this story is ‘an indictment of the disciples – so, too, of us.’

Where is our faith -- I mean -- their faith? Where is their faith?

Maybe the miracle in this story is that through it all, in the water-logged boat that was about to capsize, killing everyone on board, Jesus was there. Jesus was there with the disciples; in the boat, experiencing the same terrible storm, the same terrible waves, and the same terrible danger.

And why wasn’t that enough? “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?”

You see, God is not some kind of universal micromanager. God’s power is not in controlling the weather, or the stoplights, or the outcomes of ball games. The power of God is in being in covenant, in relationship with us. It’s not imposing some divine will, or insisting on its own way; but in making the journey with us – right here alongside of us as we fumble around trying to get it right.

God’s power isn’t in miraculous interventions or preemptive strikes in some great legendary battle between Good and Evil.

God's power is in the invitation – the invitation to join God, and to build together the Kingdom, on earth as it is in heaven – a Kingdom built out of love, and peace, and justice (for all).

The seeker walked along witnessing all the tragedy and horror in the world, he prayed to God, "Why don't you do something about all the tragedy and horror in the world?"

And God replied, "I did do something – I made you."

This past Friday morning, the daughter of 70-year old Ethel Lance, a victim of the racist terrorist Dylann Roof, said to him, *"You took something very precious away from me. I will never talk to her ever again, I will never be able to hold her again. But I forgive you. ... You hurt me, you hurt a lot of people. But God forgives you, and I forgive you."*

Anthony Thompson, representing the family of Myra Thompson echoed the statement. *"I forgive you, and my family forgives you."*

Tywanza Sanders' mother, Felecia, said: *"We welcomed you Wednesday night in our Bible study with open arms. You have killed some of the most beautifullest [sic] people that I know. Every fiber in my body hurts, and I will never be the same. ... Tywanza was my hero. But as they say in the Bible study, we enjoyed you, but may God have mercy on your soul."*

The sister of DePayne Middleton Doctor said: *"I'm a work in progress, and I acknowledge that I am very angry. She taught me that we are the family that love built. We have no room for hate so we have to forgive...."*

Even as the hearing began, the Magistrate James Gosnell called Charleston "a loving community" that will reach out to the victims — including the killer's family. *"We have victims, nine of them. But we also have victims on the other side. ... victims on this young man's side of the family,"* he said. *"Nobody would have ever thrown them into the whirlwind of events that they have been thrown into. We must find it in our heart, that some point in time, ...to... help his family as well."*

This is the power of God – the palpable presence of Jesus through a storm I can't begin to imagine.

This is the power of God -- revealed coming alongside of us, journeying with us, suffering with us, weeping with us. Staying in that boat with us when, as the old Fisherman's prayer says, our "boat is so small, and the sea is so wide."

That's one way we can imitate Jesus. To walk alongside our neighbors, to journey with them, to suffer with them, to weep with them. Staying in the boat with them, because our boats are so small and the sea is so wide.

We might find this a little jarring, because we misunderstand what divine power really is – or what we wish it was, anyway. God's power isn't about controlling things like the weather, or getting me that good parking spot. It's something stronger, more paradoxical.

The power of God isn't about having power. Maybe 'omnipotent' isn't the right word to describe God. That could make God narcissistic, controlling, and insecure. The power of God is in God's giving the power away. Jesus' power is in 'the act of disarming divine omnipotence in favor of covenant and relationship with creation.'

I mentioned this earlier, Jesus' emptying of himself -- the Greek word is *kenosis* -- emptying himself in order to become one of us. I said it was my favorite passage. I believe that as I grow as a Christian I take on more of the qualities and identity of Jesus, and my ego – the worldly identity of Brad slowly disappears. Not so much that I become some sort of 'Christian' automaton, but I truly believe that the less of Brad there is, the more of Christ is in me, the more I can do what I was created to do, which is to make the world a better place; one person at a time.

So what happened after Jesus calmed the storm and scolded the disciples, before they reached the other side of the lake?

Well maybe, "...one by one the disciples lay down beside Jesus and enjoyed the storm."

You may have heard this before. It was Christian musician Scott Krippayne who wrote, "Sometimes He calms the storm, other times He calms his child."

Regardless -- Beloved Child, you are never alone.

Amen.