

*Series: Stretched by Jesus*

*“The Lord of the Storm”*

Introduction: From early days, Christian artists and poets have depicted the church of Jesus Christ as a ship. Jesus, it seems, is often around a body of water or teaching something while on a boat. A number of the disciples are fishermen, who worked from boats. A boat is a kind of community made up of those who are on it. As sinners in need of God’s grace, we are “all in the same boat.” And boats sometimes run into storms, which is where our Gospel reading takes us today.

As we continue to explore tests where Jesus stretched those who encountered him, today it’s his disciples who are stretched into fear and amazement as they watch Jesus at work, turning a raging storm into waters that are calm. Let’s enter this text a bit differently this morning. Initially, Tom will read it twice for us. The first time just listen and try to put yourself into the story. The second time listen for a word or a phrase that seems to be grabbing your attention in some way. [READ 2x]

Now, take a moment of quiet and ask yourself why this particular word or phrase has gotten your attention. What is going on in your life that might intersect with what has stood out to you?

In a few minutes we’ll read the text a third time. Before we do, let’s make some observations together about some of the things we find here as there are a lot of places where Jesus might meet us in this text.

1. There is a storm here, it’s a major storm, and the disciples have done nothing to cause it to happen. It simply happens “one day.” It’s a reminder that the storms of life come upon the just and unjust alike. Remember the parable of the wise and foolish builders? One built his house on a rock and the other on sand, but on both builders the rains came, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against the house (Ma. 7:24-27). Storms come in all shapes and sizes, from the onset of a pandemic, to the illness or death of a loved one, to the loss of a job, to the breakdown of a relationship. Jesus never promises us a place where we can go that is storm free. But if we build our life upon him, he does promise to be with us, in our boat, in the midst of the storm.

2. We can refine this even more. The storm in this particular case came upon those who followed the instructions of Jesus, to the letter! It was his idea to get in the boat and go over to the other side of the lake, and the disciples followed. Even following Jesus can bring us into choppy waters. Sometimes we think that if we’re doing what God has called us to do, then we won’t run into a crisis. But sometimes following Jesus can make things more uncomfortable at the moment, not less.

3. “Master, Master, we’re going to drown!” the disciples shouted as they wake him up. Mark, in his account, puts a finer point on this emotion, revealing that this is not just a complaint but an accusation. “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” (Mk. 4:38b). Everyone is tired and everyone is getting wet. It’s dark and probably cold. The disciples are dying, or feel like they’re close to it. And Jesus seems dead. He’s fast asleep.

I can imagine him falling asleep, to the gentle rocking of the craft, as the boat gets underway; I've watched my daughters do that on numerous occasions! But stay asleep while the waters are raging and the boat is being swamped? Who can do that?! Only someone who is totally secure in, and who is absolutely confident of, the control he has over, any and all circumstance. But it doesn't always look that way to those begin beaten up by the storm. It can seem like God has fallen asleep on us.

4. Significantly, when he awakens, Jesus doesn't snap back. In language similar to what would be used to confront demonic powers, which the ancients would have understood to be present in a storm at sea such as this, Jesus doesn't rebuke the disciples; he rebukes the wind and the waves. And all becomes calm.

In the midst of this, we are possibly given a glimpse of the resurrection to come. "He got up," literally, "he was raised." It's the same word the angel spoke to the women who had come to his tomb: "He is not here but was raised." Here in the boat he was raised from sleeping like a dead man and brought peace by declaring mastery over evil forces as he came back to life.

5. "Where is your faith?" is the question he then asks the disciples as he turns his attention to them once all has become still. I don't think it means that they had no faith, only that they needed to think about how to apply their faith to this kind of a situation. Jesus had just shared the parable of the sower to a large crowd. In that parable, Jesus said that one of the places the seed of God's word fell was on rocky ground: "Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away" (Lk. 8:13). Out on that lake, in the midst of a storm, was certainly a time of testing. If anything, Jesus had it in mind not to ridicule or question the faith of his disciples, but to teach them that growing such faith is a journey. He wanted to strengthen the nascent faith they had so that they could learn to stand firmly upon him when the winds around them began to blow hard.

6. "Who is this?" This the operative question with which the account ends. This, we learn, is the Lord of the storm, the one who has authority over all because he is the creator of all. Throughout the biblical record we see God's people, when in difficulty of some kind, turning to the Lord of all creation.

As the psalmist cries out, "who formed the mountains by your power . . . who stilled the roaring of the seas . . . and the turmoil of the nations" (65:7).

As Isaiah describes God's character to a community in exile: "The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak" (Isa. 40:28f).

That same Lord then becomes revealed in the person of Jesus, who is declared the creator of all:

"Through him all things were made" (Jn. 1:3). "For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible . . ." as Paul describes it to the Colossian congregation (1:16). The One in whom we are invited to put our trust has created, and thus has control over, all things. We're invited to bring our lives, our fears, our anxiety, to this God in prayer, writes the apostle Paul, because the peace this He brings transcends all understanding (Phil. 4:7).

So, let's hear the text once again. Then, with your word or phrase in mind, ask God if there is an invitation for you in that word or phrase from him. Pray for the grace to respond.