

Sermon for Beau-Logan Parish ^{SL NL SP}
3rd Sunday after Pentecost, 21st June 2009

Theme:

Purpose:

Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Word of God for our meditation today is written in Mark 4:35-41:

"³⁵ That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, **"Let us go over to the other side."** ³⁶ Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. ³⁷ A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. ³⁸ Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" ³⁹ He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, **"Quiet! Be still!"** Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. ⁴⁰ He said to his disciples, **"Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"** ⁴¹ They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" NIV

O Lord, sanctify us by your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

The father goes off to work like any other day. His work pays the mortgage and the car loan, the groceries, and the children's school expenses. His wife has a part time job that allows the family to pay for the luxuries of life – holidays at the coast, movies, and computer games.

The father is almost through the day at work when he gets a call to visit his boss. He walks in, and totally out of the blue, is told that he is no longer needed. He will get severance pay, but he can go home today and not come back.

A storm envelops the family's life. How will they pay the mortgage? Will they lose the car? How can they keep putting food on the table? If they use his super savings, what will happen to them in their retirement? But even more distressing, where is God in all of this? There was no warning, no hint that they should be preparing and saving for this eventuality. Is Jesus sleeping? Even worse, is it that he just doesn't care about them?

A mother visits her doctor and is sent for tests. A week or so later she visits the doctor again to find the results of the tests. More tests need to be done, he says, but it looks like she has cancer, and it seems to be aggressive. It doesn't look good. A storm overwhelms the mother and her family.

In the end, she has less than a year to live, and leaves behind a husband and 3 small children. Where was God in this? Couldn't he heal her? Was Jesus sleeping? Or worse, is it that he just doesn't care?

A man is grappling with depression. It is affecting his work – it is so hard to deal with people and their issues when you have a huge storm growing inside that envelopes everything. It affects his relationship with his wife as he withdraws into himself because he just can't deal with life and relationships, and he doesn't understand what is going on. It affects his

relationship with his children. He simply doesn't have the energy to play with them. They begin to see their dad as someone who is not part of their lives. A storm grows inside and takes over the whole life of the family. Where is God? Why doesn't Jesus help? Is Jesus sleeping? Or is that he just doesn't care?

The son is only 24. He's full of life and is been studying an advanced degree at university. He arrives home for a holiday, steps off the curb to cross the road, and is run down and killed by a hit and run driver. A huge storm suddenly throws the family into turmoil. The parents are absolutely devastated. How could this happen to their son? Where was God? Couldn't Jesus have protected him? Is he sleeping? Or maybe God just doesn't care?

Storms like these envelop our lives at some time or another. Unemployment, illness, death, tragedy – any of a number of things can send us careering into a storm that envelops our lives and we are left wondering where God is? Why does it seem that Jesus is sleeping on us? Or even more to the point, why does it feel so much as if Jesus just doesn't care about us?

The disciples understood this feeling. They were crossing the Sea of Galilee in a boat with Jesus. A storm suddenly comes up. The disciples struggle to control the boat. They struggle to keep it from sinking. Their lives are in danger, real danger. They know the Sea of Galilee, and they know boats can be lost. So they are afraid, very afraid. But Jesus is sleeping! Why is he sleeping. How can he sleep? Doesn't he care that we are all about to drown?

Jesus had been healing many people of their diseases. He had driven out evil spirits. He healed a man of leprosy, restored a paralytic after his friends lowered the paralysed man down through the roof. He restored a man's shrivelled hand in a synagogue on the Sabbath. Crowds of people were following him, but his critics accused him of doing all these miracles by the power of Beelzebub, or the devil.

Jesus started to teach the people about the kingdom of heaven. His parables were of seeds or lamps. The kingdom of heaven was portrayed as something small that grew unseen until it couldn't be ignored. Finally after a hard days work, Jesus is tired, and he tells the disciples to get into a boat and they leave for the other side of the lake. Jesus sleeps. Then the storm hits, and the disciples are terrified. So they wake Jesus, accusing him of not caring about them.

Jesus responds. He wakes up. He stands and rebukes the wind and waves just he had earlier rebuked evil spirits. He commands nature to be still, to be quiet. And the storm obeys. Nature responds. Everything is calm.

