

“Getting Back to the ONE Who is in Control!”

(June 21st, 2015)

Pastor Espinosa

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. “Where was God when...?” (please silently fill-in the blank) It’s a question that sometimes we are ashamed to admit we ask as Christians who are at the same time sinners who doubt and second-guess God Almighty. “Where were you Lord when I lost my child?” “When my family splintered?” “When my heart was broken?” “When my life took that dreadful turn for the worse?” “Where were you, so that I didn’t have to enter into that suffering which doesn’t belong to those who trust in You?” “Where were you Lord?”

This is one of those great taboos. As a child of God you aren’t supposed to ask that question, at least not out-loud! Instead, we are encouraged to quietly sweep our doubts and disappointments under the rug and pretend that the Lord must have been asleep when that unexpected “furious squall” hit our life. In truth, however, we want to react as the disciples are described in this morning’s Gospel in Mark 4:

“[Lord] don’t you care?!” (v 38)

Try to picture the situation: 13 men have filled a large boat and very suddenly there is a “great” wind, a “mega” wind. It is so powerful that the water is coming into the boat and this sight had the disciples utterly convinced that they were going to die. Put yourself there...you are terrified; as far as you’re concerned disaster has struck and if there was ever a moment that you needed God, then this is it! You look over...to the left, to the right, to the back (the stern) and there He is...there is God. He’s at the stern. You look once, you shake your head because you’re almost in shock over what you see...but your eyes didn’t deceive you. The God you desperately need is *not* scurrying to save you; not making preparations to deal with the emergency; not even trying to calm you. No, He’s doing none of these things, because He is busy doing only one thing: *sleeping*! Your world is seemingly falling apart, and He’s sleeping!

This is almost too much to bear...if He is your God of love; your God who calls you to cast all your anxieties upon Him because He care for you! (1st Peter 5:7), then why did it seem that He was sleeping when you needed Him the most?! Yes, it does seem that way sometimes doesn’t it? How often as a pastor I hear Christians reminding me that they know that the Lord will not give them more than what they can bear while permitting them a way out from under that burden (1st Cor 10:13), but sometimes we recite this not because we believe it to be true, but because we think we should. And sometimes there is a silent groan: “But why Lord did you leave me when I needed you the most?!” In truth we are tempted to believe that the Lord is not helping us at all, but that we are bearing the weight all by ourselves, and we echo the words of the disciples in the boat, “Lord, don’t you care?”

You must understand my dear Christians, that the reactions I have just described do not come from faith, but from unbelief, which so often leads us to panic. And unbelief is terribly predicable when our focus in life is NOT upon the ONE who created the wind and waves, but rather upon the wind and waves themselves. It is remarkable to consider how easy it is to shift one's focus.

Again we want to be sure to wish all of the dads here this morning a "Happy Father's Day!" I always rejoice in the many very pleasant memories of my dad, but one of his peculiarities was his philosophy about instruction. Sure there were times he would be meticulous and conduct thorough lessons, but there were other times that his method of teaching was to throw me into a situation I had never been in before. Once he had me get on a trailer to drive a tractor down from it. Just one problem here: I had never been trained on how to drive a tractor! As I needed to get the tractor into gear – as it was running and as I sat in the driver's seat – my dad told me to step on the clutch. My next thought was: *"What's a clutch?"* All of this occurring mind you on the tractor (alone) while it was very much running. But something very interesting was going on during this madness: when I focused on the tractor, all was most definitely *not* well (it was assuredly just a matter of time that I wrecked the thing or killed myself or both), but when I focused on my dad, his voice, his instruction, and the fact that he was very much close by, then my confidence would come back. Dad was there. And in fact, everything worked out. The day came after all that I grew pretty adept at driving tractors.

