

JUST AS I AM; JUST AS HE IS

Sermon, June 20, 2021

Father's Day

Texts: II Corinthians 6:1-13; Mark 4:35-41

Six Father's Days ago I told you about a Pastor Ritter who once preached on this short passage from Mark on Father's Day Sunday. He later reported every woman who walked into the sanctuary that morning and read the sermon title in the bulletin was convinced he was going to preach about her husband. The sermon title? *"SOME MEN CAN SLEEP THROUGH ANYTHING."* I also told you the Father's Day story about the first grade teacher taking her pupils on a field trip to the zoo. Each child was given a turn guessing the names of the various animals. The camel, lion, giraffe, bear, and elephant all were named correctly. Then it was one little boy's turn. The teacher pointed to a deer and asked him what it was. He hesitated; he had never seen a deer. So the teacher tried to lovingly prompt him, *"Just think of the special name your mommy calls your daddy at home."* The boy brightened up: *"So that's what a baboon looks like!"*

On a more serious note, I like how William Barclay once referred to this passage. Dr. Barclay was a Scotsman, Presbyterian scholar, author and theologian; I often make use of his writings, especially his masterful and eloquent prayers. William Barclay was also a father, a dad. His life was devastated when his only daughter (then 21) and her fiancé were both drowned in a boating accident just days before their wedding. In commenting on our Gospel lesson not long after this tragedy, Dr. Barclay said: *"I am not so concerned as to whether Jesus stilled the tempest on the sea. What I do know is He stilled the tempest in my heart."* In his autobiography, he wrote, *"God did not stop that accident at sea, but He did still the storm in my own heart so that somehow my wife and I came through that terrible time still on our own two feet."*

I don't have to tell you that the storms and the crises of life will come. Just this week, families in our church had their boats rocked. Two of our members lost their fathers (*Tom Harrop on Thursday, Wendy Petrucci on Friday*). We also had the funeral yesterday of Carole Geldard, who passed away Monday morning. It was Father's Day six years the Porcaro family had their boat severely rocked; as many of you may remember, Charles was in worship with us that Father's Day; nobody could know it would be his last Sunday with us ... at 3:00 AM the next morning, he was stricken with a massive heart attack. We pray that Jesus may help calm the storms certainly rocking so many of our lives and our loved one's lives this Father's Day. I'd like to read some lyrics from the first anthem:

*When the world that I've been living in collapses at my feet,
When my life is shattered and torn;
Though I'm wind-swept and battered I will cling to His cross
And find peace in the midst of my storm. :
There is peace in the midst of my storm-tossed life;
There's an Anchor, there's a Rock to cast my faith upon.
Jesus rides in my vessel so I'll fear no alarm;
He gives me peace in the midst of my storm.*

Mark's Gospel was, in large part, believed by many scholars to be a record the disciple Peter more or less dictated to his young friend, John Mark; some have argued it probably should be called more properly the Gospel according to Peter. Although this Gospel is otherwise short and sparing of detail, it does contain several distinct additional details not found in the other Gospel accounts of the same stories, details someone like Peter would be in a position to notice. For example, this same story of the storm at sea is also told in Matthew 8 and Luke 8, but unique to Mark's account are several little "extras" only someone on board the boat might report: for example, the fact that it was evening, the detail that there were other boats there when Jesus came on board their boat, the observation that not only was Jesus sleeping, but He was sleeping in the stern, with His head on a cushion. There is another short yet remarkable comment found only in Mark's account, a small phrase I think Peter intentionally wanted Mark to include. Peter told Mark they took Jesus on board *"just as He was" ... they took Jesus just as He was.*

Why did he say that? Perhaps it was his way of saying, *"We took Him on board just as He was, just as we thought Him to be."* There is a hint of casualness about the way they "accepted Jesus" into their boat. *"We took him on board without a second thought because we thought we knew Him; we thought we understood Him."* Yet, by the end of the account, they were trembling before Jesus in fear and asking each other: *"Who is this Jesus we took? For even the winds and the sea obey Him!"*

Note that it was Jesus who led them into the difficulty. It was Jesus who directed them to set sail, and then the disciples met with the storm. So they were following their Lord's bidding, they were doing their Lord's will as best they knew how, they were doing what they were supposed to be doing, they were faithfully doing their duty, yet they wound up right in the difficulty and darkness of the storm. They learned the hard way and in a hurry that Jesus never promises His disciples storm free lives if they follow His bidding! Then as now, He calls His disciples to follow where He leads, to go where He sends, to do what He would have us do ... **Come what may.** Then as now He calls His disciples to trust His perfect wisdom, His direction. The disciples were to go on to learn that this One they took *"just as He was"* was so much more than they thought He would be, and that He was about to lead

them in ways far beyond anything they could ever anticipate. And not only was Jesus so much more than they thought He could be, Jesus would eventually make them, grow them, change them into people they never thought *they* could be! Most of us know the hymn, "Just as I am, without one plea"; that hymn acknowledges that Jesus loves us just as we are when we come to Him in faith. And yes, Jesus does love us just the way we are, but He also loves us too much to let us stay that way!) Jesus was determined to do His disciples good. Jesus loved them even more than they loved themselves ... and by the way, if you don't understand that about Jesus, that He loves you even more than you love yourself, you really don't know or understand Him at all. Growth, character, strength, maturity, integrity all come through endurance and making it through life's storms ... and thus Jesus led them into the teeth of the storm and into the heart of the crisis.

