

“Is Your Boat Rocking?” – February 12, 2017
by Wayne J. Schneider – Credo in unum Deum

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St. Mark 4:35-41

We all know what storms look like, we have had quite a few this winter! But, there are other kinds of storms in life, episodes when our problems look humongous and our hope miniscule. Experiences where we have felt as if life itself would be swamped. Jesus’ disciples had these same encounters. Please turn to St. Mark’s gospel, chapter four, and observe how ‘the twelve disciples’ handled this storm.

When an event occurs in three of the four gospels, it means we need to sit up and take notice. This nocturnal incident on the stormy Sea of Galilee is such an event. The placement of this story in the gospel is important. It comes immediately following Jesus’ teaching on the Kingdom of God and the disciples’ part in it. St. Mark writes, “*On that day*” (the day when Jesus told the parables of the seed growing and the mustard seed), “*when evening had come,*” Jesus and his disciples boarded a small boat to cross the sea. The interval between what Jesus had just taught and ‘the crossing’ was small.

The parable of the growing seed (4:26-20) and the mustard seed, (4:30-32) are images of the reign of God. The first is a way of seeing the Kingdom of God as a growing process, as natural as when you plant your seeds in Spring. The mustard seed parable shows that the rule of God will spread like a wild bush, and cannot be held back by anything or anyone.

With this as background, St. Mark takes us off land and onto the sea; a known geography by the fisherman among the disciples. Everything is hunky-dory until a freaky storm blows in. Picture journeymen fisherman fearful and you begin to understand how terrifying the storm is. The boat starts to fill with water and Jesus is asleep! Can you imagine what the disciples were thinking? The waves are

gigantic; the wind is howling angry ghosts, lightning is strobe-flashing all over the place.

They shake Jesus awake and ask: "*HEY! Don't you even care that we are about to die!*" Well, not in those words but it was what they were thinking. Fear is what drives most of the dumb things I say and do, and, if these men are fearful now, just wait until they see what Jesus does next. Jesus stands (no small thing in that wobbly boat) and calmly says, "*Peace, be still!*" Everything ceases, and it is dead calm. I can see the disciples bug-eyed in wonder and astonishment, asking: "*What kind of man is this that he can control nature?*"

As we know, parables are layered with meaning. One way of gaining new insight is view each Biblical incident in various ways. We may, for example, go back a little in this story, and move away from the familiar images, to discover a different perspective on the 'sleeping Jesus.'

Water and the wind are used symbolically throughout Holy Scripture. And, we understand that both may be a blessing and danger. A refreshing drink of water and cooling breeze, but also a flood or hurricane that destroy entire towns. There are storms in life that are beyond the natural. Storms that threaten us come from illnesses, financial insecurity, our mistakes, or the errors of others.

We are blessed beyond belief as U.S. citizens. Someone once told me that '*I had won the Lotto when I was born an American citizen.*' And that is the truth. But, we continue to have enormous difficulties with finding the answers to the storms of cultural change, political strife, economic shifts, and racism in the sea we sail called America.

One of my patron saints, Frederick Buechner, writes beautifully about grace in our daily lives. "*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 that we may find Christ." (Buechner, *Secrets in the Dark: A Life in Sermons*).

One of the first thing God says when there is an interaction with humans, is *"Do not be afraid!"* God has to say this otherwise we would explode with panic! We are to be fearless when we face our storms because God is with us. Think Emmanuel. These storms of life do not need to paralyze "Followers of the Way;" neither is it necessary for them to control us; because, we are not alone in our boat.

The picture of grace is not just that Jesus commands nature, but that he calms our personal storms too. As God's Kingdom grows unstoppable, this same power is available to you and me, in the present, right now! This power is not only available in time of need but every time! Not just Jesus with us but Jesus present within us.

Recently, I uncovered an excellent piece of advice that I try to use when I am discouraged. I do not know it's source but I do grasp the value: *"Don't wait for your ship to come in SWIM out to meet it!"*

We have the power to react to any storm that confronts us. In smooth sailing or stormy seas, in our thoughts, words, and actions, wherever we are in whatever we are doing, Jesus is awake in us, and God's kingdom comes nearer. Alleluia. Amen.