

**The Reverend Jon Hauerwas – June 20, 2021 – The Calm *after* the Storm  
Psalm 9:1-3, 9-11 and Mark 4:35-41**

It's the playoffs. There are three seconds left on the clock. The home team is trailing by two points, and they have just used their last timeout. Arena staff rush out to center court to clear the sweat while the coaches draw up the final play. The music is pounding and, as the fans rise and sing, the focus turns to a dozen banners heralding the titles of the last century, and to the star players who have trained for this moment from childhood.

For now, this is their last opportunity. To rise. To fall. To be remembered. The inbound pass is fired with laser precision into the capable hands of the team's leading scorer. He floats above the double team, some five feet behind the three-point line. The ball glides from his fingertips in slow motion. And in a surge of excitement, and adrenaline, and anticipation, there is also an unexpected silence. In his mind, there is no crowd, no noise, just reflex and muscle memory. He has practiced for this very scenario a thousand times before. And now that the moment has finally arrived, he is ready to meet this challenge.

The greatest moments in sport's history are packed with drama because the outcome is far from certain. Even the best players sometimes miss the mark. And while victory is always the desired outcome, there are no guarantees. When the shot successfully enters the hoop and falls to the court, the collective elation of the players and the crowd serve as a reminder that hope was always mixed with doubt. "Can you believe it? Can you believe it?" the announcer yells as the arena erupts in the joy of triumph.

One day, Jesus and his disciples were traveling by boat on open waters when a violent storm arose. One need not be an angler or a sailor in order to comprehend the gravity of this situation. For if the boat is to remain upright, then the water needs to stay out there. We understand that, as a ship takes on water, and the hull begins to fill, eventually, the vessel will sink. Not even the most advanced maritime engineering can ultimately tame the sea.

In Jesus' day, there was even greater cause for alarm. The boats were wooden. And they traveled without any means of communication with the outside world. On open waters in the ancient world, a storm could quickly turn deadly. And on those unfortunately occasions when disaster struck, there was no Coast Guard on the ready.

The disciples, at least four of whom were fishermen, were in a panic. The boat was already being swamped and yet, somehow, Jesus is asleep in the stern. This is a moment requiring all hands on deck. For the time being, self-care will need to wait. They rouse their leader from his rest with shouts of pending doom - each of them anxiously wondering if he who performs miracles can free them from the clutches of the natural world.

Jesus rises to his feet, rebukes the wind, and says to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.” Next, he turned to his disciples and said, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” The twelve were filled with great awe and said to one another, ‘Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?’”

I began this morning with an analogy from the world of sports with the focus on a star player and a game winning shot. At that time, I suggested that the post-game celebration was so extraordinary because the result was always uncertain. That just as easily, the shot would not reach the intended target. Everyone knows this. The players, the coaches, and the fans were all hoping for the best while, at the same time, bracing themselves for a wholly different outcome. The sting of defeat.

In our gospel lesson this morning, the stakes were even higher. This was a matter of life and death. And yet, hope here was also mixed with doubt. Surely, he can't calm the sea. And yet, what if he can?

David Schlafer makes note of a powerful point. That is, “the fears of the disciples are not calmed by the calming of the storm;” rather, “they are intensified.”

<sup>1</sup> “In their journey with Jesus thus far,” the disciples “have been privileged, safe observers of his healings, exorcisms, teachings, and controversies. Now they are in the thick of it, swamped up to their necks. While Jesus calms the elements with one sharp word, he names the internal, spiritual storm raging in his followers with another – a confrontational, ‘Why are you afraid?’ Not a rhetorical question, or one that masks a condemnation, but an invitation to discernment: ‘Let’s talk.’” <sup>2</sup>

Sports fans often like to think of themselves as a part of the team. They imagine the arena as one big ship in need of defending. But what would it really mean to be on the same ship with Jesus? Would we have the confidence required in

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<sup>1</sup> David Schlafer, *Connections: A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship, Year B, Volume 3*. ed. Joel B. Green (Westminster John Knox Press, 2021), 106.

<sup>2</sup> Schlafer, 106.

his abilities? Or would we stand slack-jawed, unable to comprehend that he is who he really claims to be?

And what about that peaceful existence for which we long? Yes. “How much safer to remain on our own side of the shore! Who wants to be ordered by Jesus into seas that quickly turn tumultuous? If ‘he is with us in the boat,’ why does he seem to be asleep in it? Does he not care that we, his followers, could die out there? What if the best way *out* of the storm were to stand both *with* and *for* Jesus *in* it?”<sup>3</sup>

Or, as William Greenway observes, this image of a sleeping Jesus is “a vision of peace delivered by faith even amid the storms of life.”<sup>4</sup> True faith, then, is the triumph over the fear of death.<sup>5</sup> “Jesus’ stilling of the waters testifies to the ultimate power of love (anticipating resurrection).”<sup>6</sup> And in the midst of this account, we are reminded that “true faith leads Jesus to the cross and others on the boat to martyrdom.”<sup>7</sup>

Friends, when we are looking for the calm after the storm, it does not always appear as we had envisioned it. Sometimes, Jesus sends us straight into the midst of

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<sup>3</sup> Schlafer, 107.

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<sup>5</sup> Greenway, 105.

<sup>6</sup> Greenway, 105.

<sup>7</sup> Greenway, 105.

the storm. And while Jesus, as we all know well, is capable of helping us to navigate those storms, sometimes it does not end as we imagined. Sometimes the waves are far too rough, and the duration is far too long. And yet, as we mentioned during that Time with Young Disciples earlier, Jesus is, indeed, with us in that boat. And at the end of the day, that's all that really matters. May it be so and all thanks be to God. Amen.