

During a solo voyage in the Indian Ocean, a veteran mariner (Robert Redford) awakes to find his vessel taking on water after a collision with a stray shipping container. With his radio and navigation equipment disabled, he sails unknowingly into a violent storm and barely escapes with his life. With any luck, the ocean currents may carry him into a shipping lane -- but, with supplies dwindling and the sharks circling, the sailor is forced to face his own mortality.

Robert Redford in "All is Lost"

Books, artifacts and movies about the Titanic continue to fuel our fascination and fear of shipwreck to this day. 1,500 people died in the ice cold waters of the North Atlantic in the early hours of April 15, 1912.

Moby Dick, the Poseidon adventure, the wreck of the Essex are all tales of seafaring disaster and survival that intrigue and .

One night, when it was dark, at time when fears are magnified, Jesus and the disciples went in a boat to the other side of the sea. While Jesus was asleep in the stern, a storm so fierce blew up that it was swamping the boat. The disciples were terrified and woke Jesus up with the news that they were going down. Didn't he care? He awoke and asked them why they were afraid—why they still didn't have any faith. Then, he quieted the wind and stilled the sea, at which point the disciples were even more terrified. The power their boat-mate and companion had just exhibited terrified them. Who was this? In the text, there was a great storm, followed by a great calm, followed by a great fear. (Our translation calls it awe, but it is more fear than awe).

"If the disciples who fished for a living think they are bound to perish in the tempest, we should trust their judgment."¹ This is no ordinary storm. This is the kind of storm from which fisherman don't come home, and the disciples have already figured out how it's going to end. They're convinced they're all going to die. So, if the people closet to Jesus don't get it, how can we expect ourselves to do any better?

How many of us often wonder if our faith is strong enough to carry us through the storms of life? How often do we believe we are going down in the storm? I

¹ http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3677

know I sometimes do. How often do we despair when we learn of really hard things that disappoint and embarrass us?

When we heard that immigrant children were being separated from their parents at the border and that our president claimed he had no power to do anything about it, what could we have done? Some in the tech industry demanded action by protesting from within their own companies, putting economic pressure on the government agencies who used their products. Others, both democrats and republicans, including the president's own wife, spoke out making it clear that they found the policy reprehensible. Was God's grace at work in everything that led up to the reversal of the policy and in the ongoing stilling of the storm?

Power to still the storm in the Old Testament is attributed to God.

Ps 65:7

You still the roaring of the seas, *
the roaring of their waves,
and the clamor of the peoples.

106:9

He rebuked the Red Sea, and it dried up, *
and he led them through the deep as through a desert.

107:23-30

23 Some went down to the sea in ships *
and plied their trade in deep waters;

24 They beheld the works of the LORD *
and his wonders in the deep.

25 Then he spoke, and a stormy wind arose, *
which tossed high the waves of the sea.

26 They mounted up to the heavens and fell back to the depths; *
their hearts melted because of their peril.

27 They reeled and staggered like drunkards *
and were at their wits' end.

28 Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, *
and he delivered them from their distress.

29 He stilled the storm to a whisper *
and quieted the waves of the sea.

30 Then were they glad because of the calm, *
and he brought them to the harbor they were bound for.

“One of the most vivid images of chaos in ancient literature is a storm at sea.”
In a sea storm, everything is moving: you, the deck, the mast, the stern. “The
boat creaks and cracks, giving voice to the real possibility that it may splinter
at any point...This is chaos. Everything is caught up in it, nothing is secure”²

Psalms 65 and 107 proclaim that the God of Israel brings peace to all
circumstances, including distress among human communities.

In Mark's story about the storm, he shifts the focus from the disciples' struggle
of faith to Jesus and his authority. This is the good news. Mark's gospel is about
Jesus coming to free people from the forces of chaos and evil. We see God's
power in Jesus as he overcomes the dark and destructive powers in the world,
symbolized by the fury of nature in the storm. Jesus stills all kinds of storms—
personal and political. Who among us has never experienced the fear that
arises whenever we are caught up in chaos. We know what it's like to be in all
kinds of storms and to cry for God for help and to doubt that help will come.

Bruce Epperly writes that “The storms we face involve budget and
membership. We fear what will happen to us; we wonder if our congregation

² <https://politicaltheology.com/the-politics-of-chaos-mark-435-41/>

will survive the changes in the North American spiritual landscape and its own aging demographics.”³

The storm and the ensuing calm shows us that the disciples’ ultimate security and source of strength to carry on has nothing to do with the size of their faith. It resides in Jesus. In other words, Jesus doesn’t rescue us according to the measure of *our faith*. Jesus rescues us according to the measure of *his love*, which is all-powerful and never-ending.

In our lives and at worship, we want to be in the presence of this all-loving and powerful God—and, at the same time, we don’t. We know that if we surrender to his love, much will be required of us—stuff that might be beyond our human capacity to master, and so we, too, are terrified. Annie Dillard writes about worship: “we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense, or the waking god may draw us to where we can never return.”⁴

Yet, time and time again, Jesus says, “Don’t be afraid”. Time and again he assures us that none of our feelings of inadequacy, failure, or sin will disqualify us from his love. When he asks us to come and follow him as his disciples, he is asking for all of us—the parts of which we are proud and the parts about which we are ashamed. He takes us as a whole and loves us into wholeness.

“When the disciples remember Jesus is in the boat, they are still fearful, but they are no longer hopeless. They know that Jesus’ love and power are greater than their fear. Their attitude toward the storm begins to change: yes, this is a difficult situation and we are in trouble, but God is with us and we’re going to make it.”⁵

The storm is an honest representation of the resistance we encounter in our journey as disciples of Jesus Christ—inner resistance and outer resistance. Throughout the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is teaching his disciples that the

³ <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/livingaholyadventure/2018/06/the-adventurous-lectionary-the-fifth-sunday-after-pentecost-june-24-2018/>

⁴ <https://paulvanderklay.me/2012/06/07/annie-dillard-quote-on-crash-helmets-needed-for-worship/>

⁵ <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/livingaholyadventure/2018/06/the-adventurous-lectionary-the-fifth-sunday-after-pentecost-june-24-2018/>

blessings of life with him require a total commitment to the ways of the Kingdom over and against the ways of the world. We have to choose. We can't have it both ways. Either we choose what God wills for us or we choose what we will for ourselves. Our way leads to the worship of self-sufficiency, spiritual drought, scarcity, and death. The way of the Kingdom leads to trust in God's goodness and to the abundance of blessings for ourselves and for others.

There is no scarcity in God's Kingdom. God's Kingdom is a kingdom of abundance. There is no shortage of whatever we need to get through whatever storm we are facing—the ravages of systemic racial injustice, of mass incarceration, of racial profiling, of the ever-widening income gap, of failed relationships, or of any kind of personal regret or failure. God's grace can get us through it all. In the end, this Gospel story isn't so much about the miraculous stilling of the storm as it is about the disciples' discovery of the power of Jesus' love over the powers of darkness, sin, and death. Its message to us is that, whenever we might be wishing for a miracle, what we really need to do is to immerse ourselves in God's life-giving Word so that we can recognize Jesus in the midst of whatever storm we are facing and let the view from the Kingdom of God shape the way we see ourselves and our place in the world. Amen.