

“Who Is This Man...?”
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Sunday, June 24, 2018

Intro: Alright ya'll I must of done something alright last week because last week I got 5 minutes to chat with ya'll, and this week, this week they have given this young, vibrant, zealous preacher a microphone again and given him 15 – 20 minutes to talk. Last week was a tease, this week is the real deal. I hope ya'll are ready for this.

Hey: To start, I want to set up an image for you. Who here loves thunderstorms? Raise your hand, shout ahoy captain, something, anything -- if you love thunderstorms. Who has a dog? Once more show of hands who has a dog? Two hands up if your dog is the bravest, bestest dog in the whole wide world that you love more than anything? Now those with dogs, keep your hand up if your dog is scared of thunderstorms? (ideally most hands stay up: laugh about it is so, Segway to ozzy if not) Well I want to share a brief story with you about my dog Ozzy (photo of Ozzy displayed) Ozzy is the guard dog of the house. You walk in he is the first to run to the door to bark and make sure everyone knows you're there. He acts all tough but he is really the cuddliest dog ever. But there is one thing that will break that small tough guard dog – thunderstorms. Ozzy is quick to hide under the table if he so much as hears the thunder clap. My Dad and I love thunderstorms. We are quick to grab out chairs and sit on the back porch watching the rain and lightning strikes. Ozzy looks to my Dad and I in a way that I imagine the disciples looked to Jesus when they asked “who is this man?” Who can possibly be so calm during the storms?

You: We know storms. Someone I know once told me that life is a series of storms, we are either in one, coming out of one or heading into one. I'm not sure I 100% follow that because that sounds depressing but I get where he is coming from. Every day we plan our schedule and something throws it off. Running late to work and there is an accident on the highway backing things up, or the car needs gas. Needing a full nights rest for a big conference the next day and we toss and turn the whole night. Cooking dinner and we go to strain the pasta and we knock over the strainer, the pasta goes everywhere and in the process of cleaning it up you burn the chicken and you end up getting take out. Ok maybe that last one is a little personal but you know what I mean! Storms, disruption happen all the time. Some of them are small like the ones I mentioned, but others are ones that paralyze us with fear much as our disciples were that day. Someone tragically must go to the hospital, a major car failure happens and it's massively disrupts the months budget which was already tight, or a relationship crumbles and fades away. We know storms. We try to prepare for them, we do all we can, but storms still happen. Today, inspired by our theme for vacation bible school of shipwrecked, we are going to look at how Jesus stands by us during storms so that we can confidently proclaim in the end that it is well with our souls. As we prepare to investigate this mornings scriptures will you join with me in prayer: Spirit of the living God we come before you and your sacred text this morning looking for inspiration and guidance. We read these stories of the disciples crippling fear in the storm not as mockery, but as reality that even the closest ones to Jesus still knew fear. You know our hearts, Lord. Some of us are in the middle of a storm, some have come out of storm recently and some may be preparing for the next. Whatever be the case speak to each of us in this place and offer to us a word of peace and stillness. In Jesus name, AMEN.

Look: Alright, alright, alright lets get right into the text. However, before we can completely wrestle with the primary text today we need to take a couple of minutes to learn some context around this pericope. In other words, what leads up into this story and what follows after is equally as relevant as what is in front of us. For the sake of time lets just talk about Mark 4, but if you are curious about where the crowds come from in todays scripture I invite you to investigate Mark 3 in your own time. Bible study is fun stuff ya'll. Hint hint, poke poke. So prior to our story Jesus gets on the boat with his newly appointed 12 best friends and begins to teach them and the crowds a series of 3 parables. These parables are mostly about farming, but they are also about light and dark, day and night. Jesus talks about not hiding the light but rather putting it on a nightstand for all to see in the darkness and furthermore talks about a farmer who has faith day and night. This may not seem all that important at first glance but it will become tangibly so that evening when Jesus teaches the disciples by day and travels with them by night across the sea. What you will see is that the boat in this scene represents a pulpit for Jesus. It is a place for Jesus to teach from. The boat is a place of refuge as it says in Mark 3 that Jesus asked for the boat so that they could get away from the crowds. But a boat is far more than just a pulpit and a place of refuge. It is a primarily a modem of transportation to familiar and unknown lands alike. The church, is very much like the boat in mention. The church is a place to teach, absolutely, this pulpit is a powerful place of teaching and yes amen the church is a place of refuge by day and by night during times of crisis and when life gets too crowded. But the church is a modem of transformation that takes us to places new and familiar alike. So what we teach on Sunday we pray we accomplish Monday through Saturday. A similar thing is going to happen in our story today.

Alright, so that leads us up this point in time where the disciples and Jesus set off by night to go across the other side of the sea. What does it mean by the other side of the sea? The other side of the sea was less so a destination and moreso a warning. A foreign land, an unknown land, a dangerous land. For us it would be similar to venturing to the west side of Cleveland. The OTHER side of Cleveland. Eeeee. Joking aside – the other side had very cultural implications as well. The other side of the sea meant people of different cultural backgrounds, religious backgrounds and overall ways of life. People who were not so welcoming either, if we read ahead in Mark 5 it says the people beg Jesus and his disciples to leave. Jesus was taking them into an uncomfortable place. What places is Jesus calling our church in this time and age?

