

Ps 147:1,2
Ps 25:5,6
Ps 107:9,10,11,12
Ps 27:1,2,3
Hy 49:1,2
Mark 4
Mark 4:40

Yarrow, March 28, 2010

Beloved Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ!

There is something settling, something comforting, in the event recorded around our text. It's settling, comforting, because here is displayed a majesty that should put to rest every fear we might ever encounter: He "rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm...." In the words of Ps 107:

"The LORD, their fears allaying,
Bade storm and wind be still;
Hushed were the waves, obeying
Their Maker's word and will."

We can share the disciples' response:

"How happy were the men
When He the calm provided
And He their ship again
To longed-for havens guided" (Ps 107:11).

Security, safe-protection at the hand of the Almighty – the miracle of the stilling of the storm reassures us that with the Lord around, we need not fear.

And maybe that's the reason, beloved, why this account of Christ stilling the storm has become somewhat of a favourite for God's people through the ages. Songs have been derived from it, allegories made from it. It's understood that the disciples of Mark 4 represent the Christians, you and me; the waves and the wind are the storms of life. And the comforting lesson of this miracle-become-parable is that we need never fear in the face of any of life's storms; as long as we go through life with Jesus aboard, we shall surely arrive securely at the longed-for harbour.

Now, much can be said for the thought that life is safe –despite storms– because Jesus is with us. The thought is certainly Scriptural. But in the passage before us today, congregation, the Lord our God would have us learn more than that the Christian is safe in the ship of life as long as Jesus is aboard. As we come to grips with the events of this past week, it's this deeper message we need so very much.

What that message is? This: with this storm at sea, Christ tests His disciples, tests them to see whether they will work with the instruction they have just received. For Christ looks in the storms of everyday life for fruits on the preaching..., and in this case these fruits were lacking. At the same time, Christ underlines through this miracle at sea that His kingdom is certainly coming; no storm can stop Christ's work of redemption. So I summarize the message of our text with this theme:

IN THE STORM AT SEA CHRIST LOOKS FOR FRUIT ON HIS PREACHING.

1. The cause of the storm
2. The lesson of the storm

1. The cause of the storm

On the evening of a certain day, Jesus with His disciples crossed the Sea of Galilee in a boat. Jesus slept while the disciples did the sailing.

In the course of the crossing, a vicious storm suddenly blew upon the little boat. In itself, it was nothing unique that such a storm should arise. The location of the Sea of Galilee in a depression meant that breezes frequently sank from the hot, dry country around the lake into the damp depths over the Sea. And that generated a hazard for the ships on the water.

But this particular storm was, apparently, more vicious than average. For we read: "there came a *great* squall of wind," with as result that "the waves were breaking over into the boat so that the boat was already filling." The disciples were experienced sailors; as career fishermen on the Sea of Galilee they knew how to sail, knew also the Sea and how to approach these sudden storms. Yet in the face of this particular storm, even these experienced sailors feared for their lives; such was the vicious nature of this great squall. So in desperation they approach the sleeping Teacher and chastise Him for His lack of concern at their plight: "do you not care that we are perishing?"

For our part, brothers and sisters, we feel that we can understand the fear of the disciples. If they, seasoned sailors, fear for their lives, surely the storm must have been bad. If they are afraid, who are we, landlubbers, to suggest that they ought not to have feared?! Yes, we can sympathize with the terror of the disciples.

But we are to realize, congregation, that *the Lord does not agree with our sympathy* for the disciples. For Jesus asks that penetrating question: "Why are you so fearful?" We understand correctly that with this question Jesus rebukes the disciples for their fear. And that reaction of the Lord we find surprising; may one not fear when one's boat is being swamped?

To understand the Lord's response to the terror of the disciples, we have to look into the *cause* of the storm. And we can discover that cause when we consider the occasion when this storm happened.

Notice that the account of the stilling of the storm begins with a reference to time (vs 35): "on the same day, when evening had come." By introducing the account of the stilling of the storm with these words, Mark connects this storm with the events of the earlier part of the day; Mark sees this storm as an extension of what happened earlier in the day.

