

The account of Jesus calming the storm on the Sea of Galilee is one of the more memorable miracles of Jesus, for many reasons. One of the things that makes it stand out so much are the strong contrasts that are shown in the event. When we consider these words that the Holy Spirit has caused to be written down for us, we find that these contrasts give us instruction, comfort, and hope in our lives. In this Gospel lesson, we see the storms of life overcome by the peace of Jesus.

So right at the beginning, we get a strong contrast pictured for us in the words of Scripture. Jesus and His disciples have gotten aboard a boat – probably one of their old fishing boats – and are setting off across the Sea of Galilee. It's a trip that they've made countless times before, and I'm sure they're thinking that this will be just another uneventful trip.

Yet we hear, "And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves." Living in southern Wyoming, you all can no doubt appreciate sudden changes in weather. And you might even be able to understand some of the disciples' fear at this. One moment, you're driving along the highway and all is well, then you come over a hill and suddenly you can't see more than ten yards in front of you, and the road is now a sheet of ice, and you're at the mercy of the gusting winds to not be slid over into oncoming traffic.

For the disciples, many of whom have spent their much of their lives on this sea, this storm is like that, but worse. Not only is the sudden change in weather putting their lives in danger, but there's no one who will be coming to help them. Caught in such a sudden tempest, there's nothing you can do but bail water and pray. It's a scene of chaos and terror.

Except for one part. Amidst the roaring winds and waves, you have Jesus, asleep on a cushion. How on earth is He able to do this? How can He be resting as waves are crashing over the sides and filling the boat? How is Jesus at peace while the disciples are panicking?

The answer comes in the contrast that we see in the person of Jesus Himself. On the one hand, He is God, the Lord of wind and wave. He, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, made the sea in the beginning, separating the waters from the dry land. He is the God who rhetorically asked Job, "Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb, when I made clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band, and prescribed limits for it and set bars and doors, and said, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed?'"

But on the other hand, Jesus is fully, truly man. He is a man who is exhausted from constantly preaching, teaching, traveling all over the place to care for His people. And, He is also a man who is trusting perfectly in God His Father. He knows and believes with absolute certainty that His Father will not allow Him to perish before the appointed time. He has been sent to earth to redeem the world from sin at the cross, and He knows that the Father will not allow that plan to be broken.

His Father has sent Him to earth, and His Father has sent this storm upon the sea, and Jesus perfectly trusts that it is all part of His good and gracious will. And so in the midst of the wind and waves and chaos, Jesus has peace.

Following the contrast of the chaos of the storm with the peace shown by Jesus's sleeping, we come to another contrast in the cry of the disciples to Jesus. We read, "And they went and woke Him, saying, 'Save us, Lord; we are perishing!'" A very short cry, but one with two different parts.

The first part is one made in faith: "Save us, Lord!" They say this because they believe that Jesus is actually able to save them. They believe that, by the power of God at work in Him, the power they've seen do everything from cleanse lepers to heal illness to drive out demons, their Master will be able to save them from this storm. In their troubles, they rightly look to Jesus as the One who can deliver them.

However, as the first half of their cry showed faith, the second half showed doubt. "We are perishing!" Though they believe that Jesus is able to save them, they're not certain if He desires to save them. In Mark's Gospel, this is shown even more clearly, as he records additional words they spoke: "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" "Do you not care?"

Unlike Jesus, trusting perfectly that His Father will preserve Him in all things, the disciples aren't sure that Jesus will keep them alive through this storm. Perhaps they look at Him sleeping and think that He's not really concerned about them, whether they live or die. Maybe they think of Him as pagans thought of their gods: powerful, but distant and often uninterested in the affairs of ordinary men.

Whatever they're thinking, their faith in the promises of God has been severely compromised by the observations of their eyes. And so their cry in one part shows faith, but in the other shows doubt.

After the chaos of the storm and the peace of Jesus, followed by the faith and yet doubt of the disciples' plea, we get another contrast in the response of Jesus. Roused by their cries, Jesus rebukes the winds and the sea. Here, Jesus shows that He is indeed the Lord of Creation. He doesn't need to do anything elaborate or showy. He doesn't have to pray to God like one of the prophets. He merely speaks.

And yet that word that He speaks is the word of God, and it carries that same awesome power that first brought the universe into existence. He commands the wind and waves – elements that even with our modern technology we struggle to understand and predict, much less control. And at His word, those wild elements are immediately calmed. Uncontrollable chaos is instantly brought into peaceful order.

This is the King of Creation. This is the rule of God in the Kingdom of Might, as our catechisms describe.

But before He shows forth this might, Jesus speaks to His disciples. And how does He address them? Not as the Lord of power, the Almighty One. No, to them, Jesus says, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" This is a rebuke, but not the same as the rebuke of the storm. That was a stern, irresistible command. This is a gentle admonition.

“Why are you afraid?” Jesus is directing them to think, to recall all He has done. He has been faithful before; would He not be faithful now? His love has extended to complete strangers; would it not include those closest to Him?

