

"They that go down to the sea in ships and do business in great waters, they see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep."

Psalm 107 tells us of sailors in distress. It paints a vivid picture of a storm out in the middle of the ocean, with mountainous waves threatening to overwhelm the ship: "They mounted up to the heavens and fell back to the depths. They reeled and staggered like drunkards." It's enough to make you seasick. But then the sailors cry out to God, and God calms the waves.

The reason this Psalm was chosen for today is obvious. It goes right along with the Gospel reading. The only difference in the Gospel is that the boat is not on the ocean. Instead, it is a boat on the Sea of Galilee, or more correctly, the Lake of Galilee. But the boat carrying Jesus and his disciples is still in trouble.

Due to several mountain passes which surround the Lake of Galilee, gusts of wind often will get funneled, and they can make 6 foot waves appear on the lake, often in just a matter of minutes. Among the ranks of the disciples are a number of commercial fisherman. They know the danger they're in. Their boat is getting swamped. And in the middle of all this, Jesus is taking a nap in the back of the boat. I imagine that several of them are thinking, "Doesn't this carpenter know how serious these waves are?"

There's a quote, "If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs, it's just possible you haven't grasped the situation." In the middle of his nap, I'm sure the disciples were wondering if Jesus really knew what was going on.

Eventually the disciples could do no more. They've probably exhausted all of their possibilities. They can't row out of the way. They can't bail water any faster. So as a last resort they call out to Jesus, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

And Jesus stands up and says, "Peace. Be still." More literally he says, "Be quiet. Be muzzled." And the wind stops. And the water is calm.

With our modern, sophisticated understanding of meteorology, we might be tempted to dismiss such a miracle. But that would be unfortunate. We'd miss out on Good News. That point was clear to Mark's audience. Jesus is Lord over and above the forces of Nature. Jesus is able to still the chaotic waves of the Sea of Galilee.

The message for us is clear as well. It is true that most of us will probably never be in a life threatening storm at sea. But there is certainly storminess in all of our lives. There are forces outside of us that will certainly rock our boats, forces over which we have no control..

As certainly as the people who lived 2,000 years ago, we need someone more powerful than the forces that blow against us from the outside. We need someone more powerful than the forces within us. We're constantly in danger of being swamped, of being

overwhelmed. We also need someone to answer when we cry out. In other words, we need a Savior.

There have been times in my life when things have been out of control, and God has been there in marvelous ways.

At the same time, just because we're Christians does not mean that we are given a get out of trouble free card at our baptisms. Storms will come. Bad things will happen. We will experience pain. We won't always get what we want. I can guarantee it. We will all experience storms that threaten to overwhelm our boats. It's how we handle the storm that counts.

During the stormy times in our lives, it's tempting to go down the wrong track. It's tempting to throw back in God's face the question of the disciples in the boat: "Lord, do you not care that we're perishing?"

When we're really being hit hard by circumstances beyond our control, it's then that we often ask the really hard questions: 'Lord, are you there? Lord, do you care? Why are you allowing all of these bad things to happen to me? Why don't you do something about it?' In other words, for some reason, we think that we deserve to have things easy, and we gripe at God when there are bumps in the road.

In the OT, the wonderful book of Job deals with these very human questions. Job has lost everything: his children, his property, his health. The bulk of the book involves Job's friends coming to comfort him and talking about the reasons he's suffering. There are a number of accusations that those friends make against God. But throughout the book, Job responds with faith and patience. For 30 chapters, Job hangs in there.

But eventually Job's patience is exhausted, and he demands to know why. Job stands up like a prosecuting attorney and puts God in the witness box. Job demands an answer from God:

'Why? Why did all these bad things happened to me? What did I do to deserve such shabby treatment?'

God's answer to Job is an answer for all of us. It's not easy to hear, but it's one we must pay attention to. For 4 solid chapters at the end of Job, God answers. We read a part of God's answer this morning. God answers Job's question, God answers our questions, with questions of his own. A barrage of question after question:

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Who set the boundaries of the sea?
Can you create a horse, or a hippopotamus, or a whale?
Can you make an eagle fly?
Do you control the rain, and the snow, and the wind?
Do you cause the dawn to appear?
Can you control the movement of the stars?

Over and over, for 4 chapters, God asks Job these kinds of questions. The message is clear. Job cannot do any of these things. And of course, neither can we. God is God. We're not. God is in control of the universe. We're not. God sees the biggest of big pictures. We just catch a tiny glimpse of one small piece of the puzzle from time to time.

There are fundamental limits to our understanding. There are limits to what we can know of God's will. We cannot fully understand the ways of God any more than a cockroach can understand the finer points of nuclear physics. I don't care if you sit down with a great textbook and a wonderful power point presentation. The cockroach still won't understand nuclear physics, no matter how well you present it.

It's the same way with us. We just don't have that ability to understand everything there is to know about the universe. The answer to our human question "Why?" is "God is God, God's in charge, and we're not."

Fortunately for us, our God is a loving God. Our God does have our ultimate interests at heart. We won't fully understand why the storms of life come our way. But we can trust in someone who has power over all the forces of the universe.

In the midst of the chaos of life, the choice is always ours. We can try to take care of things on our own. We can try to row faster. We can try to bail out our own boats.

Or we can put matters into God's hands. We can say, "I don't understand why, but I'm trusting you." It's at this point that we can finally ask that God's will be done. When Jesus taught us to pray, after praising God's name, that was the first thing he told us to ask for: "Your kingdom come, your will be done."

We can cry out and complain. We can try to do things on our own. We can spin our wheels and get nowhere. Or we can come to God in trust, knowing that he loves us, knowing that he has much better things prepared for us than we can either ask for or imagine. And we can count on him to bring us safely home.

"Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,
and he delivered them from their distress.
He stilled the storm to a whisper
and quieted the waves of the sea.
Then were they glad because of the calm,
and he brought them to the harbor they were bound for."¹

¹ Ps 107:28-30