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Pentecost 5

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“Three Questions”

Text: Mark 4:35-41; Job 38:1-11

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

There are three questions asked in the Holy Gospel we heard today:

(1.) *Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?*

(2.) *Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?*

and

(3.) *Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?*

None of those questions are answered, directly, in the Gospel we heard. So that’s what I’d like to do today. Answer those three questions, in the opposite order, beginning with the last.

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

The disciples were still learning. They had seen Jesus do wonderful, marvelous things, but nothing like this. They saw Him cast out an unclean spirit. He had healed Peter’s mother-in-law of her fever and many others with various diseases. He cleansed a leper, made a paralyzed man walk, and healed a man with a withered hand. But this . . . ! This was different. This was nature. Uncontrollable nature. You can’t stop nature.

You know this. Think about and compare this to our day and age. It is no exaggeration to say that wonderful, marvelous things have been accomplished by medicine - healing diseases, prosthetic limbs, organ transplants, and more. People who not that long ago would have been dead are still living because of progress made in our day and age. Yet as great as all that is, there is still much we cannot do in this world, especially when it comes to nature, like stop earthquakes, prevent tornadoes, make hurricanes steer away from our coasts. Can you imagine if we could? The forces of nature are different. Nature is a whole other ball game.

So when Jesus says *Peace! Be still!* yeah, that’s stunning. Actually, even more than that. The disciples are *terrified*. When faced with the storm, the word used there is that they were *cowardly, timid*. But when faced with Jesus’ power over nature, they were *terrified*.

Now I want to put you in the boat and give you a perspective on this. Because usually,

when you see pictures of this story, they show Jesus standing in the boat like George Washington crossing the Delaware - fearless and unafraid of the storm raging around Him, with His arm stretched out in power. But Mark doesn't say that's what happened. In fact, he doesn't even say that Jesus got up. The disciples wake him up, tell Him they're perishing, and Jesus says, *Quiet down! Settle down!* Words that might be used when you're in a room full of screaming kids. Because Jesus was in a boat full of screaming disciples! And maybe they thought He was talking to them . . . for a moment. That Jesus was telling them, who had just woken Him up in a panic, to *Quiet down! Settle down!* Until all of a sudden, and in a moment, the sea (Mark's words, now) *became like glass*. Not just no more winds and waves - no more nothin'!

And now . . . oh, wait! He wasn't talking to us at all. He was talking to the screaming storm. And it listened! And it obeyed! No wonder they were terrified. No wonder they ask, ***Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?***

They were still learning. We know. He is the God of creation. The God of Genesis 1 in human flesh and blood. The God who spoke all things into being. The God who speaks and it is so. He is Job's God, the one who ***laid the foundation of the earth, determined its measurements, laid its cornerstone, prescribed limits for it***, and who told the waters, ***Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed***. That God can certainly do what Jesus did. Even, perhaps, while still groggy from sleep and sitting on the cushion.

But that kind of power is terrifying. Because the one with that power can either use it for you or against you. Think about those who wield power in our world today - what do they do with their power? If it's used for you, that's good. But if it is used against you . . . And if you don't know, if you are uncertain, how the power in this world is going to be used and how that's going to impact you, that can make you *cowardly and timid*, like the disciples. Which is what the second question asked in the Gospel today was about, when Jesus asked them:

***Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?*** Why are you so cowardly and timid? Where is your faith?

That's an important question. ***Where is your faith?*** Or, we could say, what, or who, is your faith in? If you ask people that question today, to religious people, to people in the church, you will almost always get the answer: *in God*. That's not a bad answer, but it's not enough. It is not enough to just believe in God. The disciples believe in God and are cowardly, timid, and terrified on that boat. Many people today believe in God and are cowardly, timid, and terrified of the world and what is happening. And some are terrified of God and what a powerful God might do to them. The *devil* believes in God, in that he knows that he is real. That's not enough.

No, we don't just have faith in God, we have faith in the God who is *for us*. We have faith in the words and promises of God, that all He does He does for our good. That He will not forsake His children. That a great and powerful God isn't going to use His power against us, but for us. That, in fact, God poured out His powerful wrath against our sin on His own Son on the cross. That's how much He is for you. He's all in.

