

The Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
30 January, Anno Domini 2022
St. Matthew 8:23-27
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father and of the +Son and of the Holy Spirit.

This incident on the Sea of Galilee and others like it recorded in the Gospels should be a tremendous comfort for us. Christ brought peace and calm in the very moment when all seemed completely lost, when death seemed to have an iron grip on everyone in the boat. By His almighty word, the storms were immediately silenced and brought to heal. They had to obey their Maker.

Storms and other upheavals in creation are everywhere. They are nothing new. Ever since Adam, the crown and head of creation, subjected creation to the destruction and futility of sin, there have been earthquakes and tornadoes and storms and tsunamis. As the apostle writes “all of creation has been groaning”. Like our own death, these are not natural phenomena. What is natural is for everything to work as God created it. These are quite unnatural. These are reminders that everything is broken and crumbling apart. These things are constant reminders of our sin and the judgment of God that looms against any who do not cling in faith to Christ.

It isn't hard to imagine why the disciples were terrified. Things were grim. Their prospects of coming out of the storm alive were slim to none. Even though several of them were very experienced sailors, there was nothing they could do. They were forced to confront their own powerlessness to save themselves in any way. And today, with all of our technological advances, nothing has changed. We cannot control lightning or waves or tornadoes or raging fires or the bitter cold any more than the men on the Sea of Galilee or those carrying the disobedient Jonah to Tarshish. The best we can do is try to hide and hopefully survive. And even that quite often, tragically, isn't enough.

The violent outbursts of creation are not-so-subtle reminders of the devastation that sin brings to everything it touches. Each hurricane or mudslide or volcanic eruption should startle us awake and remind us that death is constantly seeking to swallow us up and not simply end our earthly lives but drag us to the second death - eternal judgment. And what can we do to stop these things? Nothing. We are again forced to see that we are powerless to save ourselves. We cannot stop ice storms and freezing temperatures. We cannot bring peace to a world that is being

ripped apart by hatred and lies and fear. We cannot take away the guilt of our own sin or do anything to make adequate payment for it. We are powerless on earth and before heaven.

There is no Mother Nature as the pagans put their trust in and hope that by appeasing her these disasters will stop. But these too serve only one will, the will of Him who created them, the Lord God Almighty. He alone has authority over the wind and the waves, the lightning and the hail. These are all His servants doing His bidding, being sent to drive sinners in repentant humility into the merciful and saving arms of Christ. Though they seem to have limitless power, they are powerless before the Word of God. They must obey Him. He has set a bound for them that they cannot cross. The power of Christ's Word is such that even those things that do not have ears must hear and obey without question.

This is not only true of physical storms but all those things that trouble us in mind, body, and soul. The one who suffered death has authority over all things in heaven and on earth. The Crucified Son of God has risen from the dead, emptying death of all its power. "It is finished," cried the Lord Jesus as He gave up His Spirit. And with those three words, every storm of every kind was brought to a complete calm. Now, there is nothing that can rage against those found in Christ that can steal you from Christ. They may look terrifying but they are nothing. Whether you live in tornado valley or your financial house seems to be in utter ruins or your sins tower over you like a crushing tsunami, these things will not and cannot harm you. That doesn't mean that these things cannot cause you suffering. But they cannot undo what Christ has done by His Word - declared you forgiven, a child of God, a victor over death. It is His Word and His Word alone that you must trust to silence the crashing waves of guilt that cause your heart to melt. Your sins may, indeed, be many (as the sins of all are many). But just as surely as the Lord Jesus Christ, by His Word, caused the violent blowing winds to cease and the waves to lie back down in the sea, so also by His Word, bestowed upon you in the waters of Holy Baptism, He has caused the raging fires of God's righteous judgment against you to be snuffed out and the impossibly heavy weight of your guilt to be lifted completely off your shoulders and placed on His instead.

Dear children, the storms will most certainly rage fiercely all around you. You may suffer a terminal illness, you may go through what seems like a never ending stream of stress and upheaval, your heart may be sinking at the turmoil of the world around us, your conscience may be acutely aware of the guilt of your rebellion against God. Why are you afraid? Let your heart rest in Jesus who has promised you His care and protection and assured you that you will be safe with

Him no matter how high the waves or dark the clouds. He died on the cross and spent three nights in the belly of the earth to secure that promise. Death couldn't hold Him and had to spit Him out. And out He came, a triumphant victor over all the storms that threaten you.

Though their fear began to supplant their faith, yet the storm brought the disciples exactly where they needed to be - to Christ. In their need they abandoned their own wisdom and strength, they turned their eyes away from the storm to focus on Christ and lifted up their voices to the One who could help them. Their prayer was simple and to the point - save us, Lord; we are perishing. That is the proper response of faith to the storms that threaten to overwhelm us. Cry out to the Lord Jesus who cares for you and whose Word puts every storm to flight so that it may not hurt His beloved children, you.

That is the purpose of this new crucifix that our adorns our sanctuary. It is meant to be a reminder as often as you behold it of your true and only source of help - your Savior Jesus Christ. He hung on the cross for the very purpose that you may take away your fear, to rob every storm of its power. Gathered together with Christ in the holy ark of the Christian Church you are safe. You were once perishing but no longer. Christ has taken away your sins. The One who commands the obedience of the winds and sea, is the One who offered His life for you so that you may hear those most beautiful and needed of words "The peace of the Lord be with you always." He hears your prayers and He will deliver you.

In the Name of +Jesus.

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keeps your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus.