

I grew up in Katwijk aan zee, a seaside town near The Hague. My father was a baker. But at that time a lot of people in Katwijk were still working in the fishing industry. And so one day as a teenager I joined my cousin for a 5-day trip on a fishing boat (trawler) on the North Sea. We were very excited and as we left the harbour in IJmuiden, we were laughing and making jokes. But as soon as we left the harbour, I started to feel sick and had seasickness for the full – very long – 5 days. I lived on a few oranges and lost a few kilos. I was counting down the hours for us to return to land and for this terrible feeling to disappear! And mind you, the weather was perfect, there was not even a storm!

When I read the story of Jesus calming the storm, this memory came back immediately. I still fear becoming seasick because of that experience. Our reading in Mark is about fear: the fear of death, the fear of being left alone, the fear of not being in control. But it is also about faith: the faith that Jesus is with us, in the midst of the great storms in our lives. I hope this familiar story will speak to you afresh today. It is okay to be fearful at times but in the end, there is only one Person that can deal with our deepest fears and that is our Lord Jesus Christ. Let's look at the story and see how this applies to your and my situation today.

[text]

The story of the stilling of the storm introduces a new section in Mark. Following a collection of parables in chapter 4, this is the first of four miracle stories in Ch. 4 & 5.

Mark's Gospel starts with the sentence: The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God... And the first half of the Gospel is answering the question: What kind of Messiah is Jesus? 4:41 - *Who then is this?* So far in the Gospel Jesus has healed diseases and cast out demons but now in this miracle of calming the storm Jesus is exercising God-like authority over creation. By commanding the waves and the sea into submission, Jesus does what only God can do. The answer to this question who Jesus is, we find in 8:29 where Peter says: You are the Messiah! Not just a prophet, but the Messiah we had been waiting for.

Let's turn to the passage we read today. We find 3 times the word 'great' in these verses and that helps us to structure the story:

I. The Crisis— "a great windstorm" (v. 37)

II. The Result of Jesus' Command— "a great calm" (v. 39) [*dead calm*]

III. The Response of Jesus' Disciples— "a great fear" (v. 41) [*great awe*]

You may have noticed already that we can read this story on at least 2 levels: On **one level** this miracle story shows us who Jesus is. That He has the same power as His Father, that He truly is the Son of God.

On **another level** it is like a parable of discipleship: it starts with an invitation to the disciples: "Let us go across to the other side" and then there is a lesson about fear and trust.

(35-36) So Jesus is taking his disciples to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (or Lake Tiberias) to be alone with them and to leave the crowd behind. That would often mean a time of intensive learning for the disciples and that is true this time.

(37) Then events change suddenly. The text does not give us any warning (no dark clouds, nobody saying: 'I think the weather could turn'): A great windstorm arose...

Now this is not that strange because the Sea of Galilee was famous for its sudden storms. the waves began to beat against the boat so that the boat was already filling with water...

(38) Meanwhile Jesus is sleeping away peacefully on a pillow in the stern! When I was a child, there was a big fire in the night across the street where we lived. The fire brigade had been there, everybody had gone outside to watch what was happening, so they told me. I had been asleep the whole time! I was so angry with my brothers & sisters that they had not woken me up. I had missed all the excitement!!

Jesus is sleeping. The disciples wake him up and ask: "Do you not care that we are perishing?" Someone wrote: "The ability to sleep peacefully and untroubled is a sign of perfect trust in the sustaining and protective power of God". But the disciples were not too impressed by this. Their question is not so much an accusation as well as a cry of **fear** & feeling left alone.

You hear this question again and again in the Psalms: **Where is God in the midst of my distress?** And we hear this question also in the midst of the terrors and distresses of our world today. If God is so great and powerful, if God really cares about this world, then why do events in the world and in my life go so badly. The ready response is often: either God has no power, or God does not care for us or the creation. But that is not the answer to the question of the disciples here in this story.

(39) Notice that Jesus does not start a discussion whether their fears are valid or not but He immediately "woke up" and rebuked the wind forcefully: "Be silent! Be still! The response of the wind is instant. The wind ceased and there arose a "great calm" (the great storm (crisis) has changed into a "great calm": when Jesus speaks, situations change, people change).

