



Jesus Calms the Storm
Matthew 8:23-27

Let me invite you to Matthew chapter 8, once again, as we continue through Matthew's gospel.

Creation is absolutely breathtaking, isn't it? God's work seen in nature is stunning. Think of the most beautiful places you've seen or hope to see in person one day. I think of the Swiss Alps or a tropical island somewhere. And this weekend, of course, we had the opportunity to see nature's beauty in a unique way with the Northern Lights—absolutely beautiful scenes.

Creation is breathtaking, but creation can also be absolutely terrifying, as well. You might have already known this, but the Northern Lights that were visible this weekend were the result of severe weather conditions in space. Apparently, the Space Weather Prediction Center issued its first severe geomagnetic storm watch in almost 20 years. It did this because they observed five, what they call, "coronal mass ejections" from the sun. These are large eruptions of plasma and magnetic field shot from from the sun's outer atmosphere at 2 million miles an hour, and these particular eruptions were aimed at us here on Earth.¹

Now, I'm not an astronomer or meteorologist, but that sounds mildly terrifying. I mean, the sun is shooting at us. That's wild.

Of course, we've had a lot of instability in the weather here on earth lately as well. I'm sure you've seen the news about all of the tornados ranging from Nebraska south. Or you've seen the massive flooding in Brazil right now, where they are getting historic rainfall, displacing over 300,000 people and claiming the lives of over 100 so far.

Nature is both absolutely beautiful and absolutely terrifying.

It's an example of the tension of the world we live in. We live in a world that is wonderfully created, yet deeply broken.

1

<https://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/2024/05/10/rochester-ny-weather-solar-activity-could-bring-northern-lights/73640519007/>.

We saw in chapter 8 a few weeks ago the brokenness of sickness and disease as Jesus healed many people, and in our passage this morning we will see Jesus, yet again, demonstrating power over the brokenness and groaning of creation, groaning under the curse of the fall. And, we will see a challenge to hold firm to our faith as we walk through it all.

Matthew 8:23-27

23 And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. **24** And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. **25** And they went and woke him, saying, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing." **26** And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. **27** And the men marveled, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?"

This perhaps familiar account is found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. And earlier in chapter 8, after Jesus healed many in and around Capernaum, we read in verse 18 that he gave the orders to the disciples to get the boat ready so they could go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

So, they go out, and Matthew says a "great storm" arose. Storms were and are normal there. Wind comes through the mountains and onto the sea causing squalls.

But apparently, this was not just a windy day. In fact, in verse 24, Matthew uses the word "seismos," translated here as storm. But that word is used 13 other times in the NT and everywhere else it refers to an earthquake. And Matthew says it wasn't just a "seismos" it was a "great seismos." This wasn't just a mere storm. The Sea of Galilee was experiencing a storm as if the earth itself was thrashing about.

And the disciples were terrified. Remember, these were, at least some of them, professional fishermen. They've spent time on the sea. This was home away from home. And they were terrified by what they were experiencing.

But not Jesus. Jesus is calm. Not just calm, chilling in the corner of the boat. Jesus is asleep. He's been busy teaching and ministering and healing; he's tired. So he's asleep, and no storm was going to bother him.

The disciples, though, wake him up in total terror, believing they were about to die. They said, Jesus, save us, we are perishing.

Jesus gets up, speaks to the disciples and then turns and speaks to the storm. Matthew says he "rebuked" the winds - a word used to describe casting out demons in

other places. And the storm immediately ceases. This was, obviously, a divine, supernatural event.

So, the response of the disciples in verse 27 makes sense. The men “marvel” at Jesus. They say, who can do something like that? Who can speak to creation and cause it to obey? If you or I could do that, my guess is that we’d have a lot more sunny days here in Rochester. But no one here can do that. Only one person could, and he was on a boat in the middle of the Sea of Galilee that night.

Now, this experience did two things for the disciples in that boat that night, and it does two things for us as well...

- I. **Confirms Jesus’ identity** - this is the primary purpose of this scene. To recognize the identity of Jesus. And his identity as revealed through the calming of the storm is God incarnate. God, the Creator of all things, in the flesh.

So far in Matthew’s gospel, Jesus has demonstrated his authority through his teaching and through healing sickness and disease, and now he demonstrates his authority over creation itself.

The Old Testament speaks of God as the only one who has authority over the created order. And the reason is that only God is the Creator of that created order.

There are many places we could look in the Old Testament, but we’ll read just one here, from the Psalms, the psalmist declares...

Psalm 135:5-7

5 For I know that the Lord is great, and that our Lord is above all gods. **6** Whatever the Lord pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps. **7** He it is who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth, who makes lightnings for the rain and brings forth the wind from his storehouses.

