

Jesus Is Our Storm-Stiller

Mark 4:35-41 (NIV)

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!"

Whenever I hear a little rumble, I get a little excited. I head out to the window and look for the dark clouds coming in. I check my little weather app that tells me where that last lightning strike took place. I begin to stare in that direction while listening for the rumble of thunder. I could sit and stare at thunderstorms for hours, but I do that from a place of comfort and safety watching the radar on my weather app to see how long and how severe the storm will get. I mostly always know how I'm going to get through a storm.

That day, though, on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus' disciples did not know how they were going to get through the storm that came up. This particular squall caused great big waves that crashed over the boat the disciples and Jesus were on. Wave after wave brought more water into the boat, faster than these experienced fishermen could get rid of it. They had weathered storms on the Sea of Galilee before, but this one was too much. The boat was going to go down. They would be trapped by the fierce waters. They would meet a watery grave. There was no weather app to tell them how much longer the storm would last. They saw no way out of this perfect storm that just came up on the Sea of Galilee.

We use that term, "perfect storm" to refer to how a number of various things came together to make life pretty miserable, life-threatening even. This perfect storm might be an actual storm – a time when you are watching the radar, knowing that the bad weather is bearing down upon your location and that you know you can't get out of its path. Your perfect storm might be one of those weeks when you already have a full plate of duties, duties that aren't getting accomplished in the efficient and expedient way that you are accustomed to getting things accomplished, all while more and more duties are heaped on to your plate to the point where you feel like either you are going to collapse under the weight of it all, that you will fail to meet deadlines, or that you are going to lose your mind trying to get everything done. You might be going through a perfect storm in your marriage, of trying one thing after another to make the marriage better, to save it, yet everything you do to try to fix it ends up falling flat and drawing you closer to the breaking point. You might be experiencing a perfect storm with work, that no matter who you talk to, no matter how much effort you put into it, the situation does not improve and the job's difficulty increases exponentially. And the list goes on and on of the perfect storms of life.

There's a moment that comes in all these storms of life – the metaphorical and the literal - when you can't see the way out. There is no light at the end of the tunnel, just dark clouds and gloom that surrounds you, overwhelms you. It's in that moment that the fear that already had begun creeping in now fills your life. There are no solutions, no control over what is happening. There is no way out, nowhere to run to avoid it. The dread of this storm is consuming you. You panic, freak out. You freak out because you can't control this, and we don't readily – if ever - accept a situation where we can do nothing to help fix it or somewhat control it.

That's where the disciples were at in that literal storm on the Sea of Galilee. They had tried everything they knew, all their knowledge, all their expertise, all their problem-solving skills, but they were still about to go down, still about to drown. Yet, they were not out of all options. They did one thing that they hadn't done yet. They went over to Jesus, who was asleep in the middle of a storm that was threatening to take down the boat he was in, and they roused him. "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" (verse 38) It was a question that accused as much as it also asked for help. Oh disciples, do you still have no faith? Do you still don't know who this Jesus is?

We can ask the question in a very self-righteous way, as if we never accuse God of not caring what happens to us while we are in the middle of one of those storms that we don't see a way out of. When the winds are howling, the branches of trees breaking and falling into the yard, the window breaks, and the rain comes pouring in, we think, "God, aren't you going to protect us from this storm?" When you are exhausted trying to get everything done on your to-do list and one more thing gets added that you see no way of accomplishing, and you throw your hands in the air and say, "God, can't you give me a break here?" When there is another

fight with your spouse, another promise broken, another criticism unloaded, you pray, “God, don’t you care if my marriage stays together?” When work remains stagnant for you and tensions ratchet up with your boss and your coworkers and you are not happy doing what you have always done, you say in your head as you punch out for the day, “God, don’t you care that I’m miserable here and can’t take much more?”

“Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” Jesus said to his disciples while the storm raged around them. Is that surprise in Jesus’ voice? Did he expect more trust from his disciples at this point? After seeing so many miracles done by Jesus, do they not trust God in this moment to get them through the storm? They had enough faith to go to God for help - and that’s good – but they did not have enough trust in God to get them through this storm that seemingly had no way out.

Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith? Questions for a painful self-reflection. When you were in the middle of your storms, did you accuse God of not caring about what you were going through, as if he were oblivious and sleeping right through one of the most traumatic times in your life? Did you not trust him to get you safely through the storm because you ran out of options and possible solutions, because you couldn’t see how God would get you out of it?

If we accuse God of not caring about us because we can’t see a way out of the perfect storms of our lives, we have to shamefully admit that our faith is weak, lacking. When I worry, that is a sin – a sin of not trusting God, a sin that stems from us wanting to be in control, a sin of demanding to know exactly how we are going to get out of hard situations even though God never promises to give that information to us. Most of the time, when I can see what is coming ahead and how I’m going to get through it like I can with the weather app radar, I trust God. But when I can’t see how I get through it, do I still trust God or do I accuse him of not caring about what happens to me because I don’t fully trust him to get me through the storm?

The disciples, us, we accuse God of not caring when we are in that place in the storms of our lives because we don’t see the way out or when the storm will be over. We want to know how we are getting out of this. We want to know “the plan.” We want to know when the storm will end. Instead of telling us exactly when and how the storm will end, God stills them when he knows is best. “[Jesus] got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.” (verse 39)

Well, if Jesus is just going to still the perfect storms in my life, why doesn’t he tell me when? Why doesn’t he do it earlier? Our faith, our trust in God, is like a muscle. For it to get stronger, it must be used, challenged, extended past what it could do before so that it can do more next time, to trust him through the next storm. God allows storms into our lives for us to use the faith he has given us. He doesn’t always give you the forecast of it or the path out of it so that you can flex your faith, so that he can make your trust in him stronger.

Step back and think about it for a moment. You may be in a storm right now, but I want you to think of a storm that you have already gotten through. Every storm that God has stilled in our lives, every storm that has ended for us, is proof positive that Jesus is still the one who stills the storms in our lives, just like he literally did for his disciples. He stilled this storm for his disciples when they thought they were going to drown. He stilled storms in your life when you panicked seeing no way out. He will continue to still the storms that he allows into our lives. He is trustworthy. He will still the storm in your life in the timing he decides is best.

So, what do we do? For one, let’s come back to this story again and again. See that Jesus trusted his Father enough to sleep in the boat while the storm raged and the disciples feared for their lives. He did that for us. He exemplified perfect trust in our place, as our substitute. That same trust, that faith, that he had he is building in us as well when he allows us to go through storms in our lives and watch him still them. God may not always let us see how and when he is going to still the storms in our lives, but he has shown us that we can and should trust him to do so.

For another, here’s advice that I got from another pastor and try to act on it often during the storms of life: Don’t solve a problem on Tuesday that will solve itself by Friday. To say it another way, ride the storm until God stills it. Instead of panicking and accusing God of not caring about us as we go through the storm, remember that he stills the storms not because we see the end of the storm but because he ends it. He is the one who is in control over the winds and the seas. He is in control over everything in our lives.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, flex that muscle of faith that he has given to each of you. When the storms are hitting you heavy, step back and remember that God does care and that he is in control. He will still all of our storms in life when he knows is best. Trust him; he will still your storm. Amen.