

A Tempest in a Teapot!

Mark 4: 35-41

The year was 1881, and at the Republican convention Civil War General Ulysses S Grant and two other prominent men failed to receive enough votes to secure the party's nomination for president. As a result, a man from Moreland Hills Ohio named James A Garfield was chosen as a compromise nominee and would later be elected our nation's 20th president. Once a major general in the Union Army, he was well known as an advocate for civil rights and education, as well as for appointing several African Americans to prominent positions in the federal government.

He was in office for less than four months when he was shot in a train station in Washington DC. For several weeks he hovered between life and death, and our nation rediscovered an old hymn entitled Master, the Tempest is Raging. It was sung from coast to coast, over and over, and it brought comfort to a people still struggling to heal from the wounds caused by the Civil War.

The hymn was written by a woman named Mary Ann Baker, who was no stranger to suffering and heartache herself. A devout Baptist, her faith was shattered as she lost her parents and only brother to an unknown disease. Eventually she would become bedridden with that same disease herself, and it was during that dark period in her life that she said this: I have always tried to believe on Christ, and give the Master a consecrated life, but this is more than I can bear. What have I done to deserve this? God does not care for me or mine.

But gradually peace and grace overcame her anger and doubt, and at the request of her pastor she wrote the hymn that would later help our nation grieve the loss of her leader. The words were based on the text that we just heard. That passage contains one of the most troubling questions in all the Scriptures. Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing? How can you sleep through this storm that seems certain to take our lives?

It is a question worth pondering, for when we are we are afraid or in suffering and anguish, we will be tempted to question God's goodness. It is a natural response to an unnatural condition. By nature, we are all fallen people, and it is our sin nature that prompts us to doubt God. It is part of our DNA.

As with human sin, human fear is also quite universal. There will be times when all of us will be afraid of something, whether it is a monster we think is living under our bed or whether the church we love will continue to be there for us on Sunday morning. Fear had overcome the disciples that night. It must have been some storm, for they were afraid and truly fearing for their lives. Mathew, Luke and Mark all record for us the events that happened on the Sea of Galilee that frightful night, and it is remarkable how all three writers' report that the question posed to Jesus in verse 38 was asked collectively. This was not one of those occasions where they huddled amongst themselves to decide who would be best to approach Jesus with their concerns. It was not one disciple that asked the question of Jesus but all of them.

In desperation they finally wake Jesus up and instead of asking for His help with the sails or the oars or the bailing bucket they do something incredible. They question His love for them. Do you not care that we are perishing? The way they asked the question must have cut like a knife through Jesus heart. They weren't taking any chances and played the best card they had right off the bat. One of the best ways to manipulate someone into giving us something we want is to question their love for us. Perhaps you have been in that situation before. If you truly loved me, you would do this, or you wouldn't do that. Love can be a powerful wedge.

Lest we be too critical of the disciples consider things from their perspective. First, it probably occurred to them that it was Jesus that got them into this predicament to begin with. The Sea of Galilee was known for its storms and usually boats would sail around the edges of the lake in case they had to get to shore quickly if a storm kicked up. But on this occasion Jesus told them to cross over to the other side.

And because it was night time when they left it would be even more dangerous. And then to make matters even worse, worn out from teaching and preaching He decided to take a nap on one of the life vests in the back of the boat. It sure looked like Jesus didn't have much consideration for their safety or His own. In their eyes He should have known better.

The truth is He did know better. Jesus knew exactly what He was doing and knew exactly what the disciples needed. He was oblivious to the storm and commotion surrounding Him until they woke Him from His nap. He stands up and proceeds to speak a few words to the winds and the sea. Enough already! Peace! Be still. In other words, shush! Be thou gagged. Immediately the wind ceased and there was great calm, at least outside of the boat.

And then He asks a question of the disciples that likely cut right to their own hearts. Enough already! How is it that you have no faith? Or perhaps even why did you wait so long to come to me with your fears? Their response was not one of remorse or shame but one of awe- holy fear. Who can this be that even the wind and the seas obey Him? This was no ordinary man. Jesus turned the stormy waters into holy waters. Their fear of losing their lives was replaced with holy fear and awe of being in the presence of Jesus Christ, the One who created the seas they were sailing on and the wind that tossed their boat about like a cork in the ocean.

Here is what I would like us to grasp this morning: when weathering the storms of life, **it's not why we doubt God that matters but rather how we choose to deal with those doubts when they do arise.** Those who were in the boat with Jesus that night on the Sea of Galilee eventually discovered they had no reason to fear for their lives because Jesus was there with them. They learned that Jesus knew the storm-in their case it was a physical storm-the wind and the rain- better than they did. I suggest to you that Jesus also knows all about the storms raging in our own lives as well, whether they be small or large. **He is patiently waiting for us to say enough already and come to Him to find peace,** just as the early disciples did that night in Galilee.

Fear is not one of the spiritual disciplines we traditionally think about as faith building, but it can be most powerful. A bit of holy fear can be a good thing. Jeremiah 5:21-22 So when the storms of life threaten to sink our own boats, whatever they might be, remember that Jesus will be there weathering the storm alongside of us, patiently waiting for us to say enough already and come to Him for help. There is no doubt He will calm the storm at exactly the right time. There is nothing to be afraid of because He is right here with us. Amen

1. Master, the tempest is raging!
The billows are tossing high!
The sky is o'ershadowed with blackness,
No shelter or help is nigh;
Carest Thou not that we perish?
How canst Thou lie asleep,
When each moment so madly is threat'ning
A grave in the angry deep?
 - Refrain:
The winds and the waves shall obey Thy will,
Peace, be still!
Whether the wrath of the storm-tossed sea,
Or demons or men, or whatever it be,
No waters can swallow the ship where lies
The Master of ocean, and earth, and skies;
They all shall sweetly obey Thy will,
Peace, be still! Peace, be still!
They all shall sweetly obey Thy will,
Peace, peace, be still!
2. Master, with anguish of spirit
I bow in my grief today;
The depths of my sad heart are troubled—
Oh, waken and save, I pray!
Torrents of sin and of anguish
Sweep o'er my sinking soul;
And I perish! I perish! dear Master—
Oh, hasten, and take control.
3. Master, the terror is over,
The elements sweetly rest;
Earth's sun in the calm lake is mirrored,
And heaven's within my breast;
Linger, O blessed Redeemer!
Leave me alone no more;
And with joy I shall make the blest harbor,
And rest on the blissful shore.