

*Gracious God, “with You is the fountain of life,” and “in Your light we see light.”*

*Ps 36:9 Teach us to trust Your power, that we may bear witness to Your love in our storm-tossed world. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.*

Waves batter the fishing boat on the Sea of Galilee, surging against the sides and breaking over the bow. Drenched and terrified, Peter and the other disciples desperately try to steer toward land. With wind gusting in every direction, the sails are useless, and it’s hard to row with water sloshing heavily back and forth and eight-foot waves crashing over the sides.<sup>1</sup> The boat is being swamped. It’s sinking—they’re going to drown! And Jesus is asleep in the stern. “Teacher, wake up! *Teacher*, do you not care that we are perishing??”

The anger in the question is unmistakable. They have left everything to follow Jesus. They’ve heard him teach crowds with unusual wisdom and authority;<sup>1:21–23</sup> they’ve seen him exorcize demons and heal diseases instantly.<sup>1:23–42</sup> He has power. But now their boat is about to capsize, and he’s lying there asleep!

The Gospel of Mark was written in a time of overwhelming crisis for Judea. In the deepening shadow of Roman imperial brutality, Mark put quill to parchment and wrote the first Gospel, an urgent story of how Jesus of Nazareth taught and healed and fed thousands of Judean peasants before he was executed by the Romans for sedition.

Storms are raging all around Mark as he writes his Gospel.

- Judeans are being publicly crucified—some for insurrection, others for minor infractions or no infraction at all, a strategy of the Roman occupying force to terrorize the populace and quell dissent.
- The Jewish community is socially stratified<sup>2</sup>: a tiny number of wealthy elites build mansions in Jerusalem and Galilee, while laborers and subsistence-level farmers struggle with food insecurity and crushing debt; those who survive economically by serving as tax collectors for the Romans earn the undying hostility of their neighbors.
- Economic anxiety and political disenfranchisement—daily humiliations and indignities—are the experience of many Judeans, from Temple powerbrokers who collaborate with the Romans to those who just try to stay under the radar so their families can survive.

Storms are everywhere in Mark's world—violence, conflict, and threat cause turbulence in every aspect of Judean life. I can imagine tears stinging Mark's eyes as he inscribed the disciples' question: "Do you not care that we are perishing?" It's a fiercely honest question. It's also confrontational.<sup>3</sup> All through Galilee, the disciples watched as the demons Jesus had cast out acclaimed him as the Son of God. <sup>1:24; 3:11</sup> And he didn't correct them. So now, why isn't he doing something? "Do you not care that your followers are perishing?" This is about more than a fishing boat caught in a squall. "Do you not care, Jesus, that the people of God continue to perish in never-ending gales of oppression, violence, and poverty?"

Does God not care?

Mark's storytelling pulls us into the howling winds and crashing waves of a powerful theological storm.

With the Sea of Galilee swirling around our feet and our boat pitching forward into the trough of a looming wave, let's pause to observe that this is a crucial juncture in the Gospel of Mark. Like the waves relentlessly pounding the boat, readers of Mark are hit by three other stories of desperate need in rapid succession. Jesus and the disciples make it to shore and encounter a Gerasene man tormented by a legion of demons—basically a Roman army of malevolent forces destroying him from the inside out. Next, a synagogue leader, Jairus, falls at Jesus's feet and implores him, over and over,<sup>4</sup> like waves crashing against a boat, to save his dying daughter. And at the same time, a woman reaches for the hem of Jesus's robe. She has been exhausted and bankrupted by a twelve-year hemorrhage that no doctor has been able to cure, and an undertow of healing power goes out from Jesus.

Wave after wave of threat and diminishment of bodies, minds, and spirits! Mark floods us with intense drama: four stories of urgent need, each one unique, each illustrating not the best philosophical answer to the problem of suffering, not the most effective way to resist systemic oppression, but just one thing:

Follow Jesus to find healing and peace.

In Jesus is our hope.

Our story dramatizes the proclamation at the heart of Mark's Gospel:

*Jesus saves us* from everything that buffets us from outside (as the storm) and torments us from within (as the legion of demons)!

*Jesus saves us* in every imaginable tragedy, trial, and trauma of human life.<sup>5</sup> Even when it seems that he is unaware or focused elsewhere, he will save us!

Neither storms from without, nor evil forces from within, nor years of debility—not even death itself can overcome the power of God in Jesus Christ!

Writing around the same time as Mark, the apostle Paul would put it this way:

“Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,<sup>3</sup> nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord!” Rom 8:38–39

Back in the boat, the desperate disciples stagger as wave after wave crashes over them. They call to their Savior; Jesus rebukes the wind and commands the sea to be still. To their utter astonishment, instantly there is a dead calm.

Tranquility.

One moment a howling gale; the next, serene water glittering in the sun.

The disciples are filled with awe. They had known Jesus could heal all kinds of diseases and harms rupturing the bodies and spirits of their community. But power over the forces of nature? They cannot begin to comprehend it.

“Who *is* this, that even the wind and the sea obey him??”

“Who is this?” A brilliant move on the part of Mark. Because there’s an answer.