Earnest Hemingway wrote in A Farewell to Arms: "*The world breaks everyone, and afterward, some are stronger at the broken places.*" That's "some," not everyone ... to mix metaphors, sometimes the world's storms break some people who stay broken and weakened, but through the grace of Jesus Christ it doesn't have to be that way! Another sort of related Earnest Hemingway quote: "*As you get older it is harder to have heroes, but it is sort of necessary.*" It's precisely when the storms of life break you that you show your mettle, what you are really made of, the quality of your faith and character. I agree with Mr. Hemingway, the older I get, the more I realize how hard it is to find consistently genuine good role models ... true heroes who faithfully and consistently endure through the storms and brokenness and temptations and difficulties of life; too many I've once looked up to are no longer on the pedestals I once had them on. But I can still say this with certainty: JESUS never fails. Be sure He's on board your life's boat.

Back to our Gospel story. Then, of course, Jesus not only led them into the storm, the amazing thing to the disciples was that Jesus actually *fell asleep* in the storm. He put his head down on a pillow and went to sleep! These strong, seasoned fishermen awaken Jesus, crying out: "*Teacher, don't you care if we drown?*" Now, these disciples were experienced fishermen. I *don't* think they are panicking. They had been caught in storms before; they knew what needed to be done, they knew everyone had to chip in, here. Personally, I think they are a bit angry with Jesus here! Maybe they think Jesus is not pulling His weight. It is true, as Pastor Ritter said, that some men can sleep through anything, but it is also true that most men have learned how to FAKE sleeping through anything in order to avoid having to DO anything! I've been married; I've been there, I confess! The baby starts crying and you fake snoring so your wife will get up, or you pretend not to hear the strange noise downstairs. All men, including fishermen, know this male trait all too well, so just maybe they think that's what Jesus is doing! They find Him inexplicably asleep in this loud, crashing, violent storm and blurt out, "*Teacher, don't you care if we drown?!*" In other words, "*How can you sleep through this? Get up and help us! Grab an oar Jesus; grab a bucket, do SOMETHING. Help us out here! We need all hands on deck!!*" "TEACHER, DON'T YOU CARE IF WE DROWN?"

Of course He cared. He was in the *world* because He cared. He was in the *boat* because He cared. He was *destined for the cross* because He cared. Of course He cared! It was probably Peter saying these words, because this question is found only in this gospel, "*Teacher, don't you care if we drown?*" It was the same Peter who would later in the upper room take Jesus aside and say, "*Lord, I don't understand what you are doing.*" And Jesus had to reply in so many words, "*Peter, you do not now understand, but afterwards ... afterwards, you will understand.*" Seventeenth century Puritan John Flavill once wrote, "*The providences of God are like Hebrew words ... they can be read only BACKWARDS.*" It is usually the case that we discern the will of God working His perfect plan as we look back over our lives and see His divine hand working in how things all came together. Jesus says to Peter and He says to all of us going through any storm of crisis, "*You do not now understand. But afterwards, you will.*"

Jesus then rose in the boat and displayed to them His divine majesty. What a sight it must have been to see Him arise and say to the wind, "QUIET!" and to the waves, "BE STILL!" and to witness the almost instantaneous calm that came. With His divine power He gave to His wondering disciples peace in the midst of the storm. Only Jesus could do it. That, by the way, is a picture of what Jesus can do in all our storms if we have taken Him on board the "ship" of our lives. And it is also a picture of what He will do at the end of the age, when He comes again with majesty and power ... He will arise from His heavenly repose and speak to this world that is so storm-tossed, "QUIET! BE STILL!" As the Bible tells us in the final chapters of Revelation, at that point there will be no more sea, no more crises, no more threat, no more storms, no more disease, no more death to mar our fellowship with Christ or with each other, and God Himself will come to wipe away every tear from our eyes.

Again, I don't have to tell you that the storms and the crises of life will come. Having Jesus "on board" does not guarantee safe, storm-free lives, but it does mean we do not have to be in the storm all by ourselves ... the soul that has "the Lord on board" may experience real peace in the midst of the storm's fury. Be sure to take Jesus just as He is ... not as you think He should be, not even as you may want Him to be ... but just as He is.

Make certain He is on board in your heart.