

Sermon for Year B Proper 7

The Text: Mark 4:35-41

The sinking ship is an image that can represent our greatest fears in situations of panic. The image of a sinking ship stirs in us a fear that our refuge at sea may not be that safe after all. For the famous ship the *Titanic* that sank in 1912, the ship was boasted as unsinkable, and having enough lifeboats on the deck for all on board was seen to spoil the look of the ship. What a tragic mistake that was! So many lives could have been saved if there were simply enough boats; the pride of human achievement blinding them from common sense.

But as we might picture the stern of this great ship sticking out of the water, we can be reminded of the near sinking of the boat that Jesus and the disciples were in on the Sea of Galilee in our text today. It's not too different in fact from *Titanic*. Their boat was beginning to flood at the bow or front, with the disciples desperately trying to stop the stormy water from filling it up. Jesus is tucked up and sleeping at the stern, still dry. Jesus is raised up at the stern, the disciples down low feeling the icy cold threat of death and drowning as the water takes over.

The situation in their eyes has reached tipping point, and so they force Jesus to wake up. The disciples might be thinking a few things: *'How is Jesus managing to sleep through all this? Yes he's exhausted from the crowds that keep following him, but surely he cares and knows what's happening?'* Jesus' sleeping in the storm makes the disciples doubt Jesus' character and love.

What we are seeing here in the disciples is what we would possibly all do when we have reached our limit or our tipping point. We see our security begin to vanish, we panic, accuse and misunderstand each other in our attempt to survive. Anger flashes like lightning, and in the storm the devil gets the better of us as he increases the fear and panic of the situation. But this storm was very real indeed for it to make experienced fishermen panic for their very lives. Squalls, high winds and storms were quite common on the Sea of Galilee, but there was something about this one that felt very different than normal.

When Jesus actually gets up his language indicates that something supernatural is in operation. When he orders the wind and waves to be silent, in the original language he is saying: *'Be muzzled!'* It is as if the sea were alive as a demonic creature who wanted to swallow up Jesus and his disciples in one gulp. So as Jesus commands the storm and sea to be muzzled, just like he says to the demons earlier on, Jesus is showing that a spiritual power is at work as they cross to the other side. And remember that Jesus had an original mission to go the other side didn't he?

Just imagine the light bulb moments going on in the disciples once they see Jesus casting out a whole legion of demons out of one man in Mark chapter 5. *'I see, that's why we had the storm! Satan was trying to stop us coming!'*

And so that opening line from Jesus at the beginning of our text has now some meaning and weight to it: *'Let us go over to the other side'*. That one phrase contains an entire plan of Jesus to take his disciples and us through a journey that maybe tricky and scary and unpredictable at times. Jesus knows the storm but he also knows the other side too.

It is on the other side on the shore where we can take stock and reflect how the storm is now gone, that we survived it, and how we might begin to understand what the storm was for, and what it did inside us. In the storm we got to know what we felt our limits were, and what our tipping points were. We began to work out at what point our faith held us fairly well until the trauma of what we experienced started to make us doubt whether God still cared about us.

We all have our tipping points; those times we want to shout out loud to a seemingly sleeping God and tell him how panicked we feel about our situation. But interestingly those prayers we shoot up in panic don't ever go unheard. So many times God gets up in our drowning boats and makes something change. And you may have noticed over your lifetime that your tipping points of panic may have shifted. Some of you may panic at the sight of thunderstorm clouds, and others when the water is right up to your necks, as in Psalm 69.

Every one of you can have different reference points when you decide you can't control the boat you are in, and you need God to either grab your hand and steady the boat or stop the storm completely. But sometimes God doesn't stop the storm.

For unknown reasons he can sometimes let the storm rage on, but... he is always there with us, and he helps us survive it. After a while we may find that God makes us able to weather storms better as we grow in our faith. That is all well and good once we get to the shore, but in the thick of the storm it's very hard to trust God isn't it?

So whatever storms are running in your life at the moment, Jesus is there. He's not sleeping. He's right there saying to you: *'Now don't look over the side of the boat and be terrified by the waves and storm. Just look at me, keep focused. We'll be through this soon'*.

Finally, try to be open with others who look after you about the storms in your life. We can be very good at hiding our sinking ships in our hearts, and sometimes we can have no idea such as storm is whirling around in someone; gradually eroding their faith from within. So in the service today, I pray that whatever the storms you are going through, you will feel the peace of the Lord and his authority and power over the wind and waves inside you. Remember you are not a sinking ship, but a

child of God whom Jesus loves. Jesus will be with you always over the sea of this life, but whatever happens he will always navigate you towards the final shoreline of heaven, where the storms cease and true life begins. Amen.