

## **Proper 7 Year B—Mark 4:35-41**

Do you believe in miracles? I had a Franciscan friend in San Francisco who was terminally ill with cancer. The doctor had told her she had about a year to live. She didn't want any particular treatment. About 6 months later, the doctor called her in just to see how she was doing. He gave her the standard tests and found nothing. All trace of the cancer had disappeared. "I simply don't understand it; it's a miracle" was the doctor's response. She lived for the next 20 years in good health.

Did Jesus really calm the waters of the Sea of Galilee? One historical fact we do have is that the Sea of Galilee was well-known to be the locale for terrible storms—fierce storms that would arise suddenly. We also know that the Palestinians believed such storms were the work of evil demons. In fact, Jesus commands the waves to be still in much the same way as he commands unclean spirits to be still. Jesus was in the boat in the position in which any distinguished guest would be conveyed. It was on the little seat placed at the stern, where a carpet and cushion are arranged.

My favorite Jesus scholar is a man named Marcus Borg, no longer living. Among his other virtues, he had the sense to be married to an Episcopal priest. My original parish, St. Mary's, San Francisco, had the good fortune of including him as its adult education forum speaker several times. He tells us that he can't understand why more people don't join the Episcopal Church. It has so much room for both head and heart. Well, Borg spent much of his career studying what the historical Jesus may really have said and done. To my mind, his work is hugely important because many people insist on taking every word of the Bible literally. Others, who can't fathom literal interpretation, think they need to chuck the whole thing. Borg shows people that there are deeper ways to look at the Bible.

Did Jesus literally have the power to make storms obey him? That's a natural question for scientifically trained 21<sup>st</sup> century minds to ask, but it doesn't get us very far. I do have a friend who thinks turning the hearts of some of the people he has seen is a lot more difficult for our Lord than calming a storm. What Borg would suggest we do is look at the story of the calming of the waves as a faith story. No one can ever scientifically prove such stories one way or the other.

Whether the story is historical or not, we can look upon it as a metaphor. When we say “Jesus is the light of the world,” we do not mean that he is literally a light or lamp, but that we see him as a light because he illumines our lives. He is a source of wisdom, of illumination. As for the storm, when the disciples realized that Jesus was with them, not really asleep, they became calm. To voyage with Jesus, they realized, was to voyage in peace, even in the midst of a storm. Jesus is also the one to whom we can turn in the midst of the storms of our lives. When we are suffering from doubt, uncertainty, stress, anxiety, the storms of life, Jesus is the one to whom we can turn. Jesus can withstand a lot. We don’t have to put on our best clothes to talk to him or make an appointment. We don’t have to pretend we are feeling nice and polite either. Jesus is the one strong enough to hear our confusion, our anxiety, even our anger in the midst of the storms of life. Pray to him, “What is the way?” “Teacher, do you not care that I am perishing?” Ask Jesus. You see, the real Christian life is not so much about squabbling over beliefs with other Christians as it is about relationship with God in Christ. The stories about Jesus tell us what God is like. They tell us that God is near at hand, God is accessible, God is a God of compassion, God is available in the midst of a storm, literal or metaphorical. “The Christian life,” says Borg, is about entering into a relationship with that to which the Christian tradition points...And a Christian is one who lives out his or her relationship to God within the framework of the Christian tradition.”

Most clergypersons I know have a “theology section” in their libraries, usually consisting of whatever books were considered essential at the time we went to seminary. But in real life on the run, only one thing matters: Who is God for you? Is your God malevolent and punishing, or is your God loving and compassionate? Today’s Gospel gives the Gospel’s answer to that question.

So what do we see in the story of Jesus calming the storm? We see what God is like and what a God-filled life is like. More relevant for my life than whether Jesus could calm the storm is the two questions Jesus asks: “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” And don’t forget: When you get to your wit’s end, you’ll find God lives there.

Before I close, I would like to say “Happy Fathers’ Day” to all of you who are fathers and “Happy Fathers’ Day to all who have fathers, living or dead. I suggest that in the storms of our own lives we remember what our fathers had to teach us. (May not want to include)