Now the disciples are afraid again. Are their lives still in danger for a different reason? Who is this that can command the wind and waves to obey him, and they do.

Then Jesus says to his disciples, *“Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”*

Well what does Jesus expect? People lose their lives in storms. People lose their lives to cancer. People lose their livelihoods to unemployment. People lose their families because of illness. People lose their loved ones in tragic accidents. Surely all these storms of life are reason to be afraid, very afraid?

But Jesus says, *“Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”* He calls us to trust him, even in the storms of life. What would have happened if the disciples had not woken him? Jesus suggest that it would have been alright. They did not need to fear. Simply have faith him him. Have faith in God.

In September 1542, Martin and Katie Luther's daughter, Magdalene became very ill. I read form TableTalk No 5494: *When the illness of his daughter became graver he [Martin Luther] said, “I love her very much. But if it is thy will to take her, dear God, I shall be glad to know that she is with thee.”*

Afterward he said to his daughter, who was lying in bed, “Dear Magdalene, my little daughter, you would be glad to stay here with me, your father. Are you also glad to go to your Father in heaven?”

The sick girl replied, “Yes, dear Father, as God wills.”

The father said, “You dear little girl!” [Then he turned away from her and said,] “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak [Matt. 26:41]. I love her very much. If this flesh is so strong, what must the spirit be?” Among other things he then said, “In the last thousand years God has given to no bishop such great gifts as he has given to me (for one should boast of God's gifts), I'm angry with myself that I'm unable to rejoice from my heart and be thankful to God, though I do at times sing a little song and thank God. Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's [Rom. 14:8]¹

In the midst of a storm, Martin Luther hung on to Jesus and trusted him that whatever happened, his daughter would be in God's hands, and kept safe whether in this life or in heaven.

Later, when she died, we read this (No. 5497): *Often he [Martin Luther] repeated the words given above: “I'd like to keep my dear daughter because I love her very much, if only our Lord God would let me. However, his will be done! Truly nothing better can happen to her, nothing better.”*

¹ Luther, M. (1999, c1967). Vol. 54: Luther's works, vol. 54 : Table Talk (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works (54:430). Philadelphia: Fortress Press

While she was still living he often said to her, "Dear daughter, you have another Father in heaven. You are going to go to him."

And then, later he said (No. 5498), *"I am joyful in spirit but I am sad according to the flesh. The flesh doesn't take kindly to this. The separation [caused by death] troubles me above measure. It's strange to know that she is surely at peace and that she is well off there, very well off, and yet to grieve so much!"*

Then later (No 5499), *when people came to escort the funeral and friends spoke to him according to custom and expressed to him their sympathy, he [Martin Luther] said, "You should be pleased! I've sent a saint to heaven—yes, a living saint. Would that our death might be like this! Such a death I'd take this very hour."*

Martin Luther showed what it meant to have faith in the midst of the storms of life. By faith he hung on to the hope of the resurrection. By faith, he trusted that Magdalene was with Jesus. But he also recognised the loss that happens, the grief that filled him over his daughter's death. But his grief wasn't the whole story nor the end of the story. Martin Luther's faith in Jesus was the end of that story, the most important part.

Storms will come into our lives whether we want them to or not. They are part of this life. And one person's storm may be different to another. For one, it may be struggling with an illness, like depression. For another it may be facing death of themselves or a loved one. Or it may be financial struggles. Or whatever.

But whatever the storm, Jesus calls us to trust him. To have faith in him, that in the end we belong to the Lord, and we will be kept safe by him. He calls us to trust that despite the grief we feel, there will be peace and joy awaiting us. Jesus calls us to trust in him, that he **can** still the storm and quieten the raging wind. But even more importantly, that he is with us still in the midst of the storm, even when it seems he is sleeping.

As Jesus promises us in our baptism, *"Lo, I am with you always to the very end of the age."* He will never leave us or forsake us. Whatever we go through in this life, whatever storm hits us, Jesus will keep us safe until the day we celebrate the feast with him in his Father's mansion.

"Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?", Jesus says. Amen.

The peace of God, which is beyond all human understanding, stand guard over your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.