- Mark knows Genesis 1. He knows who separated the primeval waters and gathered them into seas.
- Mark knows the Psalms. They praise a God who established the moon and the stars, who commanded the seas and laid bare the foundations of the world, whose path is through mighty waters! <sup>Psalms 8, 18, 77</sup>
- Mark knows Job. He could probably have recited by heart our Job 38 lesson this morning:

Who laid the foundation of the earth and prescribed bounds for the sea?

Who knows the dwelling of light and the place of darkness?

Who made channels for the rain and a storehouse for the lightning?<sup>6</sup>

Who is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?

This is God’s Son, <sup>Mark 1:1,11</sup> the Holy One of God. <sup>1:24</sup>

Much more than just an itinerant teacher and healer.

This is God the Creator at work in Jesus! <sup>2:7</sup>

Two other Evangelists, Matthew and John, will say it plainly a few years later:

Jesus is Immanuel, <sup>Isa 7:14</sup> GOD WITH US!

God with us in Jesus, in every storm that could possibly assail us!

On this quiet summer morning, with sunlight tugging at the clouds and the hint of a breeze stirring the air, it’s easy to forget that storms rage all around us:

Extreme heat threatening countless people and other living creatures.

Political tempests creating havoc across the globe.

Hurricanes of violence from Ukraine to Gaza to South Sudan to Haiti.

Cyclones of loss sweeping across war zones, obliterating whole communities  
and leaving families soaked in grief.

Storms are raging. They always have, from the dawn of time to this moment,  
and they always will, until Jesus comes again in glory.

Meanwhile, we have the Holy One in our midst,  
teaching us about faith, and trust,  
and the stunning tranquility of the kingdom of God!

With us is One who is mighty to save,  
One who emancipates, heals, and revives in every kind of storm,  
a Teacher<sup>7</sup> who is with us “to the end of the age.” Matt 28:20

And in him is Life! Mark 10:28–30; John 6:68

All we have to do is follow our Teacher,  
and bear witness to what we learn.<sup>8</sup>

In the Name of the One who will neither fail nor forsake us:  
Jesus Christ, to whom we all honor, glory, and praise, now and forever.

Amen.

The Rev. Dr. Carolyn J. Sharp

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Proper 7B

Job 38:1–11; Ps 107:1–3, 23–32; 2 Cor 6:1 –13; Mark 4:35–41

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<sup>1</sup> Storms causing significant wave heights are unusual on the Sea of Galilee in modern times. But wildlife photographer and filmmaker Moshe Alpert filmed a powerful storm on that body of water in 1992, documenting powerful gusts of wind and waves up to ten feet high crashing into built structures on the shore.

<sup>2</sup> See many commentaries on Mark; Sarah E. Rollins, “Social Conflict in Ancient Galilee,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 46/4 (2020): 48–51; Miriam Kammer, “Romanization, Rebellion and the Theatre of Ancient Palestine,” *Ecumenica* 3/1 (2010): 7–23.

<sup>3</sup> Some commentators find harsh the question the disciples lob at Jesus. John P. Meier calls it “rude”; he observes, “The panic and rudeness of the disciples hardly betoken faith in Jesus” and thus merit the rebuke Jesus gives his terrified followers. See Meier, *A Marginal Jew, Volume 2: Mentor, Message, and Miracles*, Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 926–927.

<sup>4</sup> πολλὰ (5:23), rendered in the NRSV as “repeatedly.”

<sup>5</sup> In his artful intercalation of the woman’s story within the narrative about Jairus’s daughter (Mark 5:21–43), Mark underscores the resonance between the girl’s age and the duration of the older woman’s suffering: twelve years in each case. By underlining this connection and interweaving the two stories, Mark may be gesturing toward the sweeping spectrum of ailments, traumas, and losses that beleaguer us throughout the expanse of life, from childhood through adulthood.

<sup>6</sup> Paraphrasing points from the full divine speech in Job 38; only vv. 1–11 were read today in worship.

<sup>7</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins writes, “The contrast between Jesus’ serene attitude and the fear of the disciples implies Jesus’ trust in God. But the question he asks the disciples, combined with their address of him as ‘teacher,’ implies much more than that. The storm is an occasion for teaching about trust” (*Mark*, Hermeneia [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2007], 262). Joel Marcus observes, “For Mark ... teaching and power are inextricably intertwined (cf. 1:22, 27),” and notes that the

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biblical Creator, “like the Markan Jesus, battles and triumphs over the power of the sea... God rebukes the sea in Job 26:11–12, several Psalms (18:15; 104:7; 106:9), and Isa 50:2.... Like God in Psalm 46, [Jesus] is ‘Israel’s’ helper, who is in their midst and works wonders through his word, and because of whom they should not fear though the waters of the sea be troubled.” He finds plausible that “the waves beating on the little boat are symbolic of the persecution being experienced by the Markan community,” a view I share. See Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, Anchor Yale Bible 27 (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 333, 338–339.

<sup>8</sup> David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie write that in Mark, “The rule of God is hidden.... Characters {within the Gospel of Mark} must discern the rule of God for themselves.... Jesus invites followers to live a life whose meaning and greatness will be hidden to the world until the end comes.” See their superb book, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 80–81.