

2015_06_21 Pentecost 4
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
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The Kingdom of God is Hidden, But Powerful
Part of June series from Mark: Contrasts of the Kingdom
Mark 4:35-41
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Grace and peace to you from God our Father, the God of all comfort, who comforts us in every trouble, that we may be able to comfort those who are troubled. Amen.

Mark 4:35-41

³⁵ On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side." ³⁶ Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him. ³⁷ And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. ³⁸ But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"

³⁹ Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. ⁴⁰ But He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" ⁴¹ And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!"

We pray, O Lord, let your kingdom come to us also that we may believe Your holy Word. Amen.

In Jesus name, dear fellow disciples of Christ,

The night seemed like an endless echo of empty answers. Waiting and waiting, all they could do was wait and wonder. They wondered how much longer it would take. They wondered if the procedure would be successful. They wondered if she would survive.

A friend that I used to work with was telling me about a recent surgery that his little 4 year old niece underwent. The girl was born with most of her organs deformed and misplaced. Through numerous surgeries she managed to survive. And now that she's old enough, they are performing a special surgery on her heart. The surgery lasted 11 hours. You can imagine how those hours would have seemed like an endless echo of empty answers.

If God is so powerful, why do we have to wait? Wonder? Worry? Now it might not be a child in the hospital. Maybe there is something else you fear Things like money, health, your future; losing your job, losing control, losing someone you love? What is it that keeps you up at night?

Now this event that the disciples experience is more than just worrying about what might happen, it is about your fears actually coming into reality. They are not just anxious about the possibility of a storm this night, but God has actually led them right into the midst of it. The storm is real. Their lives are truly on the line. And Jesus is sleeping.

In today's sermon, we learn what it means to pray, "Thy kingdom come." This is not just a prayer that God would prevent bad things from ever happening to us and keep us happy. This is more than us anticipating something bad happening and praying that it wouldn't. The coming of God's kingdom is about those moments where your fears actually do come true and knowing what to expect from God. And so in our series from Mark, we learn another contrast of God's kingdom: A kingdom which is hidden, but powerful.

1. We ask: Don't you care?

Evening is drawing near. Its been a long day, a long week in fact. They've been all over the country side, pressed about on every side by crowds of people who want to meet Jesus. He has been healing, and casting out demons, and contending with the scribes. And as evening is drawing near, Jesus has had enough. He has been shouting to the crowds from the boat, teaching them parable upon parable. And now Jesus wants to rest. He tells them to set out for the other side of the lake, a journey that would be close to eight miles. They better start rowing.

The fishing boats that disciples like James and John and Peter owned were about 20-30 feet long. The stern was built with a platform, a place where the disciples could stand to cast their nets. So Jesus climbs under this platform to rest – as Mark writes: Jesus was "in the stern." He finds sand bag under the platform and goes to sleep.

The Sea of Galilee was about eight miles at its widest shores. This would be like rowing up the Fox River from North Aurora to Saint Charles. This was a journey that could take most of the night. It was probably in the middle of the night then, dark and overcast, when the thunder heads roll in and they find themselves stuck out in the middle of the lake. A great windstorm has risen up.

The waves are bashing and busting against the little fishing boat. Everyone is soaked from the rain and the waves spritzing up into their faces. The boat is heaving up and thrashing against the waves. With each heave, the boat begins to take on water. And where is Jesus? In the stern, asleep.

Doesn't he care? They are about to die. Is Jesus, who had done so much for so many, is just going to sleep while his own disciples perish?

This is our experience of God's hidden kingdom. As far as what we see, what we touch, what we experience in the world, we might think God has fallen asleep. We might wonder, "doesn't He care?"

Job was wondering the same thing. He had lost so much. A great storm had taken his property and his family. And now he had even lost his health to a debilitating and painful skin condition. So he wonders, "Doesn't God care? What good has it done me to be a Christian? What good does it do to be righteous if I still suffer?"

Back and forth the questions and conversations go, but God is silent. For nearly 40 chapters, Job goes back and forth with his friends about why these bad things are happening. Was Job righteous and God unjust? Was Job unrighteous and therefore receiving what he deserved? The questions echo endlessly into empty answers. For nearly 40 chapters, God says nothing. And the answers he gets from his friends are empty. They do not speak for God or as God. And this goes on for 40 chapters, until Job finally says, "God has taken away my justice." This is not fair. But there is no answer. Doesn't God care? Is he sleeping?

It is an experience of a hidden kingdom. Not just worrying about the bad things that might happen; but actually experiencing those fears coming true. We are talking about two parents waiting in the hospital with nothing but endless echoes of questions with empty answers. We are talking about your fears. Those things that keep you up at night. A downsizing that puts your job in jeopardy. A mistake that put your friendship or marriage in jeopardy. An epidemic that puts your health in jeopardy. A disaster that puts your future in jeopardy. A sin that puts eternity in jeopardy. Not just worrying about these things – but actually seeing these things come true.

And meanwhile discovering that Jesus is asleep at the helm. Doesn't he care? Does he have the power to save us or not? There he is, so weak, so exhausted, so human that he needs to sleep. And we wonder, maybe he doesn't care; or maybe he cares, but he doesn't have the power to do anything about it. Our questions echo

endlessly into a night of empty answers. For forty chapters, God is silent. And just like the disciples, just like Job, we experience what it means for God's kingdom to be hidden.

