

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

Fourth Sunday After Pentecost

June 20, 2021

Psalm 124:1–8 (ESV):

1 If it had not been the LORD who was on our side—
let Israel now say—
2 if it had not been the LORD who was on our side
when people rose up against us,
3 then they would have swallowed us up alive,
when their anger was kindled against us;
4 then the flood would have swept us away,
the torrent would have gone over us;
5 then over us would have gone
the raging waters.

6 Blessed be the LORD,
who has not given us
as prey to their teeth!

7 We have escaped like a bird
from the snare of the fowlers;
the snare is broken,
and we have escaped!

8 Our help is in the name of the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.

First Reading: Job 38:1–11 (ESV):

The Lord Answers Job

38 Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said:

2 “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?

3 Dress for action like a man;

I will question you, and you make it known to me.

4 “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell me, if you have understanding.

5 Who determined its measurements—surely you know!
Or who stretched the line upon it?

6 On what were its bases sunk,
or who laid its cornerstone,

7 when the morning stars sang together
and all the sons of God shouted for joy?

8 “Or who shut in the sea with doors
when it burst out from the womb,

9 when I made clouds its garment
and thick darkness its swaddling band,

10 and prescribed limits for it
and set bars and doors,

11 and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther,
and here shall your proud waves be stayed’?

EPISTLE: 2 Corinthians 6:1–13 (ESV):

Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. 2 For he says,

“In a favorable time I listened to you,
and in a day of salvation I have helped you.”

Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. 3 We put no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, 4 but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, 5 beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; 6 by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; 7 by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and

for the left; 8 through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; 9 as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; 10 as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.

11 We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide open. 12 You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. 13 In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also.

THE GOSPEL - Mark 4:35–41 (ESV):

Mark 4:35–41 (ESV):

35 On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “**Let us go across to the other side.**” **36** And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. **37** And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. **38** But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” **39** And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “**Peace! Be still!**” And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. **40** He said to them, “**Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?**” **41** And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

Sermon 25 – Fourth Sunday After Pentecost

“Animal Death Storms”

Mark 4:35-41

Dear friends,

I'm trying to get out of Mark, I really am, but Mark keeps pulling me back in. This Gospel lesson is a continuation and a culmination of all the things Jesus has done the past couple weeks. Jesus has shown Himself to be odd, He has demonstrated that He is the Word of God and that the Word of God is like a small seed that sprouts big things. Now

Jesus will show His power and His goal as the Word of God. Ok, Jesus has proved who He is, but why is He what He is? What can we learn from this? This is what we'll attempt to cover here.

This scene starts at the edge of the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus has been teaching and preaching by boat. Remember everything Jesus has said so far, He has confronted the scribes and the Pharisees who have rejected Him, they've called Him Satan after all, and that is about as rejection as rejection gets when it comes to God. He has spoken extensively in parables about the kingdom of God and how it works and what it is. He has talked about Himself as someone who is here to bind up Satan, to lock up Satan, and steal the people that belong to Satan. After all of this, Jesus is about ready to weigh anchor and head out, which is the first thing He says in the reading. Why is this important? Right now, as He is speaking, Jesus is on the west side of the Sea of Galilee, which was largely Jewish territory. He's shipping out now and is going to head to the east side of the Sea of Galilee, which is Gentile territory. So, Jesus has worked among His people the Jews, been rather emphatically rejected by them, and now He's heading out. He's leaving the Jews for a time to go to the rest of the peoples, the Gentiles, to do exactly what He said He would do. He is going there to free souls from sin and the devil. He wants to do it for Israel, but Israel wouldn't accept that Jesus was the Son of God, so He is off. When Jesus gets rejected He goes somewhere else. That's the pattern in many of the Gospels. The sea of Galilee is rather stormy, and those storms can come up out of nowhere, a well documented weather pattern of the region. **“35 On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” 36 And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. 37 And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling.”**

The words used here can be rather interesting. In verse 37, where you have windstorm, Mark uses the word *anemos*, where we get our word for animal. This storm

is like a living thing, it is violent and tearing at the boat, it is an animal of a storm trying to eat them. The boat is already filling, which means they're about ten minutes away from drowning. So why does Mark present this? What does it all mean?

Is this a metaphor for the storms of life, how life can get unexpected and scary but Jesus can take care of it? Sure, it is, you could definitely say that, but I want see what else we can learn from this. That's been done to death, so how else can understand it? **“38 But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”** Jesus is so inhumanly chill he can sleep through an animal storm, which is quite funny when you think about it, but there is actually a weird parallel going on here that I think is worth keeping in mind. You have a journey across the sea. You have a big storm. You have someone sleeping through the storm, being awakened by the crew who think that person doesn't care because they aren't helping. Each one of these things happens in the story of Jonah as well, down to the smallest detail. Remember, the whole point of Jonah is that he had to basically die, to sacrifice himself, in order to be God's prophet. Jesus must sacrifice Himself to be our Savior, and in that we have our connection, and this is why Jesus seems to identify so strongly with Jonah. He talks a lot about the sign of Jonah, three days dead then rising again to do God's work.

I love the question of those in the boat. Do you not care that we are perishing? We're dying, Jesus, don't you care? It is the question of sinners, whether they die tonight, tomorrow, or in years and years. God, don't you care that we're dying? Why is this such an irony? Because God cares about nothing more than that. In fact, God cares about us dying so much that He is willing to do all sorts of crazy things while we're living, and is willing to put us through all kinds of trial and frustration. The disciples think Jesus doesn't care because He's asleep and the boat is starting to sink. That is catastrophically short-sighted and there is no other word to best describe sinners in this passage. We are so short-sighted.

