

Psalm 124; Mark 4:35-41

Lent Midweek 4

March 18, 2020—Shepherd of the Mountains, Pinetop, AZ

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Over the past few years, a quote has stuck in my head that was repeated several times when I was in seminary. It comes from Rev. Arnold Kuntz. "Life narrows down, and crisis comes, and suddenly only one thing matters. And there in the narrow place, stands Jesus."

The disciples were having a moment of crisis. The storm must have been pretty bad to scare these seasoned fishermen. As the waves started crashing in over the sides of the boat, and water started flooding the vessel faster than they could bail it, the disciples panicked. They were taking on water. There was nothing they could do. They felt helpless, in fear for their safety and for their lives. And their Leader? He's asleep in the stern. He's in the position of the boat in charge of directing its course. And He's sleeping! **"Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"**

Well, Jesus wakes up. He rebukes the waves. "Shut up!" He says to the sea. And there was great calm...at least calm on the sea. The panic of the disciples may have subsided, but a different kind of fear set in. **"Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"** the disciples wonder.

We are having a moment of crisis. We have a different kind of "wave" crashing over us. It's one of uncertainty. With a viral pandemic sweeping the globe, in most areas people are starting to take it seriously, but in many cases a little too late. The storm is rising and sickness is crashing over the sides, flooding our once comfortable lives. Even if we aren't affected directly by the virus, we are affected by its impact on society, on shopping for the basic necessities, on even our worship routines. We are definitely in the season of Lent now.

It has been "imposed upon" us as one of my seminary classmates reflects. ^{Rev. Andrew Jones} In a normal Lenten season, if we choose to give up something at all for Lent as part of our Christian reflection for the season, we do get to choose what to give up—candy, caffeine, Facebook, meat. We normally get to choose what we can live without. This year, each of us for Lent, is giving up normalcy. We don't get to choose. Each of us is giving up aspects of routine. Each of us is giving up certain levels of comfort.

It's a lot to take! We see the darkness of the storm all around us. We see the waves crashing in on our daily lives. And in our moment of crisis which may extend for weeks, we also want to cry out, **"Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"**

"Life narrows down, and crisis comes, and suddenly only one thing matters. And there in the narrow place stands Jesus."

The disciples did one thing right. Even though in their pre-Easter, pre-Pentecost mentality they may not have totally understand why it was right, they did do something right. In their moment of crisis, they turned to Jesus for help. And the One who could calm the wind and the waves merely by His word, saved them. Because of course He cared.

He continues to care today. Our Lord has blessed us with many vocations. Among them are the doctors and nurses who are entrusted with our care, entrusted with His healing. But there is an even greater concern for our Lord, that people are perishing eternally because of their sin. There is a much greater storm surrounding us. There is darkness and terror and guilt and despair. And when we are in the darkness of the storm, whether the physical or the spiritual, it is often hard to focus on anything but the darkness as we look for shelter and comfort.

And then as the flashes of fear come like lightning, something is lit up in the distance. Something is standing out against the horizon. It's an odd shape. It doesn't look like a house. It doesn't look our place of work. It doesn't look like a grocery store. It doesn't even look like a church building. But from what we can make out, it looks sturdy. It looks like it could provide shelter from

the storm. And the flash of fear comes again. And the rest of the world panics. But we see it again...and we recognize the shape. It's the cross of Jesus Christ. And it is our shelter in the storm. And we start to hope even in the midst of our crisis. Because whatever Satan, our own sin, or the fallen world can throw at us, we know this shelter belongs to One who is on our side, One who does care that we are perishing, One who has power to calm the wind and waves, and One who has power to save us eternally.

This season of Lent is normally a time for us to reflect on that cross. In this sudden deeper season of Lent that we hadn't planned, it is even more of a time to cling to it. Because this is where we see a God who is for us, a God who is on our side, a God that cares that we are perishing. So we look to the cross in the storm, we cling to it because that is where God poured out His wrath upon His own Son, so that His Son could pour His life into us. And that is where we find shelter from the storms of despair and grief and moments of crisis the world has to offer.

There are still days of uncertainty and doubt ahead of us. We can't sugar coat it. Nowhere does the Christian faith promise health, wealth, and happiness. But it does promise hope in Christ. It does promise forgiveness in Christ. It does promise that all who take shelter in Him will be sustained to everlasting life.

We don't know when, but we know He is coming, and He is delivering us. We know His love. And we know His grace. And He is so gracious that, even while we wait, we are invited to call out to Him in prayer, asking for relief, asking for healing, asking Him to comfort us by His Word and Spirit. And so we cry out, not in despair like the disciples did, but in prayer, knowing that in His timing He will deliver us from the storms in our lives just as He delivers us from the sin which is crashing in on us. It may be now, in a few weeks or months, or maybe at His return. But trusting in His promises we face our storms knowing that we will not perish and saying:

1 Be still, my soul; the Lord is on your side;
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;
Leave to your God to order and provide;
In ev'ry change He faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul; your best, your heav'nly Friend
Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

4 Be still, my soul; the hour is hast'ning on
When we shall be forever with the Lord,
When disappointment, grief, and fear are gone,
Sorrow forgot, love's purest joys restored.
Be still, my soul; when change and tears are past,
All safe and blessed we shall meet at last. (LSB 752)