2. He asks: Don't you trust?

So, with our persistent wondering and worrying, Jesus wakes up. Maybe it takes 40 chapters of your life before he does, but now God will speak. You ask the question "don't you care?" And he responds: "don't you trust?"

He rises up in the power of his word and says, "Be silent!" And there is a great calm at sea. But there is still a disturbance. Something that isn't so calm and still. Why did they have to wake Jesus? And what will they do when Jesus is not around? And so he gets to the more important issue than the wind and waves that threaten our physical life. He addresses the storms that threaten our spiritual life. "Why are you so afraid? How is it that you do not trust?"

It is a rebuke, not just of the waves, but of our own sinful pride. Our own need to be in control of the situation. Our own need to have all the answers, or answer all the questions the way we would like them answered. Our desire to throw off this kingdom which is hidden and find something more tangible, more touchable, more tantalizing.

But Jesus rises up with the power of his word again and says to us, "Be silent! This far and no farther. Here your proud waves must stop!" He is not just rebuking the storm, he is rebuking our flesh. For we have tried to relieve our fears by our doings. By us waking Jesus; "you know Jesus, your not really handling this very well. Or as Job said, "God has taken away my justice." And we wake him and try to get him to do what we think he should.

But his response is this: "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you are so wise. Who stretched out its limits and fasted its foundations? Who shut in the sea with doors and said, 'this far you may come, but no farther, and here your proud waves must stop!'" (Job 38). And the answer is this: If God is truly God, then we are not. And if he has set the limits of the sea, then we have not. He knows how far it should go and has complete control over where the proud waves must stop, then here our proud waves must stop. For here when we reach this limited, repentant boundary, our faith discovers the kingdom. A kingdom that is hidden, but powerful.

3. We can stop asking: Who can this be?

Here we learn what it means to pray, “Thy kingdom come.” For as Luther put it in the Small Catechism, “God’s kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word.”

The disciples don’t realize that God’s kingdom does not come in earthly glory or comforts or satisfactions. That is why they are so confused and afraid. They don’t see why Jesus would not rise up and do something to help them. How can he be sleeping while they are perishing?

But what they don’t realize, is that hidden away in the stern is the power of heaven and earth. And the fact that Jesus is sleeping, proves, that he alone is worthy of God’s kingdom. For He alone trusted, when the proud waves crashed against the ship. He took the form of a slave, not intending to use his power for personal security, but to instead trust God for security. And he slept. He was tired. He was weak, like you and I. But in that weakness, God was strong.

For it was in weakness, helplessness, servitude, and suffering that Jesus revealed the power of the kingdom. It was on the cross, as the proud waves of our sinful rebellion crashed against him. If you are the Son of God... do something about this.

So He does. He does the unthinkable. He does nothing. And that nothing is something. It is everything. God’s kingdom comes indeed without our asking. For it is a merciful and gracious kingdom. Jesus dies for us. And the power of His kingdom is directed toward our sins. To purge them, cast them away into the depths of the seas, and bring us true calm, that He might say to us, “be still.”

“God’s kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and live a godly life here in time and hereafter in eternity” (M. Luther’s Small Catechism, Second Petition).

We need no longer ask, “Who can this be?” For Jesus has filled our empty answers with something more meaningful and lasting than the answers we were looking for. He does respond to our cries. He commands the storm to cease. He proves who he is, with all power over wind and wave. He proves that he is the same Lord who laid the foundations of the earth; who fixed the limits of the sea; who shut up its doors and said this far you may come and no farther. He has all control over everything in your life. But his goal is not to make your life comfort-able, but to make your faith comfort-ed.

So he fills your empty faith by demonstrating his power. Not just over wind and wave, but over death itself. Ultimately that is the great fear. Fear of losing someone you love; fear of facing death yourself – that is what is at the root of all our fears; for death makes us lose all control. And death is where he proves who he is. He rises from death and His kingdom come in the power of the resurrection. This means, you who believe cannot be threatened or bound by death. And this gives us power over every evil. Knowing that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.

This calms our soul in the midst of the storm, so that we can climb up into the stern, lay our head on a pillow, and know God will steer the ship to safety. Whether its downsizing at work; mistakes in your relationship; a health epidemic; a disaster; or even a particular sin or series of sins you have committed – even when these things actually come true; you know where to turn.

Psalm 121:1–4 I will lift up my eyes to the hills—From whence comes my help? My help comes from the Lord, Who made heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel Shall neither slumber nor sleep.

The night seemed like an endless echo of empty answers. Waiting and waiting, all they could do was wait and wonder. After 11 hours in surgery, the doctor came out to speak with mom and dad. Their 4 year old was stable, but they couldn't complete the heart procedure. They will have to bring her back again in August. More waiting. More wondering. More worrying. But also more opportunity to for family and friends to pray: "Thy kingdom come." More opportunity to discover a kingdom which rests not in what we see or touch or feel, but which is powerful beyond any earthly power. A kingdom which performs a procedure on our heart that will survive even death itself. For there in our spiritual heart, His kingdom reigns in a promise to raise us up on the last day and give us eternal life. A kingdom which comes when he gives us His Holy Spirit so that we would believe his word; a word which says, "Be still and know that I am God."

*Be still, my soul; thy God doth undertake
To guide the future as He has the past.
Thy hope, thy confidence, let nothing shake;
All now mysterious shall be bright at last.
Be still, my soul; the waves and winds still know
His voice who ruled them while He dwelt below. Amen.*