

Introductory

This text has parallels in Matthew (8:22-27) and in Luke (8:22-25). In the TLH one-year lectionary, Matthew 8:23-27 is appointed to be read every year on the Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany. In LW, this Mark text is appointed to be read on Pentecost 5B. Neither the Matthew text nor the Luke text is appointed to be read in the three-year lectionary in either LW or LSB.

There is a tendency among preachers to go right to allegorizing, talking to the listeners about the “storms of life” or some such thing. Just because you haven’t been killed by a storm doesn’t mean that it doesn’t happen, and it used to happen a lot more in than it does now. In the past, death has generally been much more frequent, common, and at a younger age than it is now, often by storm.

Tsunamis still kill a lot of people. A 2011 Tsunami killed over 15,000 people in Japan, and before that, the 2004 India Tsunami killed 230,000. Tornadoes still kill a lot of people. The 2011 Joplin tornado killed 158, and the NWS said that 109 people are killed in an average American tornado season. Erik Larsen writes of the 1900 Galveston Hurricane and its 6,000 dead in *Isaac’s Storm*.

Who doesn’t remember the fate of the Edmund Fitzgerald, one of countless ships lost over the years in the Great Lakes, or the Andrea Gail, whose fate was chronicled by Sebastian Junger in *Perfect Storm*, made into a movie with George Clooney. Use examples like this to make the hearer feel what it’s like to fear a dangerous storm. I may speak of tornadoes in this tornado country.

This incident takes place after the telling of last week’s two parables, the last two of several recorded in the fourth chapter of Mark. Before the string of parables, He had tangled with the religious leaders and talked about His true family. He has also done some healing by this time and called the Twelve. On the other side of the Sea, He will encounter some interesting demons.

I’m not the kind of person who complains or even talks much about the weather. I have lived and travelled in places with various climates and weather, and I just sort of adapt to whatever the moment holds weatherwise. But I am quite annoyed by weathermen. Modern Meteorology is just over one hundred years old – Larson’s book tells the story well of the development of the science.

Climate Change has been politicized, and therefore so has the weather. As a matter of fact, the climate as well as the weather has always been changing. I may or not talk about that on Sunday. I’m annoyed by weathermen because they make way too much of the current weather, and they make even more of the upcoming weather – and they’re often wrong – and they are very excitable.

It's one more place where I am nannied, and I already get too much of that. Don't forget your umbrella, and maybe dress in layers, and maybe you should just stay home if you can. There's more. My biggest criticism is that they have made us fear all weather. Fear the rain. Fear the cold. Fear the heat. Fear the wind. Fear the thunderstorm or tornado that may or may not come.

During Lent 2022 – we have Wednesday midweek services where attendance has dwindled to twenty to twenty-five. It was windy, but it's Iowa, and the weatherman talked all day about the “dangerous” winds out there. He so scared my people – and they are hearty people – that it affected our church attendance. What's the number? If only four show up? – we cancelled the service.

I know that you good Pastors would have insisted on doing the service, but I didn't really make the call. It was awkward for those four, and I get it; you would have done it, and like I said...and that's what they have done. They have made people fearful of what we all used to understand as normal weather. Given the slant of the media, might that effort be part of that political agenda?

Textual Notes

35. Mark ends his account of Jesus telling several parables by saying that “He did not speak to them without a parable,” but He explained them to His disciples in private. What does that say to preachers who don't bother to tell stories, and who maybe poo-poo those of us who do? Jesus tells stories all the time, “He did not speak to them without a parable.” The Bible itself is a true story.

Mark sets the new scene, “Καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ὅψιός γενομένης Διέλθωμεν εἰς τὸ πέρα – and He spoke to them on the evening of that same day, ‘let's pass to the other side.’” The preposition is followed by a noun in the accusative case, motion towards. To cross the Sea of Galilee to the other side is to move from the familiar home territory of Galilee east to Gennesaret.

There is really nothing profound or unusual about such a crossing. It would have been one made regularly and fairly routinely by any number of people, and many of these men who were with Him were experienced fishermen. Accustomed to fishing on the Sea of Galilee, they would have known it well, including its proclivity for the kind of sudden and violent storm described here.

It is entirely possible that they waited until after the sun went down because sunset generally brings calm to the seas. During the day, when the sun is shining, solar energy powers a lot of air movement, and sometimes it gets violent. At night, solar energy goes away, and the earth cools much more quickly than the air, which often creates an inversion layer of air that is not moving.

