

*Texts: 2 Corinthians 6:1-13; Mark 4:35-41*

*Subject: Jesus stills the Storm*

*Theme: ReNEWed in Faith*

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, June 20, 2021; Reformation Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV

Grace and peace to you from God our Father in heaven and our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

When I was a kid, I would watch reruns of old TV shows. I loved the Monkees, The Munsters, and Dennis the Menace. One I'm sure you'll remember is the Lone Ranger. Before there was Chuck Norris, there was Clayton Moore - the last Texas Ranger. The show actually ran on television from 1949 - 1957 but those reruns must have been on for four decades. Every episode included some great action, wrongs made right, and the Lone Ranger riding off into the sunset, and someone would ask, "who was that masked man?" Didn't they know? They'd seen him ride into town on his trusted horse, Silver, and he'd rescued those in danger, solved the problem, caught the bad guys, and generally saved the day. How could they not know him?

Well, the mask, of course. It covered his eyes, or a total of about 3 square inches around his eyes, so there was no way of recognizing him. This was clearly the same generation that couldn't tell Superman from Clark Kent, because of his glasses, right? In order for us to enjoy the fantasy of the show or movie, we have to suspend our disbelief - we ignore that part of our brains that recognizes what's really going on, so we can be a part of the story. We know who the masked man is, but we want to see how the action plays out, and we want to enjoy the tale along with the towns people, so we play along.

This story of Jesus calming the sea, is a bit like that for us. We hear it and know who Jesus is, or at the very least we aren't surprised when He does what seems miraculous to the fearful disciples in the boat. We're in on it. We get it. We're not afraid.

But they were still trying to figure it out. Who is this Jesus, and what must his actions and identity mean for them and the world?

In this well known story there are many things that might make us wonder. Why would they cross the sea at night? Didn't they know a storm was coming? How can Jesus be asleep in the back of the boat with it rocking, and rolling the waves?

Let's not judge these disciples too harshly. Sure they'd seen Jesus heal the sick and cast out demons. They had to know there was something special about him. But there were others who did works of healing too. There were people who performed exorcisms. But Jesus was a different kind of teacher, who gave his power and authority away. He was teaching them, revealing God and the Kingdom in their midst. They were following him maybe to see what he would do next. The author of the Gospel of Mark wrote this down and shared the story around the same time as the destruction of the temple in the year 70 A.D., and those who were hearing Mark's good news knew about storms too. Bible scholar David Jacobsen from Boston University describes the era: "The center of worship is destroyed; the cultural and religious center of the people no longer holds. In the midst of all this chaos when the world-as-known is ending, here this Jesus is revealed not as one more therapist or miracle worker but as a revelation of God's extraordinary cosmic purpose in the person of this ordinary Jesus."

And just like you or I would after a long day of work, he's in need of a nap.

Storms were real. People were afraid. The one taking place in their society and the one on the sea. It's a place where the winds can whip up quickly and the waves can get large enough to topple a small boat. And there were other boats along with them. The sea itself was a symbol of chaos. Israel and Judah weren't generally seafaring

societies. The sea was dangerous, it was unknown. It was where the monsters came from. So, the disciples on the boats are understandably afraid. Who can save them? They've tried to let him rest, but Jesus is their last hope and they have to wake him up. They wonder if he doesn't care about the storm - or that he doesn't care about their safety. With a word, he 'rebukes' the wind, and says to the sea, "Peace, be still." And it happened. The sea became calm. The wind ceased.

"Why are you afraid?"

"Have you still no faith?"

From then until now, the world has known fear. Humanity has had to contend against the chaos, the wind and the waves. We have been through our own storms. Oppression. War. Inequality. Disease. Distrust. From the Strand in Galveston - June 19th 1865 - to Stonewall in Greenwich Village June 28th 1969, and to today, people have known the tension between fear and faith. Those who survived enslavement had faith that "a day was going to come" when they would know liberation. Those who had been victimized, maimed, and killed for their sexual orientation still had faith that they could begin to bring change for the community. Even while they were afraid.

We have seen storms. Mass shootings, Economic crisis, protests, along with droughts, fires, and floods. We have been through a global pandemic - I don't know we've survived it yet - but we've been through it. We have seen the unemployment and underemployment, isolation, anxiety and depression, homelessness and hunger it has brought with it and find ourselves still out on the sea and if we are not afraid for ourselves, we might be afraid for what others are going through, or what yet may come our way.

We are exhausted, irritated, frustrated, and fearful at times. Maybe our faith is running low. We need to be renewed. These are times when we turn to Jesus. When we are at our lowest, at the end of our rope and the bottom of the pit, we cry out to God. Jesus hears. Jesus knows. We can be renewed, because Jesus is faithful *for us*. When we cry out, our community hears it too. People show up, they share a meal, they come together to sing and pray, and give their own blood, their food, their labor. They build each other up. Even through the fear, faith sustains us and strengthens us, and makes us new.

Why is Jesus sleeping? He's not afraid. He's Jesus. Of course, he knows what he will do. He is not worried. Those other guys in the boat don't quite know who He is or what He is capable of. But they are about to find out. He wakes up and doesn't ask them to do anything. Doesn't require a prayer, an oath, or an offering. He does what they cannot do for themselves. He rebukes the wind. He calms the sea. The word "rebuke" in the story is the same word used back in chapter 1 of Mark's gospel when Jesus casts out demons. It's translated as 'rebuke' but can mean 'to instruct by warning' - It demonstrates his authority over the powers of the world, and He's also instructing his followers during these events. This fully human, fully sleepy Jesus, demonstrates the fully divine power of God out there on the sea at night. For the sake of the disciples, and the ones around them. And still they wonder: Who is this?

Jesus - the one who calms the wind and waves - who rebukes them and the demons that still haunt us - is the one we turn to in our times of fear, and renews us through faith. This is not just about *our* faith, but *Jesus' faith* in the goodness and perseverance of God over the powers of evil that still exist, the ultimate victory in His

death and resurrection - his victory over our failings and our fears and over death itself. Jesus is the Son of God who is with us always, and sends us power too, through the Holy Spirit, to change our hearts, to bind us to Him, and to one another and to remind us of the love that sustains us. His faithfulness guides us and leads us for the sake of those in the boats around us - our neighbors, when they are afraid or facing their own storms. It's Jesus that moves us from fear to faith and renews us along the way.

Our fears warn us and instruct us. But Jesus calms our fears so they don't paralyze us. He casts them out. His voice calls us to trust in his identity as the one who can save. His cross reminds us who He is. So we don't have to ask 'Who then is this?', but to trust and believe, that He is our Lord and Savior. And he will bring us safely through the storm.

Amen.