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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 7B)

June 21, 2015

Text: Mark 4:35–41

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

A series of questions drive the drama of today's gospel reading. The first is found in vs. 38, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" Jesus, don't you care?! How often have you voiced that question? Maybe you've screamed that question. The ups and downs of life are too numerous for me to pick a single illustration that would cover everything. But maybe the recent events in South Carolina will serve as a sufficient illustration.

You go to church to pray and hear God's Word. And a stranger comes in, acts like he's listening and participating only to start shooting up the place. When it's all said and done, 9 Christians are dead. Jesus, don't you care? Your people were praying, minding their own business, not harming anyone and 9 of them die. For what reason? Speculations abound. Racial tension. Maybe it was the Trayvon Martin case? White on black assault responding to black on white assault. The twisted logic gets convoluted. But the results are the same. Nine are dead. Jesus, don't you care?

The 12 disciples of the Lord Jesus are in a desperate situation. They are caught on the Sea of Galilee in a whale of a storm. According to vs. 35, Jesus told them to get into several boats in order to go to the other side. Don't forget that little detail. Jesus told them to do this!

It had been a busy time in the Lord's life. Jesus' public ministry is just beginning but it's already taking a toll on Him. To be sure He is God, fully and completely, but He is also man, fully and completely. Once the word got out that Jesus can heal the diseased and deliver the demon-possessed, the crowds were constant. A mass of humanity followed our Lord wanting to be touched by His healing hand. Then, there was the added pressure of His detractors. The Pharisees are already accusing Jesus of breaking the Mosaic Law. Teachers of the Law from Jerusalem publicly declared that Jesus' power is demonic. "He is possessed by Beelzebub!" they said. "By the prince of demons he is driving out demons." And to top it all off, Jesus is preparing 12

disciples for future work in the Kingdom. They are slow learners; they're simply not getting it.

It's time for a break. The crowds are dismissed so Jesus and His disciples can get a few moments of rest. I find it most interesting that Mark adds this seemingly unnecessary comment in vs. 36, "And leaving the crowd, they (i.e., the disciples) took (Jesus) with them in the boat, just as he was." No preparations were made. The Lord left in haste, just as he was. While the disciples steer the boat to the other shore, Jesus sleeps on a cushion (vs. 38).

Between Mark's comment about Jesus "just as he was" and Jesus falling fast asleep, a storm arises. Vs. 37, "And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling." Tempestuous winds. Breaking waves. A sinking ship. And Jesus was sleep just as He was on a cushion (another interesting detail). That's the context for the 1st question which I've already mentioned, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" (vs. 38)

Can't you sympathize with the disciples? We're about to go under and you (Jesus) are taking 40 winks. How can you sleep through this? Wind howling. Water splashing all over them. Men, undoubtedly, yelling to each other. And Jesus sleeps, on a cushion, just as he was. Don't you care?

I've told a number of people of late that God can handle our tough questions. His shoulders are big enough to carry our anger and frustration. Read through the psalms. They are filled with questions. How long, O Lord? God, Why have you forsaken me? Why do the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer? In one way or another, they're all asking the same question. Lord, don't you care?

Jesus responds to their question with decisive authority and power. Jesus speaks to the wind and the waves – don't overlook that detail, Jesus speaks to His creation – saying, "Peace! Be still!" (vs. 39). And creation obeys. The wind ceased and there was a great calm (vs. 39).

But then Jesus asks His own question, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" (vs. 40). Jesus counters their "Don't you care?" question with "Don't have faith?" How easy it would be for me to turn this remarkable event into some kind of prosperity gospel. If you can believe it then you can achieve it! Just believe and the storms of your life will yield to peace and calmness. Need money? Just give your

tithes and offerings first in faith and watch your bank account grow. Need healing? Just have faith in God. Relationship problems? Seek first God's kingdom in faith and all these things will be added to you. And if things don't turn out like you expected, don't blame God. Your faith is lacking somewhere just like the disciples. Have you still no faith?

Sadly, tragically, this is how so many prosperity preachers use these kinds of Bible passages. Such teaching is an abomination. Hope that's clear enough. That kind of so-called faith is too cheap and shallow. It expects to be able to push the right divine buttons in order to see God jump to attention at our beck and call.

Jesus counters the disciples' "Don't you care?" question with a "Don't you have faith?" question. By so doing, Jesus is teaching us the true nature of Biblical faith.

Faith really has nothing to do with sign, wonders, and miracles. Rather, faith is simple trust that God will remain true to you no matter what. Faith is not seeing storms stilled. Rather, it's trusting in Jesus whether or not the waves and winds of affliction are silenced. In other words, what Jesus is asking His disciples is "Do you not believe that I will bring you through this storm especially since I told you to get into the boat? Do you not trust that I am loving you and caring for you even if it appears that I am sleeping on a cushion just as I am?" Biblical faith is trusting in God to do you good even when all evidence to the contrary says that God is sleeping on the job.

Let me give you some more pointed illustrations. Are you facing a difficult family situation? All such vocations and relationships are given to you by God Himself. Do you not believe that God can keep you and work through you and this difficult relationship so that all things will work out well even if you never see God's final purposes?

Are you facing a health situation? God gave you your body; He fashioned it with all of its unique particulars. Do you not believe that God can work through your physical weaknesses and infirmities? That He is the God who brings life from death and promises something greater and more glorious in the world to come?

Are you facing a financial difficulty? God gives you all your resources. Do you not believe that He will sustain you and bring you through that trial or must He simply prove His love by filling your bank accounts?

In these somewhat generalized situations, I have tried to parallel the situation faced by the disciples. The Lord told them to get into the boat. The Lord gives you your family, your body, and your finances and tells you to be faithful in these vocational areas of your life. You are in these situations at the command of Jesus. When those areas of your life are threatened to spiral out-of-control, will you trust Jesus to remain true to His Word and promises even though He appears to be asleep and uninterested?

Biblical faith says “God remains true to me and loves me even if everything appears to say the opposite. The same God who loves me and gives Himself to me through death and resurrection will not abandon me no matter what. Even if I don’t understand, He remains true.”

Faith remains focused on the person: God the Holy Trinity and not the external circumstances surrounding day to day life in this fallen, difficult world.

That leads to the final question of today’s text. Vs. 41, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” Who is this man who requires His followers to trust Him even when He’s asleep on the cushion just as He is? This man is the Son of God the Father almighty; He is the Holy Spirit anointed Savior of the world who works through death to bring life, who confounds the wise with the foolishness of the Gospel, who exalts the lowly and brings down the exalted, who declares sinners to be righteous, and who loves His people so passionately that He dies their death and rise again so that they may live with Him forever in His eternal kingdom.

Was Jesus with the congregation in South Carolina this past Wednesday when nine of their parishioners were killed? Did He care? Yes, to both. And when you scream out those deep seated questions of anguish, Jesus is with you. Whether or not the winds and the waves are calmed, Jesus is there. Our dear Lord went through death and the grave to save you. He will bring you through this life to Himself that you may enjoy Him and His kingdom forever.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.