



New Day Church

Need a fresh start?

THE BOAT THAT POINTED

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There are a handful of kids in this church that I kind of consider community property. They're the kids that have been born since New Day started, so they're the New Day babies. We've been watching them grow as we've watched the church grow.

One of those is Caleb Johnson. He's 3 now. A few weeks ago here at church, somebody said to me, "Did you see what Caleb was writing during the service?" I hadn't seen. You would think maybe someone his age was drawing a picture or practicing his letters. But no: He was writing his sister's name. Linnea. That's not even an easy one for adults to spell right. But there he was. By next week, he should be filling out the blanks in my sermon outline.

I was pretty impressed by a 3-year old being able to do that, so I mentioned it to Caleb's dad, Peter. Peter said, "Yeah, he's starting to read small words, too." Then Peter said that one of Caleb's favorite things to do is to hop up on Peter's lap when Peter is reading his Bible. He'll look at the Bible and see where he can find "God" on the page and point to the word. So not only is he smart – he's spiritual too. We expect nothing less from New Day kids.

But I thought, isn't that what we're all trying to do – to see God on the page? We're all looking to find him. We're trying to recognize him and point him out.

That's what has been happening for Jesus' disciples in the stories we've been exploring in the book of Mark. Jesus shows them God in ways they never expected. This morning's text is a dramatic example of that.

Last week we looked at the story of Jesus calling Levi the tax collector. We saw how Jesus chose some of the least likely people to follow him and be his friends. This morning we're going to jump ahead in Mark just a bit. Jesus has continued his teaching ministry, further aggravating the religious leaders and captivating the general public.

The crowds have gotten so big that Jesus has taken to teaching from a boat. The people line up on shore while he sits in a boat to talk. This is a great strategy. It keeps him from being crushed, and it also creates a natural speaker system for him. Have you ever noticed the way sound travels over water? It's an actual scientific fact that voices are

amplified over water, so more people would be able to hear and understand what Jesus had to say as he used this teaching method.

But it has been a long day. Jesus has been teaching a number of parables all day and it's starting to get late. He's ready to call it quits for the night. And that's where we pick up the story.

Mark 4:35-41

That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

In the church I grew up in, we had a whole string of pastors over the years. One of the more memorable ones was a man who was from Europe named Henry Paasonen. He was from Finland originally, but he had lived in so many different European countries growing up that he had this very cosmopolitan accent. He spoke six languages fluently.

What was fascinating was WHY he had lived all over. It turned out his father was a spy. I'm not sure who Finland needed to spy on, but there you have it. Henry didn't find out until he was 12 years old. He hadn't even known his own real name! Imagine suddenly discovering your dad has a secret identity. You already look up to him and respect him, you think you know him pretty well, then you find out he's bigger than life and a little bit dangerous. It's like something out of a movie.

In our story this morning, Jesus is revealing more of who he is to his disciples. They thought they knew him pretty well. They were loyal to him, they were impressed by his teaching and his miracles, but this event uncovered a side of him they had never seen before. Suddenly he's bigger than life and a little bit dangerous.

Back in the first chapter, Mark quoted Jesus as he started out his ministry:

Mark 1:14-15

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

At the heart of Jesus' message was the concept that God's kingdom is near. The kingdom is God's right to rule, and in the person of Jesus his authority was brought close enough to see and touch. The way Jesus interacted with Scripture showed his command over it. The way Jesus healed diseases and called disciples showed his kingdom's authority over individuals and sickness. Now Jesus takes things one step further and shows that his authority extends to the very universe itself. He holds sway over the weather. This took him out of the realm of other faith healers and great teachers and planted him squarely on God's throne.

So this is more than a story about a miracle – this is a kingdom demonstration. Jesus is acting out the fact that the kingdom is now near.

If we were to take an informal poll, I would bet that Jesus calming the storm ranks as one of the most memorable snapshots from his life. It resonates with us, because we all can identify with what it's like to go through some kind of storm. We relate to those petrified disciples and find comfort in knowing Jesus has the kind of power he shows here.

When I read a story like this that is so simple to grasp, I always try to stop and say, "Is there something else going on here?" Otherwise, I'm quick to think I've already gotten all I can from a passage and move on to the next thing. It reminds me of when my kids were younger and we would slice them an orange wedge, they would put it in their mouth for about one second, suck a little juice out, then leave the rest on their plate. They didn't realize that there was much more there, that they could actually EAT the orange.

As with the rest of Scripture, Mark gives us a lot to chew on in these short paragraphs. We would be missing out on a lot if we didn't slow down to look at it more closely. What does it tell us about God and how he operates? How does what happened in that boat point to the kingdom? Let's go back to the beginning again.

