

I don't know what was happening out here, but a pretty loud thunderstorm blew through my neighborhood in the early hours of yesterday morning. I'm a notoriously deep sleeper, so instead of waking up, at first I did that thing where I incorporated the real-life noise into the dream I was having. So for a little while I dreamt that I was caught outside in this violent storm, panicked because I couldn't find shelter and afraid that I would be struck by lightning. Eventually the real storm got close enough, the thunder loud enough, and the lightning bright enough that I woke up—thoroughly confused—but eventually realized that although the storm was not just a dream, I was at least safe in bed inside my house. In the morning, I couldn't figure out why I had been so disoriented; all week I had been checking the weather in preparation for yesterday's wedding, so I knew thunderstorms were in the forecast. I don't know why I wasn't expecting that storm.

In Mark's gospel Jesus and the disciples experience a great windstorm while they're in a much more precarious position. Jesus suggests they take this boat ride to get to the other side—which meant not just the other side of the lake but into foreign territory. Jesus had been teaching and preaching in Jewish Galilee; now they are headed into Gentile country. Their next encounter will be with the Gerasene demoniac, followed by a number of run-ins with foreigners and people who are religiously, ritually unclean. Jesus had been teaching the disciples about the unpredictable, exponential growth of the kingdom of God; now they are going to get to see that happen in real time.

But first they have to get across the water. When we read about the disciples' reaction to this storm, we have to remember that they were professional fishermen who spent their whole lives on the sea. When they wake up Jesus, shouting that he must not care that they are perishing, we can trust that they were not over-reacting or unaccustomed to dealing with severe weather; they truly thought the boat was going down. So it's important that we not read this story as a mere morality tale about keeping things in perspective—*Your problems aren't that bad; don't worry so much!* That's not what is happening here; Jesus is sleeping through a doozy of a storm.

The way Mark describes Jesus' response also shows us that this is not your average weather event. Jesus “rebukes” the wind and orders the sea to be silent and still. This is the language of exorcism, of Jesus commanding the forces of evil to stand down and obey his authority. We hear echoes of the Old Testament when God spoke over the watery deep to bring

order out of chaos. Jesus and the disciples are going over to the other side through powers that would seek to destroy them; it takes the Spirit of the living God to fight those forces.

In the dead calm that follows, Jesus asks the disciples why they are afraid and whether they still have no faith. Standing in awe, the disciples are no longer afraid of drowning, but they very well may be afraid of Jesus who has just stopped a storm they thought would surely kill them all. When they woke him, they called him *Teacher*, not *Lord*, or *Christ*. Now they ask one another, *Who is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?* Jesus asks them if they still haven't put their faith in him, but they are just beginning to understand who he is and what it means for them to have faith in him. All throughout Mark's gospel, the disciples and the others who are "insiders" in the faith struggle to understand who Jesus is; it's always Gentiles, tax collectors, centurions, women—the outsiders—who recognize that Jesus is the Son of God. This storm is not just a storm; this storm is a revelation of who and what Jesus is: the one who has the power to overcome the forces of evil. If the disciples are going to follow Jesus into these places and spaces of unknown danger, chaos, and even death, they need to know that he can overcome what they, on their own, certainly could not.

Perhaps we'd like the good news here to be: *Don't worry—Jesus will calm all our storms.* And maybe there's some truth there. But even in that promise is the implication that when we follow Jesus *there will be storms*. If we think being disciples of Jesus will get us out of the storm, we should probably follow someone else. This passage asks the disciples and us, *Do you really know who you are following? Are you ready to go where he's going to go?* If those first disciples had understood who Jesus was, the one whom even the wind and the waves obeyed, they might not have been so surprised when he led them into chaos. Nor should we be surprised when he leads us there. After all, in baptism we renounce the forces that defy God and the powers of this world that rebel against God. Right from the beginning of our life in Christ, we acknowledge the conflict between God's way and the way of the world, and we commit to joining the struggle on behalf of the kingdom. But it's not our own strength that empowers us to brave the storms; only the Spirit can do that.

The chaos, the mess, the death-dealing storms of this world often take us by surprise, but they shouldn't: we've been fairly warned; they are right there in the forecast. Yet we hope and do not despair, because the one who made us, claimed us, and calls us to follow—even follow into the storm—is the one whom even the wind and sea obey.