

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Watertown, WI**

“Jesus Asleep on the Cushion”

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June 20, 2021

“And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion” (Mk. 4:37-39).

It’s one thing to tell people how to be faithful. It’s quite another to show them. So our Lord Jesus takes His disciples on a little boat ride to demonstrate what it means to have calm faith in a storm.

It was His idea to cross the lake at night, which was usually something to be avoided. A fierce storm arose. In all their years as fishermen, the disciples had rarely seen anything like it. And they are going nuts.

Have you ever been out on a lake at night? Have you ever been out on a lake at night in a boat with no power- no motor, no lights, no radio? Have you ever been out in a boat on a lake at night with no moon or stars, with gale force winds and waves crashing into the boat and filling it with water? Of course, they are afraid! They are doing everything they can to save themselves. Some are pulling in the sails, some are at the oars, one is at the tiller trying to keep the boat pointing into the waves, others are bailing water. But Jesus? He’s in the back, underneath the stern platform, “asleep on the cushion” Mark carefully notes.

There is, within Jesus, a great peace. He has perfect confidence that, in God, all is well. The waves might roar, the winds might blow, but their fury isn’t enough even to wake him. He knows He’s not just in the hollow of a boat; He’s in the hollow of His Father’s hand. So, He’s just not troubled. He is as much at ease as a small child taking a nap. His mind and His heart are free from every fear. As far as Jesus is concerned, He has no good reason to be awake, so pure and perfect is His confidence in the Father.

If we had just half that confidence in the Father, life would be so much better. Instead, we worry ourselves sick and try to save ourselves.

I can hear some of you thinking, “Well, Jesus knew He was God’s Son, and so of course, the Father would look after His Son with whom He is well-pleased.” But remember, you and I are also children of the Heavenly Father, lovingly adopted by Him in Holy Baptism. The Father loves us as He loves Jesus. Through the forgiveness of sins, He is well pleased with us. And yet when a storm arises in our lives, we become so fearful and anxious. We wake up in the middle of the night with our minds already racing, trying to problem solve, as if our Father were not in heaven, as if it all depended on us.

If for some reason I hired a security guard to stay up during the night and guard my house, wouldn’t it be foolish of me also to stay up and alert, for fear of someone breaking in? Why have a security guard if I can’t trust him to do his job? But isn’t that precisely what we do when we try to handle everything ourselves, as if we were alone, as if we were atheists? 1 Peter 5, “Cast all your anxieties on him; for he cares for you” (v. 7).

It’s Father’s Day. Maybe I can hear some of you dads thinking to yourself, “I could cast all my anxieties on Him if it were only me, but I’ve got a family to care about too.” But the Lord Jesus had others to care about as well, beginning with His disciples in the boat. He loved them. He had chosen them, called them. They were His friends. If that boat went down, what would become of them? What would become of the future Church? Moreover, the text says there were other boats out there with them. They were all in jeopardy. He cared for them all. Yet He slept on the cushion because He knew they were all in the Father’s care just as He was.

To sleep on the cushion was the smartest thing for our Lord to do. Maybe we can even say it was His duty, so that the next morning he could be up again to continue teaching, healing, preaching, traveling and addressing the pressing needs of the crowds. If He is to do all that, it is incumbent on Him to be ready for the next day’s work.

Sometimes I am asked how another member is doing who has been sick. And sometimes, I just don’t know the answer. It always makes me feel a bit of a failure because I can’t keep track of it all. And, of course, the great Accuser is there to pester me: “You know, any pastor worth his salt would know how his people are doing.”

But I take comfort in the words, “Be still and know that I am God.” I take comfort in the fact that the Father does know precisely what’s going on. I take comfort that He is watching and holding vigil.

Jesus is in the back of the boat asleep on the cushion. The wind is howling, the disciples too. The boat is pitching, starting to fill with water, and still He sleeps, with complete trust in our Father.

The disciples shake Him awake and yell at him, “Teacher, don’t you care that we perish?” It’s more an accusation than question. Clearly, the disciples have some faith in Him, or they wouldn’t have bothered waking Him at all, but He had given them no reason for such words. And the same is true of us. When a storm arises in our lives, we storm the gates of heaven with our prayers. It’s not wrong to do so, but we should check our attitudes. Like the disciples we wonder, sometimes out loud, whether God really cares for us or not.

Polycarp was a Christian bishop of the early church. In 155 AD, he was burned at the stake for refusing to renounce the Faith. Shortly before his execution, he said, “Eighty-six years I have served Jesus and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?”

Jesus died on a cross for you and for your salvation. He means you no harm and has done you no wrong. How can you question His care for you, His love, His grace, His plans?

The disciples are angry at Jesus and rudely awaken him. Jesus rebukes the wind and the waves. “Peace! Be still!” he says. And immediately, the wind ceases and there follows a great calm. In the Bible, the brute forces of nature always obey the Lord’s commands better than His people. We fuss about how His commands curb our freedoms. We question whether they are just or fair or necessary. We set ourselves up in judgment over the Lord our God. And often we flat out disobey . . . because we want to. The brute forces of nature always obey the Lord’s commands better than His people.

He rebukes the wind and the waves, and now He rebukes His disciples. “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?” The disciples thought they had faith, but apparently it wasn’t what Jesus thought it should be by now. Makes me wonder what He would say of my faith. . . and of yours.

The disciples clearly have lots to learn and so do we. But they made progress that night. They learned some things about themselves and about him that they didn’t know before. They learned they could trust Him, trust Him with their lives . . . and trust Him also with their deaths. They learned that in spite of anything that would rage against them, they were ultimately safe with Him. They learned they could rely on His presence. After all, Jesus **is** in the boat with them. Maybe that’s the hidden miracle of this lesson. The Son of the living God is in the boat with us. Whatever storm it is, He is near at hand. He is Immanuel, God with us. We don’t have a God who cares for us from a distance, but a God who is with us, wherever we are. He does us no harm. So:

“Peace. Be still.” Every sin you have ever committed is forgiven, removed from you, taken away, “as far as the east is from the west” (Ps. 103:12). Peace. Be still. “The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin” (1 Jn. 1:7).

“Peace. Be still.” Satan is your vanquished enemy, and “the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (Rom. 16:20). “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (Jms 4:7).

“Peace. Be still.” The earth is the Lord’s footstool. It must submit to His rule. It can do none other. Not all the presidents and princes and prime ministers on earth can thwart His authority. “Take courage – I have conquered the world”, He said (Jn. 16:33).

“Peace. Be still.” By the death of Jesus Christ God has destroyed death. “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

“Peace. Be still.” All things work together for the good of those who love him (Rom. 8:28).

“Peace. Be still.” Judgment Day and eternity carry no threat, because we are God’s own redeemed children. “Nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:39). “Have no fear, little flock, for the Father has chosen to give you the kingdom” (Lk. 12:32).

“Peace. Be still.” “You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You; because he trusts in You” (Is. 26:3).

The storms are still going to rage in your life and mine, and Jesus is going to want to sleep on the cushion again. But there’s a cushion back there underneath the stern platform for you too. It is the grace and power of our Lord Jesus Christ. Lie down and sleep in peace, for the Lord alone makes us dwell in safety (Ps. 4:8). Amen.