

Calming the Storm: The Miracle of Faith

Jesus calms the wind and the waves, saving a boat load of disciples. Question: "Do you believe God still does miracles?" Yes, all the time. Next question, "Do we understand why God does some and not others?" No, not at all. Last question; "How big do our miracles have to be before we rate them connected to faith?" That is the right question.



Mark 4:35-41(NIV) That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

Reflections

How we respond to the miracles of Jesus depends a bit on how we view them. If we wish, we can look at these stories as occasional moments when Jesus steps outside the boundaries of "normal" ministry and pulls off a wonder. Different in kind from anything else he does. Or we can look, and see how connected these stories are to the rest of his ministry, how woven through with the same themes and the same working. What happens then is not that miracles are reduced to ordinary, but that we start to see his "ordinary" work with the same sense of wonder that we might reserve, at first encounter, for the "miracles."

Today we enter a study of his miracles and we certainly start with a big one. Jesus and the disciples set sail across the Sea of Galilee. A ferocious storm comes up. The terrified disciples (including at least four professional fishermen!) wake Jesus for help. He speaks to the wind and waves, and the sea goes calm.

Certainly not "ordinary." In wonder, the disciples ask themselves, "Who *is* this guy?"

But look again, and see how Jesus treats this situation. To this point the disciples have seen nothing that might compare to this one in the "wonders" category. Yet Jesus chides them for their fear and lack of faith. As if

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they should have expected, in the "ordinary" course of events, that he would still the storm. As if in the working of Jesus among us, there is no real difference between speaking to the waves so that they are stilled, and speaking

to Levi the tax collector so that Levi leaves it all and follows him (Mark chapter 2). Or healing a man on the Sabbath (Chapter 3). Or teaching the Kingdom of God with authority, in ways never heard before (Chapter 4). These things, they *had* seen. And when the storm comes and they panic, he chides them for not having understood.

What are we looking for as we look for the work of God in our lives? Perhaps the strongest impact of a study of Jesus' miracles comes when we can see past the "magic" and look to the ways the miracles work in the lives of those he touched. Because he works like that with us, whether it looks to us like a "wonder" or not, just as he did then. The disciples learn a bit of who he is, they hear him call them to a faith that has no fear, and they see him calm a storm. Not bad. Look for such work, today, in our lives, and in the lives of those we love. Trust him.

—Bob Henderson

Readings

Sunday, April 19 — “I cried to the Lord....”

Psalm 18:1-6, 16-17; Matthew 8:23-25

Perhaps there is no more profound preparation for a study of the miracles than simply to place our cares with Jesus to the extent that our faith enables us. What are you facing this week? What are you carrying now? There is no-one else like him, and we are meeting him again through stories of his power. Offer your week into his hands.

Monday, April 20 — Into the teeth of a storm, “Quiet! Be still!”

Mark 4:35-39; Psalm 33:4-9

With a word he brings the sea to total calm. This is one of the most arresting pictures of Jesus that we have. Difficult to miss the link to the words of creation, “*And God said...*”, or to the Psalm passage named above. What does it mean in our lives to be loved by such a Lord? By such power? Where might you need him to speak today?

Tuesday, April 21 — “Why are you so afraid?”

Mark 4:40; Jeremiah 29:11-13

He chides them for their fear. *We* know who he is and what he is about. *They* were in the dark about both. Yet what might have happened to God’s purpose had that boat gone down? What might it mean in our fears if we simply have confidence that God will fulfill his purpose for us, even, especially, when we can’t see the plan at all?

Wednesday, April 22 — “Do you still have no faith?”

Mark 4:40; Luke 7:1-10

He chides them for lack of faith. With the storm raging around them, what might faith have looked like, faith at the level he offers? In the trials that we face, what might that kind of faith look like? It is possible with God. We can ask him for it.

Thursday, April 23 — “Who is this, that wind and waves obey him?”

Isaiah 35:5-6; Matthew 12:2-5; Mark 4:41

We cannot miss that a primary purpose of Jesus’ miracles is to announce who he is. His response to John (Matthew 12:4-5) is wonderfully compact and powerful. How do you think that response was understood in his day? How might we respond now when asked who it is that we worship?

Friday, April 24 — “In this world you will have tribulation”

John 16:33; 1 John 4:18

In times of turmoil and desperation, what can we learn from this story? He stilled the storm with a word. What can he do in our lives? What would it mean, in whatever storm we find ourselves, to trust him? Maybe a first step is just to ask him to help us to trust. Time to pray.

Saturday, April 25 — “This is the Lord’s doing. It is wonderful in our eyes.”

Psalm 118:5, 19-24; Mark 4:41; Mark 16:6

An ancient psalm of triumph. Twelve awestruck disciples in a small boat on a completely calm sea. Jesus risen from the tomb. What a story we have to tell. What a Lord we serve. How does this story touch and shape your life, today? How might it touch your worship tomorrow?

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