

## **Suddenly there was a storm**

Mark 4:35-41

A Sermon for the Fifth Sunday of Pentecost

One again, we are asking: What is the problem? Without a problem you have no need for an answer. This Sunday we come to a very particular kind of problem, that is, nature. Of course, all the events in our lives have to do with nature, but here we have this unusual event, and that event is in the fourth chapter of Mark.

It says the disciples and Jesus are in a boat on the Sea of Galilee, which is about thirteen miles long. The hills on either side are high; it's like a bowl prone to sudden storms. As they were crossing to the other side, it says that Jesus fell asleep. And suddenly there was a sudden storm with high winds from the hills crashing down on the lake below. The disciples were afraid. They wake him up and say: "Don't you care if we perish?" And it says he rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' And the storm was over. They are amazed, and say to each other: "Who then is this that even wind and sea obey him?" (Mark 4:41).

What then is nature? We struggle with that. We know that there are many different understandings of nature. We say, "It's natural to do this or that." What is natural? We mean can all kinds of things. What is it to be natural?

Here we have this terrible wind and storm, and then the sudden end of it. Take that, Mark Twain! Remember he said: "Everybody talks about the weather, but nobody does anything about it."

Even today people will expect pastors to be able to do something about the weather. They will come up to clergy and say: "You're the one person who can do something about the weather."

What is the weather? Here Jesus is sleeping, and then he says something, and it's over. Perhaps it was going to be over anyway. If you go the account as it is in Matthew, it continues there in the fourteenth chapter, with him walking on water. Some would say: "He was really walking on a sandbar." Nothing important here; just move on.

What is the importance of this account? The storm is stopped. Among us there are two common ways of looking at this.

The first way is to say that everything is neutral. There is neutrality throughout everything that exists. Some call it natural law. Or perhaps, because we have to have some way of starting things, we'll say it's as if God wound up a clock and then he walked away and left it.

But, of course, there are some things in nature we cannot explain, at least not yet. There are some things we can't manage, at least not yet. So we put God in those spaces. We put God in those gaps of our knowledge. This kind of religious thinking is called the God-of-the-gaps thinking.

Finally, there is our infinite insignificance. What in the world is it all about except some big vast neutral nothingness? Oh yes, when there's a disaster, one's insurance policy may say it's an act of God.

Tennyson said about nature that it is red in tooth and claw. It's violent. We can use poetic terms about nature. After all, in Psalm 114:4 there's that lovely little verse: "The mountains skipped like rams, the hills like lambs." We may say that doesn't mean there was an earthquake, it's simply a poetic way of talking about the beauty of nature.

These are all aspects of one way of regarding nature, as if it is all neutral. This is a very common way of looking at nature.

The second way to look at this is an ancient way that is coming back again. This other way is to make nature into a person. Some talk about nature as "Gaia," from ancient Greek mythology. In this view, nature is alive, animated, and one must be careful not to offend the spirits floating around. Nature is sacred and mystic. If you look at Hinduism, which is actually a huge fertility cult religion, everything is a god. It is commonly said there are 330 million gods in Hinduism. An ant walking, the monkey in the tree, the elephant. Nature is divine.

It is commonly thought that the rise of modern science occurred because we were able to neutralize the world, that is to say, there are ways in which it is simply physical laws which can be measured and dealt with, and not mystical spirits, whether good or evil.

Over against both of those two viewpoints is the Christian faith. The Christian faith says something entirely different. Not that nature is neutral. Nor that nature is divine.

But rather what Paul writes in 2 Cor 5:19: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself." And John 1:14: "The word became flesh and dwelt among us." That's an entirely different take on everything. And with that comes 2 Corinthians 5:21, a verse Luther frequently quoted: "He made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." He takes our sin and death and we receive his holiness and life forever. It is as Luther said, "the happy exchange" because God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.

As a consequence, it says in 2 Corinthians 5:17: "If any one is in Christ, that person is a new creation." Everything has become new. Therefore in 5:16 it says: "From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view. . . ." Everything has been put in that new situation, which Paul goes on to say is a new creation. Everything has become new.

The bottom line: God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. Therefore, out of this come huge conclusions. Therefore, he is the Creator. And we use the Nicene Creed which unfortunately uses the word "Maker," but in the Hebrew Bible, when it talks about Creator, it uses a different Hebrew verb to point out this is not just "making," as if God was given a bunch of stuff out of which to form or make the world. No, this is creating out of nothing (Romans 4:17).

In the text today from Job, the Lord says to Job: "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" (Job 38:4)

In Psalm 107 it talks about the Lord's "wonderous works in the deep," and how he "commanded and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea," (verse 25) and how "he made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed" (verse 29).

In Psalm 8:3-4 it says: "When I look at the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him?" The psalmist is asking: What is it to be human? And yet it says he has made us little lower than God. We are his creatures, and it goes on to say we have been made in God's image, that is, we are given a task, as it says in Genesis 1:28, to have dominion, to be those who are his creatures and caretakers for this world.

How does this happen? He reconciles the world to himself through his word. You recall in the first chapter of Genesis that he spoke and it was done. In the text in Mark 4, Jesus says "Peace, be still" and the storm is over.

In the great Reformation hymn, "A Mighty Fortress," in the third verse it says of the evil one: "a little word shall slay him" that is based on Psalm 46:10: "Be still and know that I am God."

The bottom line for you and me in all this: What is God doing and how does God work? It's summed up in John 14:27: "Peace I leave unto you; my peace I give unto you; not as the world gives, do I give I unto you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."

"Not peace as the world gives," but his peace because he is Lord. To come back to 2 Cor 5:19: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself." He died and rose to give us his peace, which is life, real life now and in his peaceable kingdom to come. Amen