You may or may not notice that – on a windy day – sunset will often bring a palpable calm. And most importantly – meteorologically speaking – the water of the sea cools most slowly of all. Warm air from the sea rising up and meeting that still, cooler air, which is often the same conditions that spawn thunderstorms and even tornadoes in the Midwest, which are greatly to be feared.

It is also possible that they used cover of darkness to make their getaway from the crowds. Given their behavior up to this point; they hound Him from one location to the next, it is not unreasonable to think that they were doing the same thing here. The other side of that coin is that Jesus keeps trying to escape. Other boats that will be noted in the next verse lend credence to such a scenario.

36. Mark says the disciples had “ἀφέντες τὸν ὄχλον – released the crowd.” The verb is a masculine plural, meaning that the male disciples were the ones who released – often translated “forgive” – the crowds. The verb occurs one hundred forty-six times in the NT. It is used in a variety of ways, including fishermen releasing their nets into the sea and Jesus forgiving sins (Mark 2:5).

Were these the Twelve, and were the Apostles dismissing the people, or absolving them? The idea that they were pronouncing the Absolution is absent from the commentaries in front of me, but is such a thing really that far-fetched? To be sure, the command to absolve sins is not explicit until the locked room on Easter Sunday. But they had seen Jesus absolve the paralytic, for example.

Then they had been called and sent to proclaim the Gospel, and they did that. Now, why would we not think that their last act upon leaving the crowd behind was to absolve their sins? John is the writer from whom we expect the double entendre, but that doesn’t mean that Mark is not aware. Absolution from the mouths of the Apostle would be a perfect ending to this time of teaching.

Having done that, “παραλαμβάνουσιν αὐτὸν ὡς ἦν ἐν τῷ πλοίῳ – they take Him with them just as He was, into the boat.” KJV and most translations have these disciples taking Jesus – describing His state, as stated, as “just as He was.” Some of the newer translations make it into a locative preposition, placing Jesus already in the boat beside them which gives it a whole different meaning.

The “just as He was” refers at least to His physical condition; He’s exhausted. The preposition followed by a noun in the dative case does indicate that He is now located beside them in the boat. But they were not alone; “ἄλλα πλοῖα ἦν μετ’ αὐτοῦ – but other boats were with Him.” Likely some of the crowd wanted to follow the man in the boat, and it’s easier to do by boat than on foot.

37. Later in the night, with the temperature of the air still decreasing and the water temperature remaining the same, the movement of wind and currents often picks up, like here. In addition to that, the Sea of Galilee is very shallow. Waves created by wind – we can see them go up, but what you don’t see is them going down and bouncing off that shallow bottom, and they come up again.

The Internet talks about several other factors that make storms on this sea in particular particularly violent as well as very sudden.

Such storms result from differences in temperatures between the seacoast and the mountains beyond. The Sea of Galilee lies 680 feet below sea level. It is bounded by hills, especially on the east side where they reach 2000 feet high. These heights are a source of cool, dry air.

In contrast, directly around the sea, the climate is semi-tropical with warm, moist air. The large difference in height between surrounding land and the sea causes large temperature and pressure changes. This results in strong winds dropping to the sea, funneling through the hills.

The Sea of Galilee is small, and these winds may descend directly to the center of the lake with violent results. When the contrasting air masses meet, a storm can arise quickly and without warning. Small boats caught out on the sea are in immediate danger.

The Sea of Galilee is relatively shallow, just 200 feet at its greatest depth. A shallow lake is “whipped up” by wind more rapidly than deep water, where energy is more readily absorbed.

Put it all together and “γίνεται λαῖλαψ μεγάλη ἀνέμου – comes a storm of great wind.” When a great wind happens on a body of water, the wind causes waves to form, “καὶ τὰ κύματα ἐπέβαλλεν εἰς τὸ πλοῖον – and the waves beat into the boat.” That verb is in the imperfect tense, the waves began to hammer the boat, and they continued to hammer it over and over and over again.

The situation is dire; “ὥστε ἤδη γεμίζεσθαι τὸ πλοῖον – as a result, the boat was already filled.” KJV has it right, and I’m not sure why the other translations have various other things. This is not the first time these men have run into a storm like this. The waves crash into and over the side of the boat, and you bail. You bail, and you hope that you can keep the output ahead of the input.

They are losing. They are bailing as quickly as they can, but the water is coming into the boat faster than they can expel it, and the boat has come to the point where it is about to lose buoyancy and sink to the bottom of the Sea. If that were to happen, the boat would be lost, and so would all hands. Even the strongest of swimmers – methinks – would have a hard time making it to shore.

