

012421 Mark 4:35-41

*Mark's Epiphany series: "Lord of Storms"*

Storms: thunderstorms, snow storms, ice storms, hail storms, tornadoes, hurricanes, nor'easters, blizzards. Every year, without fail, many properties are damaged, jobs are lost, homes are destroyed, and lives are lost because of storms in our nation, in our world.

Most of us dread storms. We try to avoid them. But some people make their living off of storms. And I don't want to pick on the Weather Channel team, but don't they seem to take a rather distorted delight in their storm predictions and storm chases? Here's storm legend Jim Cantore, reacting calmly to the phenomenon of thundersnow. (*play video*)

And perhaps you saw this next one from 2018. Another Weather Channel reporter, Mike Sidell, was braving the fierce winds of Hurricane Florence in Wilmington, North Carolina. (*play video*)

Well, Jim and Mike may love analyzing, forecasting, reporting, experiencing, and occasionally exaggerating storms. But no one at the Weather Channel, no one at AccuWeather, no one at the National Weather Service, can control storms. Not even Al Roker can claim to be "Lord of Storms."

Our story from the Gospel of Mark today is about a storm. More precisely, our story is about the one and only person who can control storms. Mark is giving us his picture of Jesus. If you've been reading along with us the past couple of weeks, Mark's already shown Jesus healing the sick, casting out demons, teaching the crowds, picking out disciples, shaking up religious authorities. And today, Mark shows us Jesus commanding a storm.

The twelve disciples are crossing the Sea of Galilee in a boat with Jesus. He's had a long day. So Jesus takes a little rest in the stern. Then a pop-up storm hits them suddenly. The disciples are frightened. Some of them are fishermen. They're comfortable in these waters. They know how to handle a little weather. But this storm is fierce. Wind, waves, their lives in peril. And Jesus is sleeping. Panicked, they wake him. "Teacher, don't you care that we're perishing?"

And wouldn't Jim Cantore love to be able to do what Jesus does next? He doesn't gauge the strength of the storm, or brace himself against it. Jesus commands the storm. He rebukes the wind, and says to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm."

Mark wants his readers to know that Jesus of Nazareth – the guy sleeping in the stern of the boat – has power over creation itself. As the Son of God in human form, Jesus has only to speak a word, and the storm obeys. Jesus comes through for the frightened disciples. He is the Lord of Storms.

Like many of you, I've read these miracle stories in the Bible since I was a little child. And I have no problem believing that my Lord, my God, can do awesome miracles. In the Gospels, the miracles of Christ demonstrated his divinity, and helped people back then to deepen their trust and faith in him.

But what about us? What about today? Is Jesus still the Lord of Storms? That may be the sermon title up there on the screen. But how do these words deepen our understanding of who Jesus is in our lives? Is our only takeaway from this story a realization that Jesus has divine powers, and can even control storms?

I think there's more to grab hold of in this story. Think for a minute about that word, "storms," and all the different kinds of storms we go through. We've been talking about meteorological, climatic storms. But then there are life storms, too: relationship storms, political storms, vocational storms, culture storms, guilt and shame storms, mental health and physical health storms. That word, "storms," can apply to many parts of our lives, to many events we experience.

Jesus is the Lord of a wind storm, the Bible says. But what about all those other kinds of storms? What about the storms you have to deal with this week? Is Jesus going to settle down the strife between you and your spouse? Will he find you a job, or get your health benefits back? Is Jesus going to get you an appointment to get a vaccine? Will he say, "Peace! Be still!" to everybody who's conflicted about the state of our country? In what sense is Jesus the Lord of these storms?

The answer is different for all of us; and, at the same time, the answer's the same for all of us. It all comes down to faith. Faith in your Lord Jesus Christ. Not just faith in what Jesus might do for you next; but faith in what he's done for you already.

I remember a conversation I had several years ago with a man in New Orleans. It was a few months after Hurricane Katrina had devastated that city. I was there with a church group on a mission trip, and I ran into this man downtown. He asked where we were from, and thanked us for helping his city. I asked him how he was doing. The man told me his home had been severely flooded and damaged. Everything he owned had to be thrown away. He had no job, and his community was shattered.

“But I’m thankful,” he told me, with a smile. “I know that my Lord Jesus Christ will never leave me, and I am closer to him now than I have ever been. With him I have everything I really need.” I can still picture that man, and I think about that man’s remarkable faith often. No, Jesus didn’t command that storm to cease. But that man had faith that Christ was with him still in the aftermath. He had faith in the stronger-than-the-storm love of his Lord.

I tell you that story because, when storms hit your life, faith in your Lord Jesus Christ is the most important thing. You can try to fix the situation by yourself. You can fall into despair. You can get angry. You can sit around, and wait for Jesus to perform a dramatic miracle. But the most important thing you can do, when the storms hit you, is to believe and trust in your Lord Jesus Christ.

Believe and trust that he’s with you. Believe and trust that he knows what you’re going through. Believe and trust that he cares for you. Believe and trust that his love and salvation are greater than any storm, and can never be taken from you. Believe and trust that, somehow, he’ll see you through. Believe and trust what he says, that all the hardships of this stormy life are not even worth comparing with the glories and the perfection of the life to come.

It comes down to faith, doesn’t it? For the disciples in the boat, for you and me who walk as yet by faith. Let’s pray for faith to the Lord of Storms. Please join me.

*Jesus, we know you are powerful, truly our God, and you have supreme authority. When storms come our way, Lord, help us to have faith. Let your Word take root in our hearts. Send your Holy Spirit, to make our faith strong, to help us endure, to deepen our belief and trust in you, in every circumstance. Thank you, Lord. Amen.*