That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat.

Jesus is through with teaching the crowd and is ready to go. He calls to his disciples and tells them the itinerary. He was already in the boat, since he had just finished teaching. They follow his orders and head out.

What stood out to me this time as I read it is that

The journey belongs to Jesus.

Going across the lake was his idea. Heading for the distant shore in the evening with unpredictable conditions was something he requested. Notice the sentence order: Jesus said, "Let's go over to the other side, " THEN the disciples "took him along."

In my own life I tend to think that the story starts with the second sentence.. I'm choosing my own destination, and I "take Jesus along." I invite him along for the ride.

Back in the 1940's a book came out called "God is my copilot," which was authored by a World War II flying ace. The book barely even mentions God. That's the kind of press copilots usually get. But the title shows an attitude we all can have sometimes without saying it, which is that we're really the ones in charge. God is helpful to have along, but the trip itself is ours to plan and direct.

We all fall into that attitude don't we? We like to determine our own destiny. God is our wingman, serving in a support role while we steer.

But if I'm going to face storms, if I'm going to hit rough waters, I'd rather know that the journey was Jesus' idea. When we know he's the one charting our course, then we know whatever we come up against is something he anticipated. He chooses the path, he chooses the final destination, and he knows everything we're going to encounter along the way.

Proverbs 20:24

The very steps we take come from GOD; otherwise how would we know where we're going?

God is leading. It's so freeing to know we don't have to be paralyzed wondering if we're going the right way. If it is our desire to follow, God will map out the steps. Jesus isn't merely a passenger in our car – it's his car, or his boat as the case may be. The journey belongs to him.

It doesn't take very long out at sea for the disciples to run into difficulty.

A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped.

The Sea of Galilee is famous for its violent storms even to this day. The lake itself is approximately 700 ft. below sea level, and it is surrounded by hills and mountains. Mt. Hermon is just 30 miles away, rising to over 9,000 ft. So the winds come sweeping down unpredictably into the Galilean basin.

For example, in 1992, fierce winds whipped down off the Golan Heights into the Sea of Galilee, creating enormous swells and sending walls of water 10 feet high crashing into downtown Tiberias and doing extensive damage to the city.

The word Mark uses for furious squall could mean a hurricane or whirlwind. You have to remember that Jesus' first disciples were experienced fishermen, so for them to be frightened so badly, it must have been extreme weather. This photo shows a reproduction of the kind of boat they would have been in. Mark tells us the boat was almost completely swamped. This was a bad, bad storm.

I think it's important to note that Mark gives us permission to admit that

Conditions are what they are.

When things are bad, our tendency is to downplay them, as if that will help make them less bad. It's like the optimist who fell off a 30 story building. Each floor he passed, he'd say, "Well, so far so good."

Sometimes church is the worst for this. We come here and hear other people talking as if their lives are all holding together, and it makes us feel like there's something wrong with us for being in a bad spot. We try to dress things up and say, "Our marriage is getting better," when we're bailing water left and right. We'll say, "It's going fine," when the rain has us depressed and we're feeling lonely. Or we'll say, "I had some trouble at work, but it's all good," when really we're dying inside and don't know what we're going to do.

We somehow think our storms reflect on us, and we try not to use scary words to describe them. Guys especially have a hard time with this, because by nature we are problem solvers. We don't want to look like failures. But conditions are what they are. God never asks us to apologize for the truth, and the truth is that some hurricanes are a level 4 or 5. The waves are big and the winds are vicious.

Why is that an important truth to grasp? Because there is no power to change the situation by denying it or downplaying it. We don't make our problems smaller by covering them up or minimizing them. It's not going to go away just because we don't admit it. That only serves to make us take them less seriously and delay seeking help.

What conditions in your life are maybe more serious than you've been ready to acknowledge? An anger problem? An addiction? A financial mess? Face it honestly. It is what it is. Be straight with yourself. Truth sets us free.

The disciples couldn't get around what was happening to their boat. So eventually, they went to get help.

Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

Wake up, Jesus. Look what's happening. Don't you care? That is the universal cry of people in distress. "God, do you see my situation? I'm drowning! Don't you care?"

Dr. Albert Schweitzer worked as a medical missionary in Africa for 40 years. He worked non-stop, around the clock, seven days a week, pouring his life out for people. One afternoon he laid down for a nap in his hammock, absolutely exhausted. Someone from the village came running up pounding on the door, "Dr. Schweitzer, wake up! I'm sick. Get up. Don't you care?"

