

We didn't fly much when I was a kid, so I used to get pretty nervous on airplanes. It turned out to be not just the uneventful flights but surviving a few rougher flights that eventually eased my flying anxiety. I remember one particularly bumpy landing when even the flight crew applauded the captain for finally getting us on the ground. Once when the wheels were about to hit the tarmac the pilot suddenly took off again because something happened to the plane in front of us, and we would have rear-ended it had we landed. One time, after everyone had boarded, the flight was delayed while the mechanics fixed a hole in the plane. At the previous airport they had tried to fix the hole with "speed" tape, which though fancier than duct tape is still tape, but it had come loose because they had applied it in straight vertical and horizontal lines, and evidently you need to weave the tape at angle to tape a plane back together...or so explained the captain who for some reason thought we would be reassured by that information. After a number of those flights, I've gotten comfortable enough that most of the time I end up falling asleep on the plane; so if you see me panicking on a flight, you might want to panic, too.

All this is by way of saying that when Jesus' disciples, most of whom were life-long professional fishermen, wake Jesus up because they think they are going to drown, it must be a great windstorm indeed through which Jesus is peacefully sleeping. Later Mark calls Jesus a carpenter, and Matthew calls him the son of a carpenter, and Nazareth is land-locked, so there is no reason to believe that Jesus has any sailing expertise whatsoever. Either the disciples are desperate enough that they want all hands on deck, even untrained hands, in order to get the boat under control, or they want Jesus to do something miraculous to save them. They ask, *Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?* but it seems like the first question should be *How can you sleep through a storm like this? Haven't you even noticed what danger we are in?* and then to get right to the heart of the matter, *Aren't you going to do anything to help us?*

Overall, Mark describes Jesus as somewhat less patient with the disciples than the descriptions we read in the other gospels. So when Jesus wakes up and rebukes the wind and waves, he also addresses the disciples in much the same way we might if we were woken up from a nap for something that turned out to be less than a life or death situation. He sort of sounds a little cranky, doesn't he? *Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?* But I wonder what that question is really about. Is Jesus' critique that the disciples didn't trust him when he instructed them to travel to the other side of the lake—that is, into less familiar territory? Or is

he saying that if *he* could be calm enough to even sleep through the storm that they shouldn't have panicked? Or is he suggesting that they could have commanded the wind and the sea themselves if they had the faith to ask?

Yet the storm might not be Jesus' focus. He doesn't say *Why were you afraid?* but *Why are you afraid?* —*after* he had calmed the storm. Because whatever it was that the disciples were expecting when they woke Jesus up, now that he has calmed the storm, *now* they are filled with fear. A little more of who Jesus really is has been revealed to them: *Who then is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?* ...but even that is something of a rhetorical question; they know who commands the the wind and the sea. The very first thing we know about God from way back in the very beginning of Genesis is that when the world was complete chaos, a wind from God moved over the face of the waters. The disciples were in danger from a natural disaster, but their salvation from it comes through *supernatural* intervention. They have to ask themselves: What is more powerful? The storm that could have drowned us or the One who was able to stop it with a word? As desperately as they cried out for help, they are just as afraid when Jesus saves them. God's ways are even more powerful than they thought.

A similar truth is revealed in the story of David and Goliath. Against the impossible odds of fighting a literal giant, Saul can only envision the human solution of sending David into battle like a typical warrior, and so dresses him in armor that is too heavy for him even to move. David—who is still young and inexperienced—is nevertheless the wiser one who knows *the Lord does not save by sword and spear*. It will not be with superior strength or a larger army that Israel will defeat the Philistines; that is the human way of thinking that our agency can prevail through force. But the battle is not really between David and Goliath; it is the Lord who has the power to save his people, no matter what the threat. That the Lord chooses to do that through David and his slingshot is one more illustration of how God is not bound by human expectations.

I've never been in battle. And I've never seriously thought I was meeting my end in a storm, in a boat, or even on a plane. But have we not in our own desperate times prayed, *Lord, do you not care that we are perishing? Aren't you going to help?* That help might not be as dramatic as the sudden stilling of a storm or the slaying of a giant, but the one who calls us out of fear and into faith has gotten us this far. Instead of pulling on armor that doesn't fit us anyway, or feverishly trying to bail our sinking boat, maybe it's enough to know that we're not in that boat alone. We know who it is who even the wind and sea obey—and we know it's not us. But thankfully, it doesn't have to be. Thanks be to God who never asked us to go it alone.