What had happened earlier on that day is recorded in the first part of chap 4. Christ had spent that day teaching about the kingdom of God. That's what we conclude from vs 11, and it's repeated in vs 26, where Jesus says that "the kingdom of God is..."

Now it's true that Christ did His teaching in this chapter through parables. The reason for that was that many in the crowd did not wish to understand Jesus anyway; they followed Him for the sake of sensation. So Jesus spoke in parables, "so that 'Seeing they may see and not perceive, And hearing they may hear and not understand'" (vs 12). But for those who were truly interested in the kingdom of God, to them it was given that they might understand the secrets of that kingdom as Christ revealed them in His parables. And so that the disciples would understand

exactly what Jesus meant in His parables, He gave them more than ears to hear; privately He also explained everything to them (vs 34).

It was the disciples who were in the boat when the storm struck. It was these same disciples who had listened to Jesus' teaching all day, who also had that preaching explained to them in clear language. What, now, was it that Christ had taught specifically to them in the course of that day?

Christ spoke of the kingdom of God. That term of Scripture does not refer to a physical kingdom of such and such a size. What is meant instead is that God is King over all the world; *all* is His kingdom, nothing falls outside of His sovereign control. The only thing is that not all in the world *acknowledge* that God is King, is sovereign. When we read that God's kingdom *is coming*, then the point is that God in Christ is compelling people to *recognize*, to *admit* that He is King, is sovereign. So on the last day every knee of every created thing will bow before the King of kings; they will acknowledge that He in truth is God.

Christ spent the earlier part of the day teaching about the kingdom of God. By means of parables He told His disciples that God's kingdom *grows*. The sower, eg, went forth to sow his seed, and some seed fell on rocks, others on poor soil, others on good soil. Some of that seed was plucked up before it could bear fruit, but other seeds grew well and produced a rich harvest, some bearing 30 fold, some 60 fold, some 100. And the point in it all was this: the kingdom of God *is coming*; though some seed may be plucked up and other seeds may be choked, the promise is fixed: there *shall* be fruit, God shall be recognized and acknowledged as king; a percentage of Jesus' hearers include the reality of God's kingship in how they go about their daily activities and in how they respond to the bits and pieces the King puts on their path.

That reality is also the point in the parable of the growing grain in the vss 26-29. The seed is sown, and then the farmer can go to bed; he need do nothing more for the seed for it invariably grows by itself. So it is with the kingdom of God; it is sown, its beginnings are established, and so of necessity it will grow into a full plant – God will be acknowledged as king by the world.

Again, to what can this kingdom of God be compared? Jesus asks attention for the mustard seed, the smallest of the seeds. But it grows, and nothing prevents it from becoming a tree and being acknowledged as such by the birds of the air, for they nest in its branches. As the mustard seed grows from tiny to large, from useless to being a home for the birds, so also the kingdom of God grows from tiny to catholic, for the well being of one and all. And nothing can stop its growth. The kingdom of God: that's all the world. And that kingdom is coming, and that means that all the world will be made to acknowledge that God is sovereign over all.

This is what Christ had taught in the course of the day, and what the Teacher had explained privately to His disciples. But, we understand, this information, like all preaching of the gospel, should not go into the disciples' mental file, there to collect dust until it be needed for future discussions. No, the disciples should *work* with this instruction. That's why it was given!

So it is, congregation, that at the end of this day's teaching, Jesus says to His disciples: "Let us cross over to the other side." That statement was an instruction for the disciples to get into their boat and sail across the sea. But it was more than instruction, beloved; it was also a promise, a promise that Jesus and the disciples would safely get to the other side. For that's the way it is when Jesus says something; it shall happen as He desires. And that is something these disciples should know; they had just heard on that very day what Christ's kingship and sovereignty was all about.

The disciples, sailors that they were, took command of the boat, sailed it across the water. The Lord, meanwhile, lay down in the stern to sleep. Surprising. Jesus undoubtedly knew that the Sea of Galilee was given to unpredictable storms, but that doesn't stop Jesus from laying down to sleep. For Jesus, we need to know, was working with the material He had taught in the course of the day; Jesus knew who was sovereign, knew that all creation had to acknowledge God as king, had to listen to Him. So Jesus could do as David had done when Absalom pursued him (Ps 3); he lay down and slept. Jesus, too, laid down and slept, confident that He was safe in the hands of the Almighty.