It's not really a fair question, but it's the one that pops out. No matter how much we've seen God do, doubts can begin to creep in when he is silent. Why wouldn't he act on our behalf when we're in trouble? We can't understand how he can say he loves us and not take up our cause. We become frustrated with him. But

Jesus dwarfs our frustration.

In the case of the disciples, you have to wonder what it was they were wanting him to do. They certainly weren't expecting him to shut the wind and waves down. They were so shocked when it happened that they couldn't have been anticipating it. I don't think they were looking for that kind of power at all. They had something much smaller in mind, like maybe Jesus could grab a bucket and start scooping water out of the boat. Or maybe he could man an oar or come up with a plan of attack for the rest of them. They wanted his participation in the crisis, but they still didn't really believe he had any real power over the situation. They were more concerned that he appear engaged than in him having an effect. It was a cry of desperation without any real hope in it.

When we're frustrated with God, quite often it comes from our agenda that he's not meeting. We get upset with him for not doing something far less than he's capable of. We say we want to know that he cares, but deep down we mostly want him to do what we're asking. In our dissatisfaction, we ask an unfair question and look for the wrong response.

But if Jesus is going to get involved in our lives, he's going to head straight for the real cause of the problem. He's not interested in mopping up the surface when he can deal directly with the deeper issues, the storms themselves. Dr. Robin Smith says, "Life won't let us get away with a cheap bandaid on a sacred wound."

We look for a bail out when Jesus offers a change in weather. That's why I say he dwarfs our frustration. His awesome power makes our complaining seem small and shallow by comparison.

We also miss what I think is key to this entire story which is that

Quiet can be misleading.

There was Jesus – asleep on a cushion. This is the only reference in the Bible to Jesus sleeping and it's right in the middle of a horrific racket! I can't even sleep through the furnace turning on in my house, let alone a huge windstorm with water spraying my face.

Now to the disciples, this appeared as indifference. Jesus seemed to be acting selfish and a little arrogant. "You guys deal with it. I'm too important to be bothered. I've had a long day and I can't be disturbed." The words of the disciples sound like they harbor a bit of resentment about the whole situation as they read into Jesus' inactivity. All they know is that he has been sleeping while they do all the work, which in their minds means he doesn't really care.

But Jesus' ability to sleep during the chaos tells me something else: It isn't only that he was utterly exhausted or detached from reality. It was that he was completely in control. His sleeping through the storm demonstrated as much power over it as when he told it to be quiet. He wasn't worried. The storm wasn't going to have any emotional hold on

him. There was a peace in his own heart that became the source of the peace he would soon spread. He is the Calm One.

Calm can sound like a nothing word. But at its heart it means undisturbed. And if Jesus was undisturbed by that storm, he's not going to be ruffled by the situations we face in our lives.

We sometimes mistake God's silence or apparent inactivity for his lack of care for us, when really God is just more in control than I am about the situation. He knows nothing is beyond him, so he has no need to respond in a rushed or frenzied way. He will not let circumstances hold that kind of power over him.

I don't want a God who panics as easily as me. But sometimes that's how I pray. "Hurry God! I need you NOW!!" I want to learn to trust the calm in his heart and not misinterpret it as something it isn't.

Do you remember what Gandolf told Frodo in Lord of the Rings? He said, "A wizard is never late – nor is he early. He arrives precisely when he intends to." The apostle Peter said something similar about God:

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

It's good that God can't be bullied by external forces. What kind of God would that make him? His quiet shows his absolute control, which I desperately need in the storm.

I love it that Jesus doesn't get upset with the disciples when they wake him up. As misguided and irritating as their tone must have been, Jesus still put his energies directly to the need. He looked past their obnoxious approach with eyes of love and alleviated their fears.

What grace. Even when we don't understand him, Even when we go about our asking the wrong way and the way we treat him doesn't deserve an answer, Jesus still stays true to himself. His concern for his disciples overrode their shortcomings, and his concern for us overrides our shortcomings as well. He loves us even when we are forgetting who he is.

Jesus speaks to the storm with the same type of commands that he used to address the demons. "Quiet! Be still!" The wind and the waves respond instantly.

As a boy, I can remember occasionally getting all wound up and out of control when we would have company over to the house, only to hear the sound of my dad give one snap of his fingers. And he wasn't keeping time with any music. It was the most intimidating, fear inducing sound in the world and I would instantly stop whatever I was doing. Even without a word, I would know there was no room for argument and I better shape up.

That's how the wind and waves react. They are subdued. They recognize Jesus as the Creator and show their respect by immediate compliance.

But even in his rebuke, there is a gift. As I see it,

Jesus gives who he is.