But even as the disciples gazed upon the sleeping Christ, they were still nevertheless transfixed upon the wind and the waves...with their belief that they were doomed; with their conviction that God was letting them down. Before going on, however, we have to stop and break our preoccupation with this lack of faith. Why is the Lord sleeping?! Is He sleeping because He doesn't care? Absolutely NOT, because no one cares about you more than He does! Christ the Lord created you, not someone else; He gave His life for you...who else has done that for you? He watches over you every moment of your life today, and no one else can say that! So how dare we even consider that He does not care?! Oh how He cares! So there must be a very good, rock-solid reason for His sleep!

He is sleeping dear friends, because first of all God really did take on our flesh in Christ and as true man was tired after all He had been doing for the people. But the other reason the Lord Jesus was sleeping through this storm was because He completely trusted the Heavenly Father! Yes, the wind is terrible and the waves are great, but so what?! Will the wind tear us from our newly created life in Christ? Will the waves wipe away His holy blood which covers our sin for all eternity? As the Scriptures clearly say in Romans 8:

"If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things...Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" (vss 31b-32 & 35)

No, dear Christians, none of these things can rob us of our salvation in Christ. Christ died for us and in Holy Baptism, He joined you and now you have died to sin, and fear, and death. That old nature which only knew how to question God has died, and the new creation – the believer – lives! You now trust in the Lord and join the Holy Church as a boat which sails through life...right through the wind and right over the waves. At times, it seems as though we will capsize, but we won't because the Lord is sailing with us...He is sailing with you. And while it appears that He is sleeping at times, it is not at our expense, but to demonstrate that we really and truly have nothing to fear!

As many of you know Psalm 46 is the Psalm of the Reformation. The 500th anniversary is coming in 2017, but we often forget or take for granted the great tribulation that those first Reformation Christians had to face. They were confronted with fear, so Luther knew what he was doing when he chose to focus on Psalm 46! Here are verses 1-3 (let's read them together as the people of God):

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, and though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains quake at its swelling pride.”

But we might want to ask, “How is it that we can be so confident in the midst of so much calamity?” And again our Gospel text answers by describing what happened after the disciples awakened Christ: *“And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.”* (Mark 4:39) This account is of course about a great miracle that took place and it provides a glimpse of your Savior's true power. Typically, even after winds finally die, it takes a considerable amount of time before the waves calm, but after the great unrest, there was great calm...and the wind and the waves together became completely still!

Our Lord then pointed out the disciples' true problem...and it was never the wind; it was never the waves. He says, “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?” (Mark 4:40) The word here for “afraid” means “cowardly”...why were you cowards? And then, why didn't you trust in God? Why didn't you believe that the God who created the sea also controls the sea? Why were you cowardly to believe that life had gone out of control? Impossible! Because Christ also controls the wind and waves in every aspect of our lives!

In this account in St. Mark's Gospel, we go from a great storm, to a great calm, and finally to a great and awesome reverence. Our text says at verse 41 after they witnessed the miracle: “And they were filled with great fear...” but the word here means that they were amazed at His power. It is easy to forget the answer to their question, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” He is God and He is in the boat with you. This image of our being in boat or ship is a symbol of the Church.

We – the Holy Church – are assailed by incredible waves and frightening winds, but they really can't harm those who are trusting in the Lord instead of giving into fear. But if we think of it, this is completely consistent with His holy sacrifice on the cross. The worst winds and waves came not from any location on the sea, but 2000 years ago on the cross. The full fury of our sin and Satan's hurricane of death (our death and our condemnation) came upon the Lord. But He was there, and though His eyes eventually closed and though He was perfectly still, we would be wrong to ever imagine that this meant that He was not in control. For in truth, His closed eyes, and stilled heart, actually meant that He was in complete control.

It meant that He bore your sin; He went through your death; He gave His blood to say, "Quiet! Be Still" to Satan, the world, and your flesh which seeks to take your life. They can't, because in Christ, God – the One who you now trust – no longer counts your sins against you. There is now calm...great calm...and in the greatest awe and reverence, we must bow our heads and say, "Thank You and Praise You O Christ! You have calmed the wind; you have calmed the waves; and you have calmed my life!"