But while the Master slept in peace, and while the disciples rowed their boat, the Lord God caused a draft from the dry lands to rush down upon the damp air over the lake. He was King, in firm control over all, and therefore He commanded the wind to blow and the waves to rise. And since He was King, the wind and waves obeyed Him.

But the disciples are slow to understand that the reality of God's kingdom means that every aspect of God's world is securely in His hands. Despite what they had heard in the course of the day about the kingdom of God, it does not dawn on them in this storm that howling winds and thrashing waves must obey the Creator – in fact, come from the Creator. It doesn't dawn on them and so they fear. They are terror stricken, because they see the elements rage, and they do not see that God's kingship means that all creation must submit to the King of kings. They see the elements rage, and do not see behind the raging elements the hand of their God. They are terror stricken, because they do not *work* with that which the Teacher had taught them earlier in the day. Christ explained what the kingship of God was all about, but the disciples do not appreciate that neither sea nor wind, neither storm nor tempest, can separate them from the love of God. The secrets of the kingdom of God, the fact that God was forcing His sovereignty to be acknowledged, did not become living realities for the disciples. They had listened, they had learned, but in the problems of daily life they forget what Jesus had taught them, do not work with the Lord's preaching. That's why Jesus responds to them as He does: "How is it that you have no faith?" Have you forgotten all I taught you today? Have you not digested My teaching, have you let it go in one ear and out the other, or have you perchance stored it in your mind as interesting but not all that relevant for the ups and downs of every day living? Do you not realize, O My disciples, that My teaching is practical, is very concrete, means everything for daily living? Why then are you afraid, O men of little faith?!

So we find ourselves in the heart of the second point:

2. The lesson of the storm

What is that lesson? It's this: if God's kingdom is real, if God is sovereign over all, there is every reason for God's people to be secure, at peace. The reality of God's kingship means that in the nitty-gritty of life there is no room for fear in the heart of the child of the King of kings. For his God controls all.

Christ demonstrates that there is no place for fear by stilling the storm. The disciples are terrified, but Christ speaks a word – "peace, be still" – and lo, the winds cease blowing and the raging sea is instantly as smooth as glass. Here is *pointed up the sovereignty of the King*; even wind and sea obey Him. Well are the disciples impressed by what they have just seen; they are filled with awe and marvel at the sovereignty of God in Jesus Christ. They thought to be overwhelmed shortly by the waves breaking into their boat. But the child of God need fear nothing; all things are so in the hands of the King of kings that nothing can so much as move apart

from the Lord directing it so. And all is in His hand because creation itself –unlike so many in the human race– *does* recognize that God is king. You see, His kingdom comes.

So Jesus demonstrates how much the disciples are to *work* with the reality of God's sovereignty in every circumstance of life. They've just heard the preaching; that preaching has to be *applied*. Sailors they are by trade? That means that in their sailing they should know themselves secure in the hands of the King of kings, the God of heaven and earth. Even on the water, even in the storms of life-at-sea, nothing in all creation can separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus. God is King, and therefore wind and sea must obey Him.

This event of the stilling of the storm at sea occurred before Christ defeated the hosts of hell on Calvary. But if Jesus, beloved, before He went to the cross, could rebuke the 12 disciples because they did not work with the realities of the day's teaching, how much more would a rebuke from the Lord be in place for those who live after Christ's triumph on Calvary when we fail to work with the reality of Christ's kingship!?

