

**Brothers and sisters, Grace to you and peace from God, Our Father,
and from Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

For many years, my brothers and I would take our sons fishing on Leech Lake. The boys were small, there were ten of us and we always stayed at a resort on the Southeast side of the lake. They were a friendly and had their own unique little harbor where we could rent boats.

We would all fish together on one huge pontoon. My Dad was a navy guy so we would make him the captain. Truth is, he was much happier driving the boat than dealing with all the leeches and minnows... It was pretty chaotic, lots of goofing off and tangled lines, but we always caught fish, walleyes and northerns...

One day, instead of going along the shore toward Bear Island, we decided to head across the lake toward Walker. Leech is a big lake! The day was breezy and overcast, but didn't seem too unusual. Those were the days before smart phones, and live radar. About half way there, the weather changed dramatically. The wind started blowing, the waves became white caps and the swells were getting bigger and bigger.

My brothers and I started getting a little anxious and tense. Because of the canopy over the boat, we were being blown around pretty good. The kids all had life jackets on, but we suddenly asked them to reel everything in and sit in the middle of the boat. And although it looked like rain, we rolled up the canopy so it wasn't acting like a sail.

We turned around and decided to go back to the resort. The kid's faces changed from smiles and giggles to fear and concern-- you know when your kids are scarred.

Well, we struggled back, it was a rocky ride, my dad is good at handling a boat, but believe me, I was never so happy to get back into that safe little harbor! It was a scary ride... I bet a lot of you who go fishing have a similar story...

Like it was for us that day, so it was for those disciples, sometimes the weather changes and you feel at the mercy of the circumstances around you, and it is scary...

This gospel story is known as Jesus stilling the storm and it comes to us after a series of parables... stories and metaphors that Jesus uses to teach and instruct.

This gospel story is also present in all three of our synoptic gospels-- Matthew, Mark and Luke... That's called triple tradition. The writers of these gospels all agreed that the story was important; they all thought it was significant.

This story has a lot of connections with the Old Testament. The first century Jewish Christians in particular would see a lot of symbols that would be consistent with the scripture they already knew. For instance, stories about wind and water are common.

Wind is often associated with spiritual matters, which can be both good and bad... And water is often associated with Chaos. In fact we have several gospel stories that reference these elements, for example, Jesus walking on the water.

In Genesis we hear, “And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.”

It’s part of the creation story, a story of how God brought forth life; it’s a transformative story of speaking chaos into order. Of creating something good and positive out of something dangerous and chaotic.

Some commentators have suggested that this story of Jesus stilling the storm is like a new creation story. Jesus is creating a new way to access God’s love and forgiveness. And I kind of like that idea.

Perhaps another story that many **early** Christians would see in this story, is Jonah and the Whale. Jonah is called by God to go to Nineveh and proclaim that unless they repent, God would destroy them. And since Jonah didn’t like the Ninevites, he thought they were dirty rotten people, he tries to get away. Jonah gets in a boat and goes in the opposite direction.

Well, a big storm comes up and everyone on the boat is scared. They try lightening the load by throwing dispensable things overboard. Jonah goes under the deck and falls asleep. The captain wakes him up and asks “How can you sleep?”

The sailors cast lots to see who was responsible for the calamity. They are getting more anxious all the time... And the lot falls on Jonah. They ask him what terrible thing he had done; the water was getting rougher and rougher... Finally Jonah says, “I know it is my fault that this great storm has come upon us.”

The sailors don’t want to, but they throw him overboard and the rough seas become calm. And of course we know the rest of the story, he’s swallowed by the whale and he’s spit up on dry land three days later.

The story of Jonah and the whale has a lot of similar elements, people in a boat, big storm, someone asleep, fear and panic... But with a significant difference! In the Jonah story, he is thrown overboard, essentially sacrificed and the result is that the sea becomes calm, in the Jesus story, he directly rebukes the wind and waves and the sea becomes calm.

Some scholars have noted that this story might be foreshadowing, or pointing to another part of the gospel story—specifically the story of the passion and the stormy events of the week leading to his arrest and crucifixion.

This is human storm of jealousy and hatred, betrayal... Jesus was caught in tangled web of trumped up accusations and tossed about between the Chief Priest and Pilate and the mob. They believed Jesus was to blame for their turmoil, and like Jonah being thrown overboard, he was sacrificed, they crucified him on a cross and left for dead.

And after three days in the tomb, God raised him from the dead. And through the resurrection of Christ, we are offered forgiveness and mercy. And as Luther said, where ever there is forgiveness, there is new life. So this is a new creation story, and not just any creation story, but **your** new creation story.

And in this way, Jesus does in fact calm the storm. Once upon a time in a boat with his disciples, and also once and for all time for you and me! This is God's way of saying, whenever you're in the midst of stormy circumstances, I will raise you up!

What are the stormy situations you find yourself in? What are those circumstances in your life that feel out of control? What makes you afraid?

For me, personally, some of the things that trouble me are the violence and the violent rhetoric in our society. It's hard to avoid the news these days. Sometimes it feels like the whole world is going mad. And sometimes I find myself in prayer, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

The school shootings, the pundits, the self righteous politicians, both Republicans and Democrats, all the people who point their fingers and accuse each other of violence; when in fact they are just mirror images of each other... Doesn't it feel like our society is getting stormier all the time?

My heart is troubled by these things, and I imagine yours is as well.

And this is exactly where Jesus comes into our story, for us, here today. We are all different from one another; Republicans and Democrats, people who watch CNN, people who watch FOX, and yet we are all members of the same body of Christ.

We all need each other. Christ is the unity we all share in common, and for the common good of all. As Christians, this is what makes us different in this stormy world and for the sake of this world.

We are called to a different kind of righteousness, rather than pointing out the speck in someone else's eye, we are to notice the log in our own. Rather than point our finger at someone else, we are to notice we have four fingers pointing back at ourselves.

As Christians we are called to go into those stormy seas of violence and show the world a different way of being. While the stormy world would tell us to throw rocks at people who are different, Jesus tells us to love them. We are even commanded to love our enemies-- people who are different than us.

The good news this morning is that Jesus calmed the stormy sea. And through the crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus has permanently and forever calmed the seas.

He never promises us that life will be easy, he promises to be with us under all circumstances. When we're afraid, Jesus is a prayer away. When we're scared, Jesus is that parent watching and loving us. When we're not sure where to turn, Jesus is always there. When we face our final chapter, Jesus is there to take our hand...

Jesus calls us; o'er the tumult of our life's wild, restless sea, day by day his clear voice sounding, saying,
"Christian, follow me"

Indeed, Jesus brings us into that safe harbor... Amen.