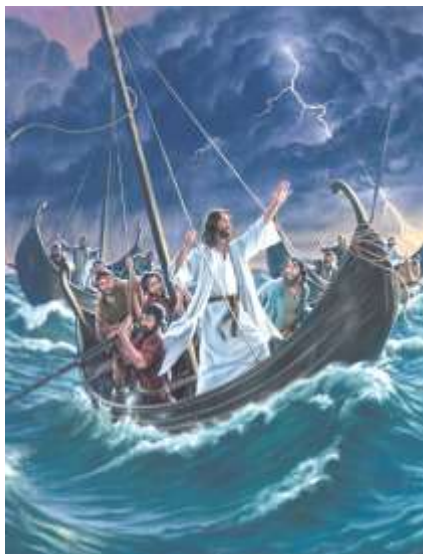


The Storm of Life

Mark 4: 35-41

Rev Alex Rodgers



This Story in Mark's gospel is one of the great miracle stories of the New Testament. It's probably one of the few stories from the Gospels that people who don't go to Church have heard about.

It is a great image of Jesus using the power of God to overcome and control one of the most powerful events in the natural world!

Storms are bad enough when we confront them at home, here in Adelaide. But a storm at sea is a fundamentally intimidating event – it reaches into the deepest areas of our being.

As one of those British migrants often referred to by people as 'Ten Pound Poms', coming as we did by assisted passage, my parents, my sister and I came to Australia on the good ship "Fairsea". It had been a Liberty Ship during the Second World War and bought by an Italian company and converted into a

cruise ship. But it was nearing the end of its useful life. Its engines were on their last legs (indeed they caught fire after the ship left Adelaide), the facilities were quite poor, and worst of all the Fairsea had no stabilisers – so she rolled heavily in rough seas.

As we rounded the Cape of Good Hope in Southern Africa, a really major storm hit us. I was fourteen years of age and frightened of nothing. I played a game of standing at the rail of the ship, and when it rolled away from me I could step from the rail on to the top of a ten foot pile of deck chairs inboard. The fun in that soon waned and I wandered up to the highest point passengers were allowed, just under the Bridge of the ship, and a large window allowed me to look out in front of the ship, seeing pretty close to what the captain could see directly above.

When I arrived, I was the only passenger there, and we were at the top of a wave, about to go down. I was exhilarated. But we went down and down and down and down seemingly forever, and when we eventually got to the bottom of the wave I looked up and the next wave was towering high over my head. It looked like hundreds of feet above me.

This brave fearless fourteen year old cowered down below the window, and purely by feel, hands and knees, I crawled back from where I had seen the waves, it seemed like for hours, until eventually I got back to the tiny cabin I shared with my little sister who was blissfully uncaringly sound asleep.

I was absolutely petrified of that storm!!

The Sea of Galilee is an inland lake, but it is large and well known for terrible storms and large seas. So the image of the disciples and Jesus on the fishing boat caught in a storm would have been a recognisable one for Mark's readers. It would have conjured up images of fear and concern for those on the boat.

So Jesus performs the astounding miracle of bringing the incredible natural power of the storm and the heavy seas under control. Mark is describing for us once again the power of God.

But if that is all we take out of this story of the calming of the storm we misunderstand and minimise the point Mark is trying to make – the Good News he is really attempting to communicate to us.

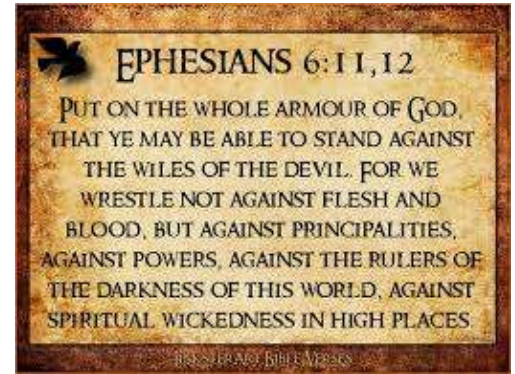
Mark is making a statement about Jesus, God become human. Jesus rescues the disciples, but they fail to understand the real importance of what has taken place. They are left questioning.

Who is this?

Mark wants us to answer that question.

You see this story has very little to do with Jesus' power to control the weather (and wouldn't that be a handy gift to have!). Rather, it is a story to illustrate the struggle of all of Jesus' people against the destructive power of evil in the world.

The gospel, according to Mark, is about Jesus coming to liberate people from such forces. It is to see Jesus as the embodiment of God's power, the bearer of God's Spirit, to challenge and overcome the deep and destructive powers which the furies of nature symbolised.



Remember the world of Jesus and Mark was much like our world today!

People were fearful. There was a sense that evil was winning the day.

That nothing could be done to overcome those forces which destroyed everything that was good and noble and loving in the world and in people's lives.

Mark was reminding people that Jesus had come to liberate humanity from the power of evil – to make God's love the controlling power.



Mark's story has a political, social, and moral impact as well as spiritual.

Remember the disciple's words. "Who is this, that even the wind and sea obey him?"

That's the hint that there is more to this story than meets the eye!

The "Karate Kid" is a movie about a teenager who feels alone and unprotected in the hostile environment of his school and community. He is scared, unable to defend himself against the hoodlums of his neighbourhood. He is afraid.

It happens that the lad, whose name is Daniel, meets an old man, Mr. Miagi, who has a black belt in Karate, and the old man agrees that he will teach him what he knows so that he can protect himself.

On the first day of his lessons the old man asks Daniel to wax and polish several old cars that he owns, wax on, wax off. All day the lad labours to follow these instructions; Wax on - Wax off. On the second day the old man asks the boy to paint his fence, paint up, paint down. Again it takes all day. On the third day the old man asks him to sand the wooden floor of his veranda, in a circular fashion - and again it takes all day.

At the end of the third day the boy is very angry - I've done all this work for you, he says, and you still haven't taught me anything. At this point the master tells Daniel to stand in front of him and perform the motion for wax on - wax off, and lo, as he does this, the master makes as if to hit him, and his blows are deflected by the boy's arms.

The boy's work for Mr. Miagi, his obedience, has made him ready for his first lesson in how to face danger; it has prepared him for the lessons, and the dangers, to follow.



Like Mark's world we are faced with the power of evil in our world. Powers that make so many of us fearful.

In the calming of the storm Mark assures us that wherever the seemingly overwhelming power of evil confronts the world, it can be overcome!!

Take the disciples again. Look into their hearts on that day.

These experienced fisher folk weren't just surprised by, or afraid of, the storm. They had seen such storms many times before. The Sea of Galilee was notorious for storms. Every day they ventured out, it was to engage in a risky business. Neither were they suddenly regretting the fact that they hadn't clicked onto the weather forecast website before setting out.

They were afraid of themselves. They had lost their courage, because they had developed a dependency on Jesus.

Walter Wink an American theologian is helpful, I think with this comment: "They awoke (Jesus) with reproaches, not the cry of believers for help. They also lacked faith in themselves. You deal with the storm. You are the seamen here. You had the resources, and you failed to call upon them. Exercise your own faith!"

Now that is interesting. Confront your fears. Forget your dependency. You have the resources. Exercise your own faith!

This story by Mark, shows they (and by implication, Mark's community) were also terrified of life! They had given up their courage by entering into dependency on Jesus. And so they experienced the storm not as challenge, but as an evil threat.

Where had their courage fled?

They had not yet seen the bearded prophet of a modern newspaper cartoonist, published a few years back, which said, 'The world is not coming to an end. We will have to learn to cope'.