Do you not care that we are perishing? Sinners have been accusing God of this from the very beginning, many of them faithful Christian people, faithful Jews, have cried out to God that He cares not for their troubles or their deaths. Job spends thirty chapters doing this, and our Old Testament lesson is God's response to it. Elijah did it after being threatened with death. Jeremiah did it repeatedly. Now the disciples are doing it. We see what's in front of us, we see what we can see, even when we can see more, and I like to think that I can see more, disaster is disaster and its out of our control and we wonder what could possibly happen or how God could possibly pull it off, even when He does all the time throughout history. Death forces us to reckon with who we are, we are not god, we are sinners instead, and as sinners we fear death, and we mistrust God, and we want to make sure it never touches us.

God cares about our dying more than He cares about anything else. He cares about how we die, because Jesus is there, in this boat, to do something about that. Not only that, He is there to illustrate something about that. Mark shows us that Jesus is the Son of God, Mark shows us that Jesus the Word of God here to bring us to faith. Finally, Mark shows us that the reason the Son of God comes down to earth, and the reason the Word of God speaks to us to give us faith, is so that He might overcome death for us. Jesus cares about the fact these people are about to die, He cares about the fact that YOU are about to die, so much that He is in this boat with us. He is living with us, walking with us, and soon He will go to die with us. What Jesus doesn't seem to care about is the immediate danger. The storm. Jesus doesn't give a hoot about the storm, His sleeping is such a display of contempt that I absolutely love. You want to insult something that's threatening you? Go to sleep. The ultimate act of defiance in the face of danger is not courage but indifference. Jesus isn't heroically facing the storm, bailing out the boat. Jesus treats this storm like it isn't even there. To Jesus, it might as well not be. He doesn't care about that storm because Jesus knows how He will die, Jesus knows that the storm isn't the problem. Death itself, death as a concept, is the problem.

It is the same for us. You have faced many dangers in your life, dangers either to your physical health, to your friends and family, or emotional dangers, the threat of great suffering and pain or what have you. All of these were genuine threats, actual problems, and that's what you see and that's fine. What Jesus sees, however, is the root of all those problems, which is death. You wouldn't be afraid of physical danger if it couldn't hurt you. If you couldn't die, you wouldn't be worried about it, right? Jesus cares about the inevitability of death. You might evade danger for 80 years by God's grace but you'll still die. That's what Jesus is here to address.

This is a story of resurrection. It's not about trusting Jesus to get you through the storms of life, though He will, it is about trusting that Jesus has gotten you through the worst storm of all, the storms of death. Look at how Jesus deals with this, and marvel: **“39 And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.”** Jesus is actually quite rude to the storm, telling it to be muzzled. Put something over your mouth so you can't make noise. This is not something you say to people, but Jesus says it to the storm, and Jesus also says this to the demons He encounters. He treats the storm like a demon, telling it to be quiet and cut it out. Why is He doing this, and what does this have to do with death?

If Jesus is the Word of God, He is the Word of God who can speak things into happening. He shows us this. This is the Word of God who can speak and rid people of disease and genetic defects. This is the Word of God who can speak and quiet the demons. This is the Word of God who can speak and change the world itself. So what does this Word of God speak? He speaks to you. He tells you He loves you. He tells you He is here to shed His blood for your sins. He tells you that God hasn't abandoned you, isn't leaving you, and does care about your death. He even cares about your life because He is that gracious. Jesus is flexing here, but He's not doing it for His ego, He's doing it for our comfort. The God that speaks the storm still can speak you out of your graves. When God speaks, life comes out of death, just like disease comes out. That's what He's showing you.

Danger is just the mechanism, danger isn't the problem. The earthquakes, the storms, the droughts, and the fires don't want to kill you. A virus doesn't want to kill you. Even a gun or a knife doesn't want to kill you. You don't fear those things. You fear the one who's holding the gun, you fear the one who commands the storms, you fear the one who makes human physiology vulnerable to pathogens. That is to say, you fear God. That's what the disciples do. **“40 He said to them, “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?” 41 And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”**

The fact that you die is the problem. That is the reason you fear. That is the reason we fear God and all the things God can possibly do to us. That's why we sometimes get afraid in this life. It all comes down to death. Yet, in His life, Jesus shows us exactly what He intends to do with death. He intends to break us free from its grip so that we don't have to fear it. Jesus isn't, because He knows when His time will come to die. We don't need to either, because we know that when it is our time to die, Jesus can call us out of death and into eternal life. His Word calmed the storm, kicked out demons, and healed disease. For you, His Word will call you out of the grave and into a life that is real for you right now, a life of true colors, with actual joy and actual relief because you know that no matter how it ends, it all ends the same way. Not in the emptiness of the grave, the separation from everyone we love, no. For Christians, our life ends and we greet the face of Jesus Christ.

Jonah had to go down to the deep before he could be spat out to life. Jesus went down, like Jonah, to the deep, and the deep spat Him out, because death couldn't hold Him, and that is a permanent truth for you and me. Death will not hold us either. It will spit us out, because we taste like Jesus, and death and the devil cannot stand against Jesus. Nothing in this world or the next can resist Jesus' Word when He says, come to me, my child, come and rest at my side.

Amen