38. And where’s Jesus? He’s “αὐτὸς ἦν ἐν τῇ πρύμνῃ ἐπὶ τὸ προσκεφάλαιον καθεύδων – He was in the stern, on the pillow, sleeping.” We don’t know for how long, but the storm has been raging for long enough that the boat has been filled with water. Finally, “καὶ ἐγείρουσιν αὐτὸν – and they woke Him.” You wonder if they had tried and not succeeded before, and if not, then why not?

The bow is what boaters call the front of the boat. The stern is what most people would call the back of the boat. Jesus is in the stern, and Mark makes sure to tell us that He had a pillow. This is not the picture of a man made sleepy by the gentle rocking of the boat, and He dozed off. He very deliberately made His way to the back – not the front, where all the action is – to nap it out.

On a very base level, Jesus was tuckered out. He was tired, they had left “that same day,” it’s nighttime, and if you are really tired, you can sleep through a lot. Maybe He was just one of those people who could sleep through anything, and there was no reason for Him not to; if He’s like me, The Builder’s Son will leave the boat in charge of those who very much know what they are doing.

After they finally woke Him up, “καὶ λέγουσιν αὐτῷ Διδάσκαλε, οὐ μέλει σοι ὅτι ἀπολλύμεθα – they were saying to Him ‘teacher, don’t you care that we are dying?’” They don’t really ask Him for help. What they do in this moment of crisis is what people will often do at times like that. Directing their attention away from the storm, they direct their attention to Jesus, who doesn’t care.

39. But not so fast; “καὶ διεγερθεὶς ἐπετίμησεν τῷ ἀνέμῳ καὶ εἶπεν τῇ θαλάσσῃ Σιώπα, πεφίμωσο – and waking up, He rebuked the wind, and said to the sea ‘silence, be still.’” Who talks like that to the weather? Besides Pat Robertson and Jesus, not many. The year was 1985, and Hurricane Gloria was bearing down on Virginia. The storm changed course, and Robertson claimed it.

When Jesus spoke to the storm, “ἐκόπασεν ὁ ἄνεμος, καὶ ἐγένετο γαλήνη μεγάλη – the wind fell, and there was a great calm.” When Pat Robertson spoke to God about the storm, God listened to him, like a father listens to a child, and then went ahead and did what He did. When Jesus directly commands this storm to stop, the storm stops immediately and every time without fail.

40. Then He says to them “Τί δειλοί ἐστε οὕτως; πῶς οὐκ ἔχετε πίστιν – why are you timid? You still don’t have faith?” The adjective “δειλοί - timid” occurs four times in the NT, and it is not the normal word for “φόβος – fear.” Besides a measure of fear, the word also has a nuance of cowardliness, and that nuance might be seen here. According to biblehub.com, the definition is,

("fearful of losses") refers to an excessive fear (dread) of "losing," causing someone to be fainthearted (cowardly) – hence, to fall short in following Christ as Lord. [1169] /deilós is always used negatively in the NT and stands in contrast to the positive fear which can be expressed by 5401 /phóbos ("fear," see Phil 2:12).]

Whatever nuance you put on the word, Jesus pays these men no compliment when He says what He says, followed by His questioning their faith. Sometimes Jesus talks about “little faith,” but that is not the case here. Jesus does not say here that they don’t have much faith, but instead He is rhetorically questioning whether they believe in Him at all or not.

41. The answer to the rhetorical question is ominous; and here we have the common word for fear, “ἐφοβήθησαν φόβον μέγαν – they feared with great fear,” They recognize the sheer power of a person who is able to control the weather, even a violent storm. They were afraid of the storm – and rightly so – but they “feared” even more that kind of power, and not necessarily in a bad way.

In the Bible, particularly in the OT, to “fear” God means to be in awe of His great power – like here – which could go either way. And they said, “πρὸς ἀλλήλους Τίς ἄρα οὗτός ἐστιν, ὅτι καὶ ὁ ἄνεμος καὶ ἡ θάλασσα ὑπακούει αὐτῷ; hey – to each other ‘who then is this, that even the wind and the sea listen to Him?’” Selected OT passages might be helpful in answering that question.

Psalms 89:9 says, “You do rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them.”

Psalm 94:4 says, “Mightier than the thunders of many waters mightier than waves of the sea, the Lord on high is mighty.” Even in his utmost hubris, man does not claim to be able to still a storm, but Jesus does just that, and with a word. That’s who He is.

Sermon Titles

Storm Rages. Jesus Naps.

Hymns

LSB 715– Jesus, Savior, Pilot Me

LSB 717 – Eternal Father, Strong to Save

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