So when Jesus asks His disciples, ***Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?*** He is, in effect, asking them, don't you yet understand that I'm here *for you*? That I'm here with my power *for you*. The powerful Egyptians cannot stand against Me. The powerful Assyrians cannot stand against Me. The demons and unclean spirits cannot stand against Me. And this power I am using for you, to defeat your enemies - not Rome, but your enemies named sin, death, and hell. And that should fill you with confidence. That should make you strong and courageous. There is nothing more powerful than me, and so nothing that will be able to overcome you!

*Unless . . . unless your faith is in the wrong place. Faith in an unknown god, faith in yourself, faith in the people or things of this world, in these there is only fear and uncertainty. On these we cannot rely. They've let us down before, and they will again.*

But faith in Jesus is different. Because it is faith in the one who is not just powerful, but the one who used his power to die on the cross for you, and then rise from the dead for you. So that you do not even have to fear death itself. And that is far greater - far greater! - than simply being able to command the winds and waves!

The disciples don't understand that yet. They will. They will after they see Jesus die on the cross, be laid in the tomb, but then risen and alive with them. Then they will understand what *Saviour* means. The one who wasn't here to save Himself, but to save us. And who now says, trust me. If I did all that for you . . . if I went to the cross for you . . . if I laid down my life for you . . . won't I take care of everything else, too? And He will. He promised.

It is when we forget those promises, or when we take our eyes off of them and look instead at the storms raging around us, that we then ask the third question we heard in the Gospel today:

***Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?***

Teacher. Ironic, for that's exactly what Jesus is doing here. Teaching them.

But that question, ***don't you care?***, or the accusation that is implied in it, *you don't care* - those words hurt, don't they? Sometimes we deserve them. Sometimes we act that way. But to ask that of Jesus, who's done nothing BUT care? But sometimes emotions take over and cloud our thinking. Especially when things look bad. Especially when we're

afraid. These things satan uses to try to rob us of our faith and convince us: *Jesus doesn't care. Not really.*

And we think that, too, don't we? At times? That God might not be asleep on the cushion like Jesus was that day, but maybe asleep at the wheel of my life. So maybe we ask: Don't you know what's happening? In the world, in my life. Why aren't you doing something about it? Why aren't you making it stop? Why are evildoers getting away with their evil, and those who are working for good are getting persecuted and punished? Don't you *know*, God? Don't you *see*, God? Don't you *care*, God?

At just such times, with just such questions, **look at the cross**. Look at the cross and see just how much God cares for you. **And then your faith will be back where it belongs**. And if you feel guilty for questioning Him and His love, hear Him speak to you, *I forgive you all your sins*. And that's for your other sins, too! And when the powers and storms of this world are swamping you, the very same Body and Blood of Jesus that was with the disciples in that boat is here on the altar for you, to feed you and strengthen you with His forgiveness and life. And when you think you are too insignificant for God to notice or care about, look at this Font and remember that here or in a Font very similar to this one, God made you His child. He wanted - and still wants - you to be his own.

And then, knowing not just your *powerful* God but your faithful and loving and forgiving God, you have peace. Not the *quiet down! settle down!* peace that came from Jesus speaking to the winds and waves, a peace borne of the Law - but far deeper and more lasting peace: the peace of the Gospel. The peace of knowing that there is nothing in all creation that can separate you from God's love for you in Jesus. And that one day, when your body is finally overcome by the wages of sin, when you die, even then, *especially* then, the power, love, and forgiveness of God is for you. For when you die, you are not dead! For when you die in Christ Jesus, you are also raised with Him to life. *And so you live*. A life now beyond the reach of sin, death, and hell. A life that will never end.

So that day on the Sea of Galilee, the disciples thought they were going to perish. No! But they did get a preview of it, I think. What it will be like. For before the throne of God in heaven, the book of Revelation tells us, there is as it were a sea of glass, like crystal (Revelation 4:6). A sea, just like the Sea that day after Jesus spoke to it. That's what awaits us, in Jesus. Perfect peace. And knowing that, we can be bold and courageous now! Because we know the end of the story. So that if anyone asks you, *Why aren't you afraid? Where is your faith?* you can tell them of the one who has calmed the storms and wields all power, and that He uses that power for us. And if they'd like to have that peace, they can. It's for them, too. *Jesus* is for them, too.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds

through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.