

“Who Is This?”

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New Testament Lesson: Mark 4:34-41

Old Testament Lesson: Genesis 1:9

Herbert O’Driscoll in his book “Portrait of a Woman,” notes that “we speak so casually of the presence of God. We assume certain things of it; that it is nice, that it is soothing, encouraging, affirmative. This, of course, is a reflection of our wishes,” says O’Driscoll, “and indeed there are times when the presence of God is thus. But to describe the presence of God in this way is like describing the ocean as calm, the wind as a whisper, or fire as warming. There can be terror to the presence of God. The fact that we sometimes feel this terror, its demand, its vocation, its cost, is precisely the measure of how clear is our understanding of God,”¹ who God is.

We see this in today’s New Testament lesson, where the disciples are in the presence of the Lord, but they don’t yet fully understand who Jesus is. They’re still just calling him teacher, not Lord. As Mark recalls it, it was evening when Jesus said to them, “Let us go across to the other side,” and they all got into the same boat. And “a great gale arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped.”

The disciples are at the mercy of the elements! Not only is it pouring down rain, but fierce winds are whipping at them. And it’s not like they’re on solid ground – they’re in a boat! It’s as if their whole world is about to get tossed upside down, and their lives hang in the balance.

Well, we’ve all been there, at least emotionally if not physically. We’ve all had times when the ground is pulled out from under us. Uncontrollable forces are beating us down. That which we count on to protect us and keep us safe is suddenly not enough – no help at all.

What are some things in life that are out of control like that? Anybody – feel free to shout out. How about children – we just had graduations. Do children always make right decision after graduation? No, at least not as we see things. What else? How about household finances – is there always a clear way forward when it comes to bills, retirement funds, and how to spend or save what little there is? No, at least not as things seem at the time.

As we look at our lives, can we really say that everything’s under control. No, at least not as it appears in the moment. There’s always the possibility of a storm arising in our lives, right out of the blue. Just like there’s always a possibility of a sudden and great gale on Lake Galilee where Jesus was, even today they fear it. Where is Jesus when storms arise in our lives?

¹ Herbert O’Driscoll, Portrait of a Woman (New York: Seabury Press, 1981), 22-23.

Well, let's look at Jesus in the story of the storm that Mark tells us. Jesus is in the stern of the boat, asleep on the cushion. The stern is the back of the boat, typically more stable. The person at the stern is the one who steers the boat. Stability and steering – sounds about right for Jesus. Except that he's asleep. That doesn't seem right – not when there's a storm raging, not when their world is completely out of control!

"Teacher!" they shout, "do you not care that we are perishing?" Of course Jesus cares. Of course God cares – that's why he sent Jesus in the first place. And if we think about, maybe sleeping amid the danger is just the right thing for Jesus to be doing. Why? Because Jesus is the embodiment of calm and peace amidst any and all upset and danger, whether that's out on a lake, or out in your life – my life.

But let's get back out on the lake with Mark and the other disciples. They are out in the boat, a great storm is threatening their very lives, they call out for Jesus, and he says to the wind and sea, "Peace! Be still!" "Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, 'Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?' And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'" "Who is this?" That's exactly what this story Mark's story reveals to us, and to the listeners of his day.

Those listening to Mark would have already heard by now how Jesus cured fever, leprosy, and paralyzes; broke down social barriers with sinners and tax collectors; overcame Satan; and redefined family as those who do the will of God.

But there were healers and prophets of his day that did similar miracles; taught with similar wisdom and insight. So while if we saw someone doing the things Jesus did, we would recognize him as the Lord, it's no wonder the disciples at that moment didn't quite get it yet – "who is this?"

Notice that Mark doesn't dwell on their fear during the storm, but rather, he focuses the story around how they felt after Jesus calmed the storm: they were in great awe of him, wondering who then is this.

During the storm, they just want to drag Jesus into their panic and fear, saying, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" They don't ask or expect him to actually do anything about it. Don't we do the same? Don't we drag people into our panic and upset rather than look to someone who can actually help us? Whether that's family or friends or the good Lord himself, we tend to leave it up to fate rather than lift it up in faith.

Life is hard, and when things get toughest, we get stuck there – looking at the glass half empty rather than looking to Him who can make our cup overflow. It's like when the mother walked in on her 6-year-old who was sobbing. "What's the matter?" she asked. "I've just figured out how to tie my shoes," said the child. "Well, honey, that's wonderful. You're growing up. But why are you crying?" "Because," he said, "now I'll have to do it every day for the rest of my life."

Here, the 6-year-old has made a very significant step toward independence, and all he wants to do is go back to the safety and security of his mommy's dotting and attentive care.

We can relate to that too, can't we? The world is a scary place. We don't want to be in it all on our own. And thank God we are not. God is with us. That's what Jesus shows us by calming the storm and – later in his travels – by raising the dead, and then in his own resurrection, by defeating death altogether! "Why are you afraid?" asks Jesus. "Have you still no faith?"

Even amid the storms of life, Jesus calls us to have faith. As Leonard Sweet says in his book *Quantum Spirituality*, "The miracle Jesus wanted to show them was not the miracle of calming the storm, but the miracle of calming them in the storm."²

Jesus doesn't promise that your life will be free of storms – of upset and downturns, collapses and catastrophes. What Jesus promises us is that in the midst any of it, he is there, to bring us peace and calm, to be our peace and calm.

How often are you able to tap into the Lord's peace and calm when life is at its worst? Sometimes? Not so often? All the time? Few if any can tap into such divine peace all the time. And that's why we need each other, in Christ. Just as Jesus was the embodiment of peace and calm for the disciples, we can be the channel of peace and calm for one another. But only if we reach out to each other.

You, as a member or friend of this church, have someone to reach out to – and not necessarily me, though I'm always here for you. But it could be anyone. Anyone sitting here or anyone you know in this church who you can go to when trouble strikes.

The smartest thing the disciples did that day on the lake in Galilee was to call out for their teacher and friend. They had no idea if he could help or not, but they called out to him anyway – "Teacher, don't you care?" They had no idea if he cared or not. After all, he was doing something else, sleeping no less! But they called out to him anyway, stepping out in faith to reach out to another human being, for all they knew of Jesus at that point.

We too are all called to reach out, and not only reach out to Jesus, but also we can and should reach out to one another, in the Spirit of Christ. Jesus is here with us and his Spirit moves through us. And in that Spirit, we can and should help bring the calm and peace of Jesus to one another, especially amid life's many stormy moments. Amen

² L. I. Sweet, *Quantum Spirituality* [1991], 165.

Pastoral Prayer

Almighty God, Lord of the storm and of the calm, the rough sea and the quiet haven, of day and of night, of life and of death, grant us a measure of your peace, in whatever we may encounter.

Help us to look upon you with untroubled eye, and walk toward you alongside one another.

We pray your peace upon the people of Charlotte, SC, Lord, where senseless violence has once again led to the tragic loss of life.

We pray for all those whom we know whose lives are in need of your care and concern and provision.

We pray for your blessing upon baby Bronson, and your sense of wisdom and patients and strength for his parents.

Hear our prayers, O God, and receive them to yourself, that our best desires may be sanctified – that is made holy – by you, and brought to fulfillment in Christ.

We pray all this in his name, and using the words that he taught us, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts as we forgive
our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil,
For Thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory forever. Amen.**