

Is Jesus Awake in You? St. Mark 4:35-41

The three synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke all include a version of what happened on that stormy night out on Lake Galilee, so we can assume that this is an essential story. In St. Mark's gospel we need to note where in the narrative we find this story.

We discover it following Jesus' teaching on the kingdom to his disciples. "*On that day,*" following last week's two parables, "*when evening had come,*" Jesus boards a boat to get to the opposite side of Lake Galilee.

The parable of the seed that grows and the mustard seed that becomes a bush, are two symbols of God's kingdom. The first parable shows us that the Kingdom of God is a process. The parable of the mustard seed teaches us that the Kingdom, or rule, of God will grow wildly and is unstoppable. No human power will be able to contain the Kingdom.

Keeping in mind these teaching parables, the gospel of St. Mark brings us to Lake Galilee and it's environs. Note again how Jesus uses things familiar to his disciples as training tools. Jesus is now in the fishing boat with the disciples. A sudden storm occurs and the experienced fishermen in the boat are terrified.

The waters are almost over the gunwales and Jesus is asleep! No valium needed, thank you! The disciples scream, "*Do you want us to die?*" If the disciples were petrified when the boat almost sank, think of how they felt when Jesus began walking on water!

In verse 39 we find a snapshot of these trembling men in their tiny boat with the howling wind and the crashing waves. Jesus awakens and reprimands the wind and commands the waves, "*Peace! Be still!*" And their obedience produces a dead calm. It is not hard to visualize these bug-eyed men asking, "*Exactly who is this man? Even the elements obey him!*"

Like last week's parables there may be a deeper meaning in this familiar story, some new perception that promises different insight and understanding. To find this we need to focus on the sleeping Jesus onboard with scared men, in seas no Alaskan crab fisherman would gamble on.

The sea is the epicenter for St. Mark's story. It is as familiar to these men as land is to the farmer. Today we harness the power of the wind and the waves. But in this power there is danger. Tsunamis, hurricanes and typhoons often wreck havoc on people and property.

Threatening storms are familiar to each of us too: health, finances, problems of our own making, and the negative actions of others, touch us when we least expect it. These experiences happen to individuals, churches, communities, and countries. Even though each of us who, as Americans have won the "Lotto" simply by being an American, are not immune to being out of our element and shaken out of our socks.

With all of our blessings we still have difficulty dealing with problems: meteorologically, politically, economically, emotionally, or spiritually. Our ships have ridden stormy seas before and will probably do so again.

Theologian Frederick Buechner, another of my patron saints, has the wonderful ability to help people see the grace of God at work in their daily lives. Here he does so eloquently: *"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, we may find Christ"* (C.F. Buechner, *Secrets in the Dark: A Life in Sermons*).

The hidden meaning of our text is not only that the elements are controlled by Jesus, but also that he brings peace in the midst of chaos. If we look at this story from a new perspective we may see something astonishing as we face the storms of our life.

We can remember the images of the kingdom of God growing as naturally and purposefully as a planted seed sprouting and producing fruit, and of the Holy Spirit as the unstoppable and wild mustard. This identical power and presence of Jesus Christ is asleep and accessible within each of us. In the storms of our lives we can awaken to the reality of Christ always here with us, not just in times of need.

Jesus is now alive within us giving us the power to react to the furious storms raging inside and out and to serve those around us.

In the smooth sailing and in the stormy seas, in our prayers and songs in church, in our thoughts, words and service, in wherever we are and whatever we are doing, Jesus is alive and awake in us, and the kingdom of God comes near. Thanks be to God. Alleluia. Amen.