(40) Now that the rescue is accomplished and the sea is calm, there is time for some needed instruction. Jesus addresses the real problem: "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" It is fear against faith. The point here is not that we are not allowed to feel fear (I will repeat that a few times to make it very clear) but the issue here is that the disciples do not yet understand Jesus' role as Messiah, as Saviour. They only see and fear the elements that threaten them.

The question for them and for us here is **where we put our trust?** Do we believe that God is with us and that He is in control? Or do we live our lives as if we are determined by fate and you can never now what the next storm in your life will be. The Good News today is that we put our trust in a Person, a Saviour, a Messiah, who is in control. Yes, we are fearful at times (and that is okay) but in the end we have the faith, the conviction, that Jesus can and will calm the storms in our lives.

When church father **St Augustine** preached on this passage, he uses the metaphor that Christ is asleep within us (He is with us) but we so often forget this reality and we let the storms of life take control... He writes:

"... Christ is asleep in you. What do I mean? I mean you have forgotten his presence. Rouse him, then; remember him, let him keep watch within you, pay heed to him ... A temptation arises: it is the wind. It disturbs you: it is the surging of the sea. This is the moment to awaken Christ and let him remind you of those words: 'Who can this be? Even the winds and the sea obey him.'

(41) In the last verse the disciples have again “great fear,” (literally, “they feared a great fear;”). But this is a different kind of fear (2 words in Greek). It is “the fear of the Lord. In the whole Bible we see the pattern that when people realize who God really is and what He does, there is fear, there is awe. And that is happening here. A Messiah that controls creation! What an amazing Saviour.

There can also be an element of fear of having to change, because that is what Jesus is asking his disciples to do: to look at the world with different eyes. To not see the world as it is, but to see the KoG, to see God at work within our reality.

Do you fear that kind of change? The change that is happening when you realize that God is calling you to live differently, to think differently or go beyond the borders of what you think you are capable of? The answer is to choose faith over fear.

[Take away]

Let me say a bit more about faith over fear.

It is okay to be fearful at times. Fear is a healthy emotion that protects us against many harms. The point here is the fear that takes over our lives. It can be the fear of death, fear of missing out, or fear of change... these kinds of fears can turn into a giant, category-five storm that sends us running for cover. When fear controls our lives, we give it too much power over us. Sometimes we need therapy to deal with this and that is absolutely fine and nothing to be ashamed of. On a deeper level though the only medicine for fear is trust, is faith. It is trust the God who says, “I will never leave you or forsake you” (Heb. 13:5). That doesn’t mean that bad things will never happen to us. What it means is that when they do, our faith keeps us from going under. When the fears of life come our way, we can simply acknowledge that these fear are there, we talk to Jesus (Do you not care that I am drowning?) and we trust that even a giant storm can be stillen. He is able, He has done it, He will do it.

Finish with a story of **Henri Nouwen** about faith. Henri got to know some acrobats: *The Flying Rodleighs* (trapeze artists in a circus). He became friends with them and wrote about them.

"One day, I was sitting with Rodleigh, the leader of the troupe, talking about flying. He said, 'As a flyer, I must have complete trust in my catcher. The public might think that I am the great star of the trapeze, but the real star is Joe, my catcher. He has to be there for me with split-second precision and grab me out of the air as I come to him in the long jump.'

'The secret,' Rodleigh said, 'is that the flyer does nothing and the catcher does everything. When I fly to Joe, I have simply to stretch out my arms and hands and wait for him to catch me and pull me safely over the apron behind the catchbar.'

'You do nothing!' I said, surprised. 'Nothing,' Rodleigh repeated. 'The worst thing the flyer can do is to try to catch the catcher. If I grabbed Joe's wrists, I might break them, or he might break mine, and that would be the end for both of us. ... A flyer must fly, and a catcher must catch, and the flyer must trust, with outstretched arms, that his catcher will be there for him.'

This is what faith is all about: “God will be there when you make your long jump. Don't try to grab him; he will grab you. Just stretch out your arms and hands and trust, trust, trust.'