Jesus gives the weather some of the calm from his own person. He transfers the internal peace he experienced during his nap to the wind and waves. Back when God was creating the world in the book of Genesis, he created things that reflected his own character: Light. Beauty. Life.

Here Jesus does the same thing: He speaks something into existence that reflects his own character: Peace. Who he is rubs off on the weather as he talks to it.

Author Philip Yancey writes this: *Some see miracles as an implausible suspension of the laws of the physical universe. As signs, though, they serve just the opposite function. Death, decay, entropy and destruction are the true suspensions of God's laws; miracles are the early glimpses of restoration.*

Calm from chaos is more than a miracle – it's a sign of God's kingdom. It shows his fingerprints. The peace that settles over everything gives the disciples the chills.

They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

Their question changed from "Don't you care?" to "Who is this?" That's the right question to ask. "Who is this in our boat?" He just did something no human has the right or ability to do, and he did it effortlessly. Who is he really? Is he more than the teacher and friend I thought I knew?

It's the right question because it isn't manipulative like "Don't you care?" It's the right question because it forces us to consider whether or not we really know him, and if we know him, whether or not we really trust him. And if we really trust him, how will we react to storms? Everything changes depending on how we can answer the question.

Dr. Alvin Rogness had a son named Paul who was killed instantly when he was struck by a car as he was walking. He was only 24 at the time. As Dr. Rogness processed the loss of his son, he was somehow able to write these incredible words:

You and I are built for storms. We are not built for cozy, safe little harbors. The Lord is with us. With him, we have the kind of craft that can weather any storm. In fact, we should head out for the storms. One of the great perils that faces the church in our day is that we will steer people out of the storm centers. We are not to anchor our lives in some sheltered cove and let the storm-tossed world go by. The Lord's call is not like that. Not

to an easier task but a greater cause. Not to peace but to battle. Not to a cozy harbor but to the sea of storms. We are not built for safe harbors. We are built for storms.

A quote like that makes you want to stand up and say, "Bring it on!" We can romanticize the storm, like it will be so clear and big that people will want to make a movie about our lives and the adventure it was for us to overcome the forces against us. But most of our storms happen in daily existence. It's when a husband has to make the hard choice to communicate openly with his wife. It's the tough decision to do your job with integrity when nobody else at work cares. It's bringing your anxieties to Jesus when you can barely face the day. Our lives are full of furious squalls that nobody else even sees.

My natural prayer is, "God keep the storms away from me." I want to avoid the hardship and the pain and the darkness. Unfortunately, since the Garden of Eden, there's been no way to avoid it. But God has built us in a way that we can weather the storms, and he turns them into some of the most powerful opportunities to see Jesus more clearly. The most awful moments are not bigger than God. The worst case scenarios can't take away the fact that he is good, or that he is powerful, or that he is in control.

Since we're celebrating the Lord's Supper again today, I have been thinking about this message in light of the cross. And it struck me for the first time how calm Jesus was in the middle of his own terrible storm. As Jesus was about to be arrested, one of his followers got his sword out and was ready to fight. If ever there was a moment for panic, that was it. But Jesus wouldn't give in to it. He told that disciple,

Matthew 26:53-54

Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?"

Jesus chose restraint, not letting circumstances distract him from why he came. He stayed undisturbed. Even on the cross, when people were taunting him and saying things like, "If you're so great, climb down off that cross!" "He saved others, why can't he save himself?" Jesus refused to be baited.

That's where the disciples saw the answer to the question, "Don't you care?" His care – his love – was revealed in his inaction, his remaining on that cross.

We have a Lord who loves us beyond comprehension, a Lord who does not panic, a Lord who is not slow. He arrives -- and he acts -- precisely when he intends to.

As you prepare to take communion, spend a moment with the Lord, and reflect on the following:

1. Who's in my boat? What kind of Jesus do I believe in? Have I been trying to force him to answer me in certain ways, while not seeing how much more he is capable of? Do I want a panicky God or will I trust a calm one?

Maybe you're not even sure Jesus is in your boat. You can know that without a doubt. Jesus said in Revelation,

Revelation 3:20

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in...

You can invite Christ into your life by simply asking him, "Lord, I believe you died for me and my sins, and I need your forgiveness. Please come into my life, my boat and take charge." He'll put his Spirit in your heart and never leave.

Who is in your boat? Secondly

2. Where do I need his calm today? What's my storm that I'm facing? I love the line from Scott Krippayne's song that says, "Sometimes he calms the storm, and other times he calms the child." Ask Jesus to share some of his own calmness where you're needing it this morning.