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Mark 4:35-41

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6/20/2021 Fourth Sunday after Pentecost – Ord. 12 Year B Mark 4:35-41

Jesus stills a storm while on a boat at night with his disciples in Mark 4:35-41. Does it sound like just another miracle story? Well, it's not.

We start by remembering the context of Mark 4. Until now, Mark's readers have been working through parable after parable about sowing and seeds. Yet Mark is not about giving agriculture lessons. Mark interprets the work of the Word and the seed as a mystery that pertains to the apocalyptic Kingdom of God. Ever since Mark 1:14-15 Jesus has been preaching the gospel of God and the coming of the Kingdom that brings with it repentance and belief in the good news. The seeds are Mark's apocalyptic way of describing a divine reign that is sure to be coming and will grow and spread like a mustard seed.

We would be wise, therefore, to keep our apocalyptic glasses on as we read about Jesus' trip on the boat and the stilling of the storm. This is not just another boat ride, but the apocalyptic boat ride from hell. This is not just another miracle either, but an apocalyptic revelation of Jesus' identity.

On the one hand this boat ride from hell means that the trouble the disciples are facing on the boat is not just existential (the storms of life, as it were), but *cosmic*. Like most apocalypses, Mark's Gospel sees the trouble Jesus faces as cosmic in scope. As if to underline this fact, Jesus faces down the storm not with personal bromides (you have to face your fears, friends), but *silences* the storm and *rebukes* it (4:39). Those two verbs are exorcism words common to the rest of Jesus' Kingdom ministry in Mark 1-3. The storm in 4:35-41 is cosmic, demonic, and worthy

of Jesus' scaled up efforts. As strange as it sounds, Jesus is not offering therapy for our fears but an exorcism for a world out of whack.

On the other hand, this apocalyptic revelation means that the point of the boat miracle should be a disclosure. Apocalypse means "revelation" and so this stilling of the storm should tell us something more. The focus here, however, is not the mysterious Kingdom of God, but mysterious Jesus himself. The fact that Jesus stills the storm with a word of exorcistic rebuke also tells us something about him. The way there is a little difficult. In the midst of the tossing waves of the storm the disciples refer to Jesus as "Teacher" (Mark 4:38). After witnessing the stilling of the storm, all the disciples have are deep awe (feared a great fear, says the Greek in 4:41) and questions. Who is this? Who is the one whom even wind and sea obey? Discerning readers of Mark know that the disciples are slow learners and that the outsiders are usually the ones to confess faith. Here, like the readers at the conclusion of Mark's Gospel in 16:8, it is left up to the readers to discern who Jesus is when his own disciples fall short or fail. This Jesus, who was "just as he was" in the boat, was way more than ordinary. He was in his weakness a disclosure, a revelation, an apocalypse of the living God among us. Or as Mark puts it in the first verse of chapter one: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God."

Again, context is everything with Mark. Mark's Gospel is committed to writing about the time of the destruction of the Temple around 70 CE. There are storms and there are storms. But this one is huge. The center of worship is destroyed; the cultural and religious center of the people no longer holds. Identities among Jewish Christians and other Jewish groups are all in play—and at a time when the tide of gentiles is rising. In the midst of all this chaos when the world as known is ending, here this Jesus is revealed not as one more therapist or miracle worker

but as a revelation of God's extraordinary cosmic purpose in the person of this ordinary Jesus, "just as he was" (4:36) and even amenable like you and me to a good nap (4:38).

As we interpret the revelatory gospel in this apocalyptic moment, we can't just turn to our personal therapeutics of faith. More is at stake and the wound is far deeper than just me, my superego, and my id. This wound reflects a kind of cultural trauma, a displacement that asks deep questions that touch on our life together and the shared forces that threaten to upend us all. Please note that the disciples were all in a boat, a beautiful symbol of the church that stands to this day. Even in churches being emptied out by COVID-19 you can find in their ceilings looking like bottom of a boat. Churches often even call their main sections a nave, a reminder of their shared maritime context. It's not just me; we *disciples as a group* are on the boat ride from hell.

But before we constrict our ecclesiologies too tightly around this text, it is sometimes important to remember that we are not the only ones floating together on the stormy sea. In a passing comment at the end of v. 36 Mark notes that "Other boats were with him." Whatever terrors and revelations that await us in this apocalyptic boat ride and mysterious epiphany of Jesus, it's good to know that other boats are there, too. And perhaps as we consider the intersectional nature of suffering in a cultural traumatic moment, it is good to note that though we are in the same storm, we are not necessarily in the same boat.

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