

One night a storm rolled into town, and the thunder woke up little Bobby. Naturally, he ran into his mom and dad's bedroom and hid under the covers embracing his mom. After a few minutes of this, his mom rubbed his back and said, "Bobby, you know you can't be in our bed all night. We've talked about this before, a storm is nothing to be afraid of. Remember? We told you that God takes care of you and protects you. Don't you believe that God is with you?"

"Yeah, I know," Bobby whimpered, "But I can't hug God, now can I?"

All of us get scared sometimes. The storms roll in: maybe a difficult financial situation, a bad medical diagnosis, or an exam or presentation is coming up. These storms are enough to make us anxious, discouraged, or afraid. Maybe we feel like the disciples who are at sea making headway painfully for the wind is against us.

And so, our Gospel text from Mark teaches us a lesson about how Christians all too often behave in the face of adversity and trials. First, 1. (oops!) In storms, we think Jesus is absent. Like little Bobby, we want a God that we can hug. Maybe when you're sitting in a café with a cup of coffee and a good friend, you like to theorize grandiose ideas of who God is, but when trouble comes, you don't want a theoretical God, you want a God who will get you out of trouble.

Here's the trouble with our great ideas about who God is, namely, that we can outthink ourselves. We are right in saying that God is good, loving, and kind, but then we take that too far. We assume that if God is good and I'm suffering, that God must not be there, that He doesn't care or that He's sleeping on the job.

Our text opens with a puzzling statement. "**Immediately [Jesus] made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd.**" He made His disciples get into the boat. It's almost as though He had to twist their arms.

Our text continues, "**And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray. And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land.**" Jesus dismisses the disciples so that He can pray! He spends time alone so that He can spend time with His Father. The Bible doesn't tell us what Jesus prayed for, but do you think He might have been praying for His disciples?

What's even worse, though, is that when the storms come, we make God to be the enemy. Don't just say that God let the storms happen. We say He sent the storms! 2. (ugh!) In storms, we make Jesus into an enemy.

"**And [Jesus] saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, for they all saw him and were terrified.**"

Sometimes the way we react to an event is more telling than the details of the event itself. Bobby grew up going to a strict private school. Being a creative individual, he would often doodle in class. But whenever the teacher would catch him drawing in class, she would hit him on the wrist with a ruler for misbehaving.

Later in his life, Bobby got a job as an architectural draftsman. One day his boss called him into her office, and there was a ruler on her desk. The boss noticed that Bobby was tense and asked him what was wrong. He asked her when she was going to hit him with the ruler.

Surprised, His boss said, “Why would you ask a question like that? I was going to call you in to commend your good work on the latest apartment we designed!” The ruler was just lying on the table because, well, rulers are a tool of the architect’s trade, and she was simply in the middle of a drawing.

Sometimes the way we react to an event is more telling than the details of the event itself. We see a ruler, and we assume it’s for hitting our wrists for something wrong we did. We experience suffering, and we assume God is punishing us.

When we rely on our own wisdom and our presuppositions of how we think God should be, we often end up incorrect, just as Bobby did in his boss’ office. The disciples had presuppositions of who Jesus should be, so of course He couldn’t be walking on the water. Of course, they thought, Jesus forgot them. Of course, they thought, this figure out in the distance had to be a ghost.

But God uses storms to shake us up. He uses them to refocus our attention to who He really is, and how He chooses to come to us. Luther puts it this way, “But why does [Christ] do such things [namely, walking on the water and frightening them] to His beloved friends and disciples? It is so that we might learn His goodwill toward us, because He plays with us in the sweetest way when we think that all things have become utterly desperate. The fault lies with our sin, which does not allow us to recognize that He is present, but thinks Him an apparition—or rather, a devil—because He appears otherwise than we imagine and He remains silent. For in the midst of temptation we think that He is ashore or on the mountain where we left Him; we cannot understand that He is present.”

In short, it is our sin that makes us believe Jesus is someone to be feared, someone to hate, or someone who got us into this whole mess. But Jesus speaks to us in this state. He tells the disciples, “**Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.**” 3. (aha!) In storms, Jesus speaks to us. God never sends the storms, but He always uses the storms for His good.

And so it is that in our pain and suffering, Jesus tells you “**Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.**” He does it not simply as a friend. He does it not simply as someone powerful like a king or a president. He does it as the Great I am. He says to you, “Take heart, I am the great I am! Do not be afraid!”

IN STORMS IS WHERE JESUS REVEALS HIMSELF AS THE GREAT I AM. 4. (whee!) In storms, the Great I am gets into our boat. The book of Job deals with many of the questions we're discussing this morning. What kind of God allows suffering? Job reflects, “[God] **alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the sea.... Behold, he passes by me, and I see him not; he moves on, but I do not perceive him.**” Because Jesus had not yet come Job didn't fully know Him. Job didn't fully know God in the same way you or I do. Job naturally would not have a complete picture of God and His attitude toward us.

Our Gospel text tells us that Yahweh, the Lord, the Great I Am, the one who stretched out the heavens and created the earth and the one who puts the waters into submission to Him—He it is who is walking on the sea. Jesus is *that* Great I Am, and He doesn't pass by the disciples, even though He acted like it. Jesus knows the disciples needs before they asked Him, He approaches them, and He enters their boat.

Contrary to little Bobby's complaint in the storm, Jesus is God you can hug. He is God with flesh and blood, eyes and ears, mouth and nose. Jesus has the power of the creator fit into the frame of a man, a man who feels pain, a man who suffers, and a man who dies.

He is the man who got into the boat with us. Not just in the disciples' boat, but in the boat of human flesh. He knows what it means to suffer storms. He knows what it means to suffer loss, pain, and misfortune. If anyone wants to talk about God not understanding suffering, simply point that someone to Jesus, true God and true man, suffering and dying on the cross.

Jesus endured that storm on the cross, so that God would no longer be to you a phantom. He took on your sins so the Great I Am would not be a terrifying presence but comforting one. Jesus suffered the pain of separation from His Father that we would never be driven from His presence.

Jesus gets into our boat, and it's no coincidence that we're gathered here in the nave of the church. Nave, after all, is Latin for ship. Christ dwells in fellow believers, and as we comfort one another in trials and tribulations, we act as mini-Christ to one another. What's more, Christ comes to us in the flesh in this place. No, not to hug, but to eat and to drink. We believe that Christ's body and blood are truly present in the meal of communion for forgiveness, life, and salvation.

5. (yeah!) In storms, the Great I am calms storms. “**And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded,**” As Jesus, the Great I Am, comes to us, we find that He does calm our storms in His time, in His way. And we look forward to the day when He will take us to Heaven where there will be no more suffering, no more pain, and no more storms, and we will dwell in peace with the Lord forever. Amen!