Now it says that they traveled at night. At first I thought that was silly, I'm no sailor, but I would imagine traveling at night is a bad idea. Visibility is low and eyes are tired. However, the sea of Galilee is a unique little place. The sea of Galilee is wedged between a bunch of hillsides. As a result the climate on the waters would rapidly change. It would go from still waters to storms multiple times a day. So for a storm to scare the disciples as it did in our story you get the idea that this was no ordinary storm; it was massive! So for us, this isn't an example of a small storm like traffic running late or a pasta spilling or things like that. This was one of those emergency storms that disrupts everything. I want to give you an idea of what a typical fisherman boat looked like in galilee time. (slide) it was 27 feet long, 7 feet wide, 4 feet deep. It wasn't hard to fill a boat of this size with water. So it was common for water to get in and it was common to be tossing water overboard. Those of us who go through storms daily are used to some water getting in and water going out. But what do we do when the rate in which water is coming in is faster than the water going out because the storm is too big? (wait 3 seconds looking around) we panic, duh! And when we panic our faith gets tested and we can handle it one of two ways. We can sleep on the cushion knowing we are protected or we can look to God as the disciples did and say something

along the lines of what they said (slide) “Don’t you care that we are drowning!?” Of course, Jesus cares when we are drowning from our storms for Jesus is our savior, but these disciples weren’t drowning, they were still in the boat. So Jesus addresses not them first, for they were way too emotional to think rationally at that point, and rather address the fear. Both the cause of the fear, and the source of it. Jesus calms the storms, which showed that Jesus was more than just a healer of the day he was Lord, and in this case he is Lord over nature itself. So Jesus handles the cause of the fear but now must address the source of it so he looks to them and rebukes them: “Do you still not have any faith? Do you still not believe?”

Here’s the deal: I’ve often heard that the opposite of faith is doubt, or fear. But I don’t think that’s true. Doubt leads to a curious quest for truth and fear is a reverent thing. Small doses of fear can be respectful. Ozzy, my dog from the beginning has a desire to be good because good means pets and treats. Ozzy has a fear of messing up because then he gets yelled at and dogs hate to be yelled at. So its reverent as we are the same with God. We want to make God proud and we fear of messing up. The opposite of faith in my mind is certainty. When you are certain of something you need no faith. The disciples were certain that the trip would go well. They prepped the boats, they sailed at the time of day that was least likely to storm. They did everything right and the storm still came. Which is a lesson for us as well. We can do everything right and storms still come. It is not a sign that God is against us but rather this story is a testimony that God is literally with us during the storms. God is not the source of the storms in our lives, God is the savior that stands by us and rebukes the storms by grace.

The issue for the disciples and sometimes for us if we are to be honest is that their and our certainty caused them to become paralyzed when the storms came. It’s not that the disciples didn’t have enough faith in God. It’s that they didn’t have any! They were so certain things would be okay. Individually, we know this paralysis but as a church we also know this paralysis. Rev. Joyce said a line in her message last week that hit me like a ton of bricks and I imagine the same for you. “17% of people in our area come to church, which means largely our neighborhood views us as irrelevant.” Ouch. Irrelevancy is a storm. A large storm. And if we don’t handle it correctly we can be certain that is wrong but then be caught off by the storm and thus be paralyzed and look to God and say “don’t you care that we are drowning!?” But we are not drowning. We are still in the boat. And Jesus is still in the boat. So put your white gloves away Paul bearers, because the church isn’t dead. We haven’t drowned. God still views this boat as functional and thus still uses this boat as God’s preferred medium of transformation. But transformation requires transportation! A boat is a structure that **moves** us to new and unknown places. We’ve gotta lift up the anchor of certainty and **move!** Jesus leads them and us to new and unknown places. How we respond to that is the line between relevancy and irrelevancy, between fearful faith and paralyzing fear.

But hear the good news friends, hear the good news! Jesus...Jesus rebukes the storm! God is a God of protection who leads us to lay by still waters, Jesus rebukes the storms! And sometimes we are left, much like my dog ozzy looking at my dad and I and leave us saying “who is this man who can do these things?” Who is this man? Who is this man that teaches us the law of love? Who is this man that leads us to new places and peoples transcending the lines of culture, of race, of gender, of sexuality to extend the law of love to all of God’s people? Who is this man who can sleep during the storms? Who is this man who can rebuke the storms, the very Biblical symbol of chaos with a simple phrase: be still? Who is this man who does incredible things in our lives that we are left in silent and fearful awestruck? Who is this man who would go as far as to die for our sins to live out that law of love? Who is this man? This man is the Savior, the Lord over nature, life and death itself. The Messiah. The Christ, Jesus. Jesus

beckons each of you here to come and follow, through still waters and storms alike. But people of God, know that resting with us during the storms is God and that lets me say all the time that it is well with my soul. If you believe it, please rise with me and join in singing our concluding hymn: It is well with my soul. AMEN.