

SERMON NOTES

Sunday, August 31

Synaxis Gospel

Mark 4:35-40

LORD OF ALL CREATION

INTRODUCTION

The Gospel according to Mark is shorter than the other three and is probably the earliest of the four histories of the life of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Like the other Gospels, the central feature is the crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord; but in Mark's account "the action is heightened by the relative absence of blocks of teaching material."¹

Mark's purpose is evangelistic,² to tell the good news that it was the Son of God Who came to seek and to save the lost. "Mark introduces only those historical events which are directly relevant for that purpose. He omits birth narratives and accounts of Jesus' early life."³ Instead he plunges immediately into the beginnings of our Lord's ministry and His self revelation through His actions.

Our reading for today climaxes a series of events recorded in Mark in which the actions of Jesus reveal Who He is. In the earlier chapters, Jesus had demonstrated His unique mastery of the Holy Scriptures, the Word that God had given to His people. He had demonstrated that He has the authority that belongs only to God to relieve the oppressions, both physical and spiritual, that plague mankind. Finally, in this episode, Jesus reveals Himself as God the Creator, Who alone commands the forces of nature. However, now He was robed in the form a man. His body was subject to the same physical requirements of the rest of humanity—it too needed sleep.

SYNAXIS READING

Mark 4:35-40

And on that day, when evening had come, He said to them, "Let us go over to the other side."

And leaving the multitude, they took Him along with them, just as He was, in the boat; and other boats were with Him.

¹ Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, fourth ed. (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1990) p. 65-66

²Ibid, p. 66

³ Ibid

And there arose a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up.

And He Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushions; and they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"

And being aroused, He rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Hush, be still." And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm.

And He said to them, "Why are you so timid? How is it that you have no faith?"

[And they became very much afraid and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"- verse 41]

NOTES

And on that day, when evening had come, He said to them, "Let us go over to the other side."

"That day" was the same day that is the setting of Mark 4:1:

"And He [Jesus] began to teach again by the sea. And such a very great multitude gathered to Him that He got into a boat in the sea and sat down; and the whole multitude was by the sea on the land. And He was teaching them many things in parables."

The day's teaching from the boat to the crowd on the shore over, Jesus commanded the disciples to head for the other side of the Sea of Galilee, into Gentile territory.

And leaving the multitude, they took Him along with them, just as He was, in the boat; and other boats were with Him.

Without leaving the boat, the disciples headed across the sea. In Mark 4:10 we are told that besides the disciples, Jesus had other followers there. Perhaps these accompanied Him in the other boats.

And there arose a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up.

There are three uses of the word "great" in our passage.⁴ The first is found here, translated as 'fierce.' The fierce gale of wind in the sea posed a great danger to the occupants of the boat. We can imagine the desperate efforts the disciples made to bale out the water but wave after wave kept pouring in.

⁴ This is noticed by Joel Marcus in his *Mark 1-8*, the Anchor Bible, Vol. 27 (New York: Doubleday, 1999) pp. 335-36.

This passage is reminiscent of the experience of the Old Testament prophet, Jonah, who had taken passage on a ship that encountered a fierce gale in the sea and was about to break apart.

And He Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushions; and they awoke Him and said to Him, “Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?”

Jesus, like Jonah, was sound asleep in the boat when the storm struck. Jesus—as a man—was exhausted from His day of teaching; but, like Jonah, He was awakened by the frightened crew (in Jesus case, the disciples were the crew).

The captain of Jonah’s ship told Jonah, “How is it that you are sleeping! Get up, call on your God. Perhaps your God will be concerned about us so that we will not perish.”⁵ There is a great difference however between the prophet of God, Jonah, and the Incarnate God, Jesus.

At this point in their understanding, the disciples refer to Jesus simply as “Teacher.” Perhaps they hoped Jesus might cry out to God to save them. They have much to learn about the identity of their Master.

And being aroused, He rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Hush, be still.” And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm.

Unlike Jonah who told the ancient sailors to cast him into the sea to calm it⁶, Jesus spoke to the wind and the sea as one would speak to a disobedient dog. He told it literally: “Shut up! Be still!” Earlier He had used similar language to a demon.⁷

We find the second “great” in the result of Jesus’ rebuke. The wild tempest changed.⁸ Instead of a great danger there was a great peace, here translated “perfectly calm.”

And He said to them, “Why are you so timid? How is it that you have no faith:”

“Why are you so cowardly?” They had seen His miraculous power; why didn’t they have faith? How could they have been afraid of the storm when they were with Jesus? They had not yet come to understand or accept that He is God, the Creator of all.

[And they became very much afraid and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?”- verse 41]

In the Old Testament only God can command the sea.⁹

Here we find the third “great” translated here by “very much.” In the Presence of One Who exercises the majestic prerogatives that belong only to the Creator—commanding the wind and the sea—the disciples suddenly are gripped with great fear.

They ask “Who then is this?”, but they are terrified, being mortal men, of the only possible answer.

⁵ Jonah 1:6

⁶ For Jonah had been disobeying the LORD by running away from his mission and he knew the storm was on account of his sin. Casting Jonah overboard would save the sailors from suffering the punishment meant for Jonah.

⁷ Mark 1:25. As Jesus cast out the demon from a possessed man, He rebuked it and said, “Shut up and come out of him.”

⁸ Marcus has pointed out that similar or even the same words are used in the LXX version of Jonah’s story and in Mark’s account here. For example, the wind “died down” is given in both accounts for the cause of the peaceful sea. Marcus, p. 334.

