

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

STILL

Mark 4:35-41

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Analysis by Lori A. Cornell

35On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." 36And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. 37A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. 38But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" 39He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. 40He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" 41And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

DIAGNOSIS: Swamped

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Storm-Tossed*

Life has a way of tossing us around. That's no surprise. We prepare ourselves for the possibility daily: Will my baby be born healthy? Since Dad has colon cancer, am I susceptible to it too? Grandma could die any day now, kids; we should prepare ourselves for it. At least if we anticipate the bad news, we can maintain the illusion that we have some control.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Afraid*

But what if the storm catches us off guard? Worse, what if the storm threatens our very existence and it appears that God is “asleep at the bow,” so to speak? That seems to be the impression that the disciples had: that they were about to drown, and Jesus couldn’t have cared less. So they wake him with accusations that thinly mask their fears. Of course, to be fair, their fear seems perfectly rational: they thought that with Jesus around, God was by their side. Instead they are overwhelmingly helpless.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Overwhelmed, Perishing*

When we are overwhelmed, and blame God rather than trust him, we are left with no one to rely on. Alone and afraid, we go down. Our fear has swamped us, and we are in over our heads; lost in the storm.

PROGNOSIS: Stilled

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Faithful*

But here is the irony of the disciples’ fear-that they have been abandoned: God is right there in the boat with them. Jesus, who is at peace enough in God’s creation to weather the storm without fear, responds to the cry of the disciples. Rather than take offense at their words, he addresses the cause of their fear and stills the storm. But what about the unavoidable storm of death-the one that the disciples can neither anticipate nor defend themselves against? Jesus responds to that too: Awake to the ultimate human cry for help-“Save us Jesus, we are perishing!”-Jesus performs the ultimate act of life-saving: He chooses to perish in our place. Knowing the full gravity of death, he cries out like we do, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” And then he accepts what we fear most, and perishes at death’s hands. His father cannot fail to notice such

obedience, rewarding it with the same compassion Jesus once showed the disciples in the boat. God quiets death, and Jesus is saved from its squall. And with death silenced, he delivers his disciples with himself to the other side-eternal life.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Fear and Love*

When Jesus stills the storm, and questions the disciples about their fear, they observe that Jesus is more in charge than they could have imagined. The fear that they experienced when they thought he didn't care about their dilemma is replaced by a new fear: This man not only calls them to account for their fear but responds to the source of their fear, by calling nature to account to his lordship. They have more to contend with than bad weather, they have come into the company of the Lord of wind and sea. But this Lord bears no malice toward those who fear, so in his company disciples begin to learn the lesson of what it means to "fear, love, and trust" Jesus.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Still*

Miraculously, what happens as disciples fear, love, and trust their Lord, is that when the storms come they stay calm. It's not that they don't fear, exactly; more that they don't fear the ultimate stuff. The wind and sea might continue to swamp them, but they have it on good authority that the biggest storm of death is stilled. So they not only step into the personal storms to which they are subject with greater courage, but they actually risk stepping into their neighbor's storms, to be present with them, just as Christ has been present for them.