We live in the New Testament dispensation. Christ has been crucified, suffered the anguish the hell, cried out that all was now finished, that Satan was defeated, our sins paid for. He arose from the dead to prove that even death itself acknowledges the lordship of God; death too has to serve God. Christ Jesus has been taken up from earth into heaven, there to be crowned with glory and honour at the right had of the Father; He's Master over the Universe, King of kings, through whom the Father governs *all* things. So: neither rain nor drought nor storm nor earthquake nor even death come by chance; not a hair can fall from our heads without the will of the King of kings. So securely are all things in the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ that nothing happens in all creation unless He lets it happen. It is as the apostle John was shown on Patmos: no one was found worthy to open the scroll of world history, except the Lamb of God. He could open it, because He controls that history. Be it famine or war, pestilence or death, epidemic or storm: it is the exalted Christ who controls all events exactly because His kingdom has come. Good Friday is fact, Easter is fact, Ascension is fact, and therefore is Christ's kingdom a reality; He is sovereign and creation itself acknowledges Him. Because Christ is enthroned as Lord of the Universe, because today all creation knows that Jesus in king, can and does the King of all tell winds to blow and winds to be still, and those winds obey Him.

But, beloved, it's not just the big things that are in His control. King He is, and therefore are also steering wheels and brakes, bicycles and base balls, blood vessels and infections in His hands. The big difficulties of life, the small difficulties of life: nothing comes by chance, but all is in His sovereign control. And as He could once say to the wind and the waves to be still and they obeyed, so He can instruct an infection to arise, and it will obey.

I realize that millions of persons on this earth will not admit that Christ is king. But public opinion does not make something true or false. God has said that the ascended Son is King, and that's why I accept His word as true, and therefore in turn I know myself secure in His almighty hands. So there is reason to lie down relaxed, reason to sleep in peace, convinced that no storm in life can harm us, no tempest can separate us from God. For all is in His hands; His is the kingdom and the power and the glory. As Paul could say to the Romans: "I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (8:38f).

Christ's kingship is reality. That's the message we hear Sunday by Sunday in the preaching God sovereignly, graciously gives to us. Yet He does not intend this message to be nothing more than a conversation piece. The word God gives Sunday after Sunday is *practical*, and so God wants His children to work with the preaching in every circumstance of life. God is King? In the particular circumstances into which God has led us as congregation this week, God would have us to *apply* that reality. That means concretely: in the face of critical health and potential death we're not to get discouraged or get fearful. We're instead to recognize that the same Lord who has given us the preaching of His triumph over the weeks and the months and the years of the past looks for fruit on that preaching. Specifically, He wishes to see whether we, in the storms of life, will include the reality of Christ's sovereignty in our thinking and as a result of our including it know ourselves and our loved ones safe in His hands. You see, through what He's given the Lord looks in our midst for fruit on the preaching.

Then Yes, it's reason for gratitude to notice that there is distinct peace in so many hearts in the midst of what God has done in our midst this week. It's something for which to thank the Lord sincerely; *He* causes a crop of faith, be it thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown. That's so very, very encouraging!

But Satan attacks, and would desperately love to pluck away all the seed that was sown, or to choke the seed through the worries and cares of life. And he'll definitely use the tension some of us feel from the events of the week past to strive to make us bitter or angry – anything, as long as we do not in deeds demonstrate that we know our world to be in the Lord's mighty hand. In the storms of life –and life has more storms than only those relating to sr Boot's critical condition– God seeks fruit, and Satan seeks to prevent that fruit.

Here is our responsibility. That the disciples responded to the preaching of the day with the fear of the boat was their *decision*. How we respond in the crises of life is equally our responsibility.

We do not know what the coming week will bring. But we're not alone. Our God is Lord of lords, a King of such splendour that life and death are in His hands, including sr Boot's life, including our lives. This is a reality the Lord wishes us to include in our thought processes and discussions and conduct –and hence our attitudes– this week.

And be assured, my brothers and sisters: it is not at all impossible for us to work with this faith, to trust our mighty Father. The Christ of Mark 4 has ascended into heaven to pour forth His Holy Spirit even into our hearts. That Spirit makes us able. *We* may consider the storms of life to be impossible, but the promise is this: nothing can separate us from the love of the King of kings; more, He gives strength to persevere even in the worst storms of life.

The prophet Isaiah once said it like this: "Fear not.... When you pass through the waters I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you.... For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour" (Is 43:1ff).

Beloved, go home in peace.