⁹ Marcus p. 333; see Job 26:11-12; Psalm 104:7; Isaiah 51:9-10

APPLICATION

Gospel means “Good News,” or “Avedis” and Mark’s Gospel is the Good News of Jesus Christ. It seems fitting that our Church, the earliest national Christian church, begins and ends its liturgical year with Mark, the earliest of the Gospels. Mark’s mission was to recount the Apostle Peter’s eye-witness memories of our Lord’s deeds and teachings that revealed Who Jesus Christ really is. This understanding puts Mark’s central point, our Lord’s crucifixion and resurrection in proper perspective. That this Person would suffer and die and then rise again from the dead to redeem us sinners is the Good News of Jesus Christ.

In the course of our liturgical year, our church has arranged our readings so that we learn and can appreciate the fullness of the Gospels’ teachings concerning our Lord, His saving work on our behalf, and what He expects of us. Our first reading in September points us to the need of having open ears to hear Jesus Christ; while this, our last reading in August, reveals Him as the Lord of all in Whose majestic care we can safely trust and need never be afraid.

Peter was a fisherman, a very experienced fisherman. His life, before being called by Jesus to follow Him and become His disciple, had been spent fishing the Sea of Galilee. Peter knew the sea when it was calm and at peace and he knew it when sudden storms made it dangerous. Night storms were rare, but they were the most dangerous of all. It was during just such a deadly storm that Peter and his fellow disciples were given a revelation of Jesus Christ that shook them to the core of their being and made them ask themselves, “Who is this Man?!”

As Mark has told the story, the disciples had seen many amazing things. Immediately after they joined Jesus in Capernaum, they had seen Jesus silence a demon who screamed in terror before Him, “Have you come to destroy us? I know Who You are—the Holy One of God!” Rebuking the unclean spirit, Jesus had commanded that it come out of the possessed man. It obeyed. It could not do otherwise, it *had* to obey. Later, the disciples would see this happen time after time. No evil spirit could withstand the authority of Jesus Christ.¹⁰

The disciples had seen every kind of disease, even leprosy cured by His word. The blind, the deaf, the cripples—even a paraplegic—were restored to health. No disease or physical problem that troubles mankind could withstand the authority of Jesus Christ. His reputation as a healer spread far and wide and the enormous crowds pressed to simply reach out and touch Him, perhaps only His garments, knowing they would be made well.

The crowds came to be taught as well; for they had never in their lives heard such wonderful teaching. They were drawn by His gracious words that communicated His love and acceptance of each and every one of them. However, what truly amazed them was

¹⁰ The slippers worn by Armenian priests celebrate this fact. The soles are embroidered with a scorpion, the symbol of Satan and all his minions. They are trampled on by Christ and His servants.

the authority with which He handled the Holy Scriptures. Rumors flew that He must be *the* Prophet that was to come. The crowds were thrilled just to sit and listen, sometimes without eating for a full day. The disciples had witnessed all this.

The religious leaders and everyone else knew that only God can forgive sins. Yet Jesus proved He *is* the One Who has authority to forgive the sins of mankind. Only God had the power to make a paraplegic walk again but at the command of Jesus Christ, such a man stood up, picked up his pallet and walked. Peter and the rest of the disciples were as amazed as the rest of the people. Still, none of them had put all these things together and come to the obvious conclusion.

Now, it was the end of a long day. Because of the crushing crowd gathered on the seashore, Jesus had been speaking to the people from a nearby boat. As the sun sat, and finished with His teaching, He asked the disciples to take the boat to the opposite shore across the sea. As they headed out, their Master, tired and weary as any man might be, was soon asleep on the cushion in the stern. The disciples were expert sailors, they had fished these waters on many a peaceful evening. As night fell, they were well on their way.

Suddenly, to their horror, they found themselves in the midst of a fierce gale for which their craft and all their experience were no match. The high waves, whipped by the wind's fury, were crashing into the boat, filling it with water. The disciples knew they faced certain death. They screamed at Jesus, sleeping undisturbed by the wild uproar of the winds and waves. "Teacher, don't you care that we are all dying!!"

Jesus stood up, and in the same way that He had rebuked the demons, He commanded the winds and the waves to be silent. The mighty elements instantly obeyed. The disciples stared at each other in wide-eyed amazement as a new and far deeper fear gripped them. Who *was* this in the boat with them! What mere man could command the winds and the sea and be obeyed?

They should have known; they had witnessed His authority over the spirit world, over the most incurable illnesses and handicaps, they had witnessed the ease and authority He demonstrated when explaining the most difficult passages of Holy Scriptures, astounding the learned scholars of their religion. They had even seen proof that He had the authority to forgive sins. They should have realized in that moment that Jesus Christ is the incarnation of the great Creator God, the Lord of All.

Mark leaves it for others to tell the post-Resurrection story. From Matthew, Luke and John we learn that it was only after the Resurrection of Christ that the disciples finally understood. Thomas, the most skeptical of them all, falling at the risen Savior's feet, declared the confession of them all, "My Lord and my God!"

As we close our liturgical year, through our readings these last twelve months, may we too more fully understand Who He is Who became a man in order to die for us—in our

place, taking the awful punishment we deserve for our sins. May our gratefulness and our awe never cease.

Knowing He loves us, how can we ever be afraid? But in those times of overwhelming troubles when fear grips our hearts may we remember that our Savior is the Lord who crushes Satan and his demons, the Lord over sickness and handicaps and even death, the Lord of the Holy Scriptures, the Lord of forgiveness, the Lord and Creator of heaven and earth—the Lord of All.