

June 23, 2024
Fifth Sunday After Pentecost

“The Boat is Just a Boat”

Mark 4:35-41

If you look over on the wall to your left you can see the stained-glass window of a ship which symbolizes the ark of the Holy Christian Church. There is definitely some truth to that imagery. We sojourn through this short, afflicted life in the church in which the Word of the Gospel and Christ-ordained Sacraments usher us through the turbulent sea of this world to our heavenly destination. The church Father Tertullian, founder of the LCMS C.F.W. Walther and even Martin Luther all preached on the miracle of the calming of the storm and painted it as a picture of Christ dwelling in the boat of the church. The thing is, that’s not at all what this miracle reveals. Sometimes a boat is just a boat.

This miracle reveals that Jesus is true God of divine power. I guarantee you that there was not a single disciple thinking about the boat in that moment after the miracle. They were completely focused on Christ alone and the question “*Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?*” When you break it down they might have been in terror of Jesus. I mean think about how things just took place—Jesus says to a storm “Shut up” and, boom, everything goes calm. Then He looks at the disciples and is none too pleased, “*Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?*” I bet you they shut up too, fearful of what that divine power they had just witnessed might do next. This miracle is about Jesus; revealing a glimpse of His true power and glory.

But we see this miracle and really want to make it all about the boat, about Jesus in the boat with us as the storms of life come a-threatening. It’s what a lot of our prayers are about. Jesus, heal my disease. Jesus, help with my financial situation. Jesus, give me justice against my adversary. Jesus, calm my anxiety. Jesus, make me happy.

Such petitions aren’t necessarily wrong or sinful. We are told by God to ask for such things and He is the giver of every good gift. But we go astray when we start thinking His main job is to protect the boat of our earthly life, or even the boat of His church in this world. He does not promise smooth sailing. He does not guarantee your arrival at those ports that are the goals you may set for yourself in life. He is God, doing glorious God things. The point is that you recognize that, trust in that, have faith in that.

But for us, we don’t have Jesus standing in our life right in front of our eyes in the midst of a deadly storm speaking a single word and making it still. What do we have? We have the boat. We have the boat of all the things of our life. We also have the ark of the Christian church. And a big problem for us is that we tend to trust in the boat—making the things of this world an idol.

An easy example of this for a group as advanced in years as we are is medical technology. It’s a great gift of God—but a blessing in and of the world. An affliction or ailment comes along and where do we place our trust? I’m ashamed to say that my immediate go-to is the doctor! All too often Christian folks don’t turn full-throttle to God until medical science has failed. Christ our Redeemer, the God of all power and glory is with us always as He promised, but we tend to look at the boat instead, as if this broken life is the most important thing; the place where the real power is located.

And of course when we get caught up in sin this problem is compounded exponentially. Embracing sin is basically loving the creation, the boat, more than the Creator. Willful sin is to push Jesus out of view so that we can concentrate on the boat. Take greed for example. If one is

getting all caught up in the love of wealth, one isn't going to even contemplate Christ because doing so we make demands on one's life, on the boat. Maybe Jesus gets a glance once in a while, but folks don't let Him be the main thing, you know, their Lord.

And it certainly can be this way with the Ark of the Church. Christians can get full of themselves, righteous and judgmental. We can turn our attendance and service here into prideful good works. We can obsess about our fellowship activities, the way things used to be, the brick and mortar of our building. We can be all focused on the boat that is Grace Lutheran Church instead of the kingdom work of the Savior and the church founded upon His cross and empty tomb.

But folks, sometimes a boat is just a boat.

Jesus Christ for you is indeed the point. But it isn't Jesus Christ in the boat with you that is the main thing. It is that Jesus Christ is your destination.

Here is the thing about boats—they go places. If you are all about the boat being nice in and on the here and now of the sea of this life, I've got some news for you—boats wear out and decay, they hit things and break. The boat sinks. And I'll admit that this pushes the metaphor too far because the true ark of the Christian church dwelling in Christ does indeed endure unto eternity. But I'm talking about us making the boat a worldly, idolatrous thing. It comes to an end.

Jesus is the destination. You stand baptized into His kingdom, the very death to sin and resurrection to eternal life He has already accomplished. Yes, you are sojourning through the "waves" of this fallen world, struggling against the storms of temptation and sin, enduring the tempests of affliction and hardship. But "*Who is this, that even wind and sea obey Him?*" This is Jesus Christ the Lord, whose divine power and glory today stands victorious over all threats and enemies.

You want to say He is in the boat with you? Fine. It's true! He is the one here this day who declares your sins forgiven in His Word and Sacraments. He is here gifting you with eternal life in spite of the decay and death around and even within you. He is here doing glorious God things...for you! So don't get caught up in the condition of the boat! That's not important because the destination is guaranteed in Christ!

One of the overall points of the Gospel according to Mark is that the disciples and every other person in it do not recognize Christ for who He is...until the cross. This is why Jesus asks that harsh question, "*Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?*"

We have the cross, so faith is not a problem. God's Holy Spirit has called us by this Gospel and revealed the truth to us. We know where we were, and we know where Christ has brought us: "*In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I helped you.*" The destination, eternal life, is today our possession in Christ!

So if today you have fear; fear of the evils of the world, fear that God is against you because of your horrible sins, fear of the death to this life that is approaching, fear of anything of this fallen broken life at all—I urge you; stop focusing on the boat. The boat is just a boat.

Look away toward Christ. The destination is glorious and none of the broken, sinful, fallen or evil can follow you there. Christ is the divine power, glory and steadfast love of God for you. In Him, though your feet may this day be standing in the boat, the destination is right now already yours.

Amen.