Again, the One who has created all things retains his right and authority and position over all created things. And so Matthew here, and the other gospel writers as well, points us to this incredible scene to say, Jesus really is God in the flesh. The Creator and Sustainer living and breathing and acting within the created order.

The New Testament makes clear that Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity, was involved with Creation itself.

John 1:1-3

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was in the beginning with God. **3** All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

Col. 1:16-17

16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. **17** And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Jesus calmed the sea, and it was no trouble for him because Jesus was the one who created that Sea.

And as the disciples saw that and realized that, the only reasonable response was to marvel.

If Jesus is God in the flesh, the only reasonable response is worship.

In fact, in Mark and Luke's account, we read that the disciples were afraid. There was a progression with their fear. At first, they were afraid of the storm and now they were afraid as they stood in the same boat with the Lord God Almighty in the flesh.

This truly is the right response to Jesus. Not fear as in a terror that causes us to run from Jesus, but a reverent fear that causes us to marvel at him, love him, and seek to obey him.

It's been said that the great irony of this story is that the winds and waves are more obedient than we are. Imagine the audacity we have when disease, demons, the winds and the sea obey the words of Jesus, but we read his word and we say, no.

Again, the only right response for you and me is to marvel, love, and obey Jesus, God in the flesh.

So, first and foremost, the story of Jesus calming the sea confirms Jesus' identity.

But second, for the disciples in that boat and for us today, this story...

2) Challenges our faith - Again, this is the secondary lesson; the primary is all about the identity of Jesus. Nevertheless, there is much to learn here as we seek to faithfully follow Jesus as his disciples.

Again Jesus rebukes the disciples, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" Almost saying, guys your response should be very different than what I am seeing. And it is

obvious that you are driven by fear and not by faith. One commentator wrote, “The boat was not the only thing swamped that day; the fear of the disciples overwhelmed their faith.”

Reluctantly most of us can identify with the disciples here. The Bible often describes trials and difficulties with storm-like language...

Ps. 57:1

Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by.

Ps. 69:1-2, 14-15

1 Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. **2** I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me... **14** Deliver me from sinking in the mire; let me be delivered from my enemies and from the deep waters. **15** Let not the flood sweep over me, or the deep swallow me up, or the pit close its mouth over me.

For most of us, when we get bad news, or we begin to think about a developing situation in our own lives or on a larger scale, our imaginations often run to worst-case scenarios. And fear grows in our hearts, sometimes slowly, sometimes immediately, until the faith we say we have seems lost. Jesus could say just as easily to us, “Where is your faith? I don’t see it.”

And we might begin to feel like we are experiencing the exact same thing as the disciples in that boat, not necessarily with a literal storm but with a sleeping Savior.

Jesus is literally sleeping in the boat and I’m sure it confused the disciples. How could he be sleeping at a time like this? And it is very easy for us as we go through difficult circumstances to feel as if God does not care, particularly if we’ve been praying and the situation doesn’t seem to get any better. We might ask, God are you asleep?

Ps. 44:23-26

23 Awake! Why are you sleeping, O Lord? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever!
24 Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?
25 For our soul is bowed down to the dust; our belly clings to the ground. **26** Rise up; come to our help! Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love!

When it seems like God is sleep it will feel as if he doesn’t care. In fact, in one of the parallel passages of this story (Mark 4) we see this. Mark writes for us that not only were the disciples waking Jesus screaming, “we are perishing,” they even asked Jesus in that moment, “Do you even care that we are perishing?”

It might have seemed like Jesus was apathetic and was completely out of control of the situation, but we need to remember that it was Jesus' idea for them to go out on the sea! There was no cause for concern on Jesus' part. Why would the one who created all things be fearful of his creation? He was sovereign over it all, demonstrated in his rebuking the winds and waves.

While the disciples thought Jesus was indifferent, Jesus was in control. He was sovereign over the situation. The term "sovereign" speaks of God's supreme reign, that he alone is in control and not only *can* do whatever he pleases, he *will* do whatever he pleases. There is no one and nothing to thwart his plans and purposes.

Jesus was sovereign that day in Galilee over their circumstance and to this day he remains sovereign over your life and my life. SO, we can trust him.

In fact, I want to point out one thing unique about Matthew's account. Look again at verse 26...

Matthew 8:26

And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" **Then** he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.

Notice, Jesus gives his lesson on faith while the winds and the waves raged on. "Then" Jesus calms the sea. And I think there is a helpful lesson here for us as well.

Jesus should be trusted even when the storm rages, not merely after.

I think that often times we can be good at recounting the ways God either delivered us from or sustained us through a storm, only to doubt or worry that he will fail to do so again. It's like saying Jesus I need you to prove yourself...one more time.

But that is a real problem. In fact, we will see two different times later in Matthew's gospel where people ask Jesus for a sign before they will believe him. And Jesus's response is the exact same both times.

I'll just read one of those times...

Matthew 12:38-40

38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." **39** But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

40 For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

And then again in chapter 16, someone asks for a sign and Jesus says no, an evil and adulterous generation seeks a sign, my sign is the sign of Jonah, or my resurrection.

We shouldn't require signs of deliverance, protection, or sustenance before trusting in Jesus. Jesus is deserving of trust even when the storm is raging.

"The saint should be calm whether or not the storm is." (Quarles, EBTC, 227)

Again, Jesus wasn't worried that day and he is not worried today either. God doesn't worry about anything you worry about.

God is not worried about inflation. He is not worried about the upcoming elections. He is not worried about the stability or instability of your job. He is not worried about a sun that shoots charges 2 million miles an hour at Earth.

And not because he is indifferent but because they are not oversized problems that he can't handle. Nothing is outside of his plan or outside of his control.

There is great peace in knowing God does not worry.

So, it's good for us to consider, as we face storms that threaten to drag us to the bottom of the sea, in this moment, do you believe who Jesus is? Do you believe that he is the sovereign, good, wise Savior who has already conquered all that threatens his people?

GOSPEL

Because of the gospel, Jesus has already calmed the most dangerous and pressing storm any of us could face.

There is actually an incredible gospel connection with this story and another well-known story of the Old Testament, the story of Jonah.

If you remember the story of Jonah, Jonah is called to go to Nineveh and call the Ninevites to repent or else God was going to bring judgment. Jonah however didn't want to do that so he gets on a boat and sails the opposite way of Nineveh. And here we see some parallels between Jonah and Jesus:

-Both Jesus and Jonah were on boats, both were threatened by a storm.

- Both Jesus and Jonah are sleeping on the boat.
- Both Jesus and Jonah are woken by the others on the ship being told that they were going to die.
- Both storms were miraculously calmed.
- And in both stories the other passengers of the ship become more afraid after the storm than during it.

But there is a beautiful gospel picture here. In the story of Jonah, Jonah tells the sailors...

Jonah 1:12

Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you.”

In effect, he tells them, there is only one way to calm this storm, I must be thrown into it. I must die, so you can live.

We will see later in Luke Jesus then say the incredible words, “behold, something greater than Jonah is here.”

Part of what he means is that he, willingly, would be thrown into the sea to save his people. Consumed by the waves of sin and death Jesus would give his life that we might live. He was willing to endure the storm that we might arrive to the other side unharmed.

The apostle John records for us what he was shown in the book of Revelation regarding the new heavens and the new earth and in chapter 21 he writes...

Revelation 21:1

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

The picture here of a vanished sea simply means that what the seas symbolized would be no more. In Scripture they are the picture of chaos, uncertainty, fears, and even the evil forces at work against God and his people.

The storms you and I face today will one day be no more because of the work of Jesus. He plunged himself into the waves and, because of that work, for us one day those waves will cease.

And the writer of Hebrews says that this work, the gospel, can be for us an “anchor of the soul” (Heb. 6:19). We can remain steadfast in the midst of uncertainty and chaos in

our lives. **If Jesus would endure the storm of death *for* you, Jesus will endure the storms of life *with* you.**

You can walk in faith rather than fear today.

CONCLUSION

Are you gripped by fear this morning? Do you feel like you are enduring a storm? What truths do you need to cling to today so that your restless heart and mind can be calmed like the sea of Galilee?

What truths do you need to share with someone else, maybe a neighbor or family member, to be a help in this difficult time?

Don't fear. Walk in Faith. Trust your sovereign, wise, and good Lord.

CONFESSION

PRAYER

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Romans 5:1-2

1 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. **2** Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

VERSES

Matthew 8:23-27

Psalm 135:5-7

John 1:1-3

Colossians 1:16-17

Psalm 57:1

Psalm 69:1-2, 14-15

Psalm 44:23-26

Matthew 8:26

Matthew 12:38-40

Jonah 1:12

Revelation 21:1

Romans 5:1-2

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What storm(s) are you facing right now?
2. What would it look like to be overcome by a greater fear of God than the fears of our storms?
3. How does God's sovereignty, wisdom, and goodness encourage you in the midst of trials?
4. Looking back on previous trials in your life, can you now identify any ways that God used them for your good and his glory?
5. How can the gospel, with its future promises, calm our hearts in the midst of our current storms?