

Our Anchor in the Storm St. Mark 4:35-41

The first three Gospels include the story of Jesus walking on Lake Galilee that stormy night. The importance of this story may be seen in where St. Mark places it: between the teachings of the kingdom of God and the disciples participation in it. The author states, "On that day," meaning when Jesus shared the parables of the growing seeds and the rapid spreading mustard bush, "when evening had come" Jesus and the disciples climb into a boat to cross the lake.

The kingdom parables, growing seed (4:26-29) and mustard seed (4:30-32) are illustrations of the reign of God. The first explains how the kingdom grows through a process similar to nature. The second demonstrates that the reign of God will grow and extend like a wild bush that cannot be stopped.

The Gospel writers now take us to Lake Galilee, which is familiar territory for the fisherman among the disciples. Jesus is tired from his ministry, so he climbs into the tiny boat with his disciples and has no need of a sleeping pill. A fearsome storm arises, and even the veteran fishermen are shaking in their boots. The boat is about to be swamped, and Jesus is counting sheep!

Jesus' alarm clock is the disciples screaming, "*Don't you give a rip that the boat is going to down, and we are going to die!?! They just **thought** they were afraid. They hadn't seen **anything** yet!* Jesus awakes amidst the wind howling, the waves plunging, and the boat rocking. Jesus merely admonished the wind and said to the lake, "peace!" "Be tranquil." And the wind ended, and the lake became still as glass. Can you see it? The jaws dropped, the eyes twice the average size, wonder-filled! These actions beg the question, Who **IS** this guy?

Like the seed parables, we know there are deeper levels to this story, too. If we go back to Jesus asleep while his disciples are terrifyingly awake, pitching on a stormy lake, we might catch something new. The background for this story is the Lake of Galilee, as well-known to fishermen as land is to farmers.

Wind and water may be inspiring but they can also be dangerous, as we have seen so often on newscasts lately. The images of loss are not only physical due to weather, but illness, the economy, personal mistakes, insecurity and the negative actions of others, all play a part in our lives as individuals, communities, and nations.

Even though you and I live like kings compared to the vast majority of the world, we still have difficulty dealing with natural disasters, changes in culture, shifts in political and economic arenas. There is no doubt about America sailing in turbulent, political seas in the last three decades. We citizen-sailors have been tossed about willy-nilly by these powerful waves.

Theologian Frederick Buechner has an incredible ability to help people see the grace of God at work in their daily lives. He brings that perspective to this familiar Gospel passage when he writes,

"It seems that our ship of state has hit some stormy seas, and we humble citizen-sailors are being tossed about by the roaring wind and the rolling waves.

"Christ sleeps in the deepest selves of all of us, and whatever we do in whatever time we have left, wherever we go, may we in whatever way we can call on him as the fishermen did in their boat to come awake within us and to give us hope, to show us, each one, our way. May he be with us especially when the winds go mad and the waves run wild, as they will for all of us before we're done so that even in their midst we may find peace O we may find Christ" (C.F. Buechner, Secrets in the Dark: A Life in Sermons).

The great gift of grace we find in this Gospel story is not merely that Jesus calmed the elements, there is something even more wonderful for us as we pass

through the storms of life. As we recall the kingdom of God growing naturally as planted seeds and as the work of the Holy Spirit proceeding rapidly like the mustard seed, this same power and presence of Jesus Christ is asleep and available inside each of us.

As we confront each and every storm in our lives, we can wake again to the Jesus reality living within us, not just a power to access when needed. But Jesus Christ alive and present within us! This truth empowers us to respond as Jesus would to whatever storms that rage without and within us.

Whether we are sailing in rough water or smooth, our music, our prayers, our liturgy, our sermons, our words, and our actions in our communities, no matter where or when we are doing them, Jesus is awake and alive in us. And we don't forget that the Kingdom of God is here, now.

In the smooth sailing and the stormy seas, in our prayers and sermons and songs in church, in our words and actions in our communities, wherever we are and whatever we are doing, Christ is awake and alive in us, and the kingdom of God comes near.

Thanks be to God. Alleluia. Amen.