Joined to that question is the address, “O you of little faith.” This is not an insult. Rather, it is a call to grow. They do have faith, and Jesus knows that. They do believe that He has the power to save them. But with the wind and waves, that faith has been brought low. It hasn’t been extinguished, but it has shown to be weak. And so Jesus calls them to grow in faith. Trust in Him, His power, His love, His grace and mercy, and then they won’t be afraid. He doesn’t want them to be terrified but rather to have the peace that He showed, and that peace comes through faith.

Their faith is small, but it is still there, and He desires to increase that faith, that they might be blessed. In love, Jesus speaks to them not as the mighty Lord of the Universe but as the loving Bridegroom of the Church. These words are not of the Kingdom of Might, but of the Kingdom of Grace.

The account closes with a small, yet very pointed final contrast. At the beginning, we heard about a “great storm” arising suddenly. Now, at the word of Jesus, there immediately comes a “great calm.” Trouble had come suddenly, wind and waves that seemed to be taking the disciples down into the watery grave, terror arising in the hearts of men... and then Jesus spoke... “and there was a great calm.”

Not a gradual lessening of the storm. Not a decrease in the intensity to the point that the disciples could manage on their own. No, at the word of Jesus, the raging sea is suddenly smooth as glass, the stormy sky opened to beautiful blue, the howling wind now a gentle breeze. At the word and will of Jesus, the storm and its terror have given way to peace.

These contrasts shown for us by Holy Scripture aren’t just literary elements in a nice story. They are reminders for how Jesus loves and cares for us in our own lives.

Back to the first one: a storm rages, but Jesus sleeps. When storms arise in your life, you may feel very much like the disciples. Everything was going along smoothly, and then out of the blue you find yourself dealing with problems you hadn’t anticipated in the least.

And in addition to coming on suddenly, these troubles can be quite severe. The disciples weren’t crying out to Jesus because of a slight drizzle; they were crying out because they thought they were going to die. Often, in His perfect wisdom the Lord allows troubles to befall His people that are very severe. The crosses you are given to bear might seem at times unbearable.

And in those moments, you might be tempted to think that Jesus is asleep, unaware of what you’re dealing with, how close you feel to breaking. Yet in those times, remember the trust shown by Jesus. He sleeps, not because He doesn’t care, but because He has perfect trust in His Father to care for Him.

When you were baptized, God the Father became your Father, and the love and care He had for Jesus is the same love and care He has for you. When you are tempted to think that God is asleep or doesn’t care, remember the words of Scripture: “God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted

beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

In the next contrast, remember the cry of the disciples, and let your cry be one of faith. As they rightly believed that Jesus had all power to deliver them from the storm, remember that Jesus has all power to deliver you from your trials as well. Like we heard last week, the authority and power of God extend over all creation. There is nothing that is outside His control. There is nothing from which He cannot deliver His people. Forces of nature, of politics, of economics, of relationships, nothing is greater than our God.

Remember also that your Lord not only has the power to deliver you, but also the love and desire to do so. When you pray the Lord’s prayer, which the Lord gave you to pray, remember that wonderful comfort pointed out in the Catechism: you are praying to your loving Father as one of His dear children.

When you wonder why God would put you through a particular hardship, look to the marks in His hands and feet and side, and know that He uses even what would be bad in this world to bring about the greatest good in eternity. He is not an indifferent God far off; He is the God who is love, who is near.

When your loving Lord speaks to you in His holy word, remember the contrast in the words spoken by Jesus. God’s word is absolute, spoken by the King of Creation and Lord of Might. In the world’s eyes it may not look like much, but then neither did Jesus as He walked this earth. But if even seemingly uncontrollable forces like wind and waves obey His word, how much more should we who are His people obey it as well?

Yet from this text we know that our Lord gives us His word out of love for us. He is the Bridegroom of the Church, the Lord who desires what is best for all His people. What He tells us in His word, both the Law and the Gospel, are for our good. Even when that word would rebuke us, as it rebuked the disciples, it is spoken so that we increase in faith. Our Lord desires to strengthen our faith, and through that strengthening grant release from fear, anxiety, anger, and so many other afflictions. It is hard for us to hear “O you of little faith,” yet God speaks it that we might grow.

Note also that this call to grow often comes before we’re delivered from the storms, not after. Matthew records for us that Jesus addressed the disciples before rebuking the storm. We are called to grow in our fear, love, and trust in God even while bearing the cross.

Yet that word that calls us to grow, to take up our cross and follow Christ, also contains the boundless power and love of God to bring us growth, strength, and peace. Though storms may rage, our Lord has promised to deliver us and bring us out of them. It may be quick; it may take a while. The troubles might be minor, or they might be incredibly severe. But God never lets His people be overcome by this world.

Even death, which would seem to be the worst thing that could happen, becomes the instrument of God, turned toward His good and gracious will. Perhaps you been at the bedside of a loved one,

seeing their suffering, and then Jesus speaks, "Peace, be still," and brings that faithful saint out of the storms of this life and home to Him in heaven.

Jesus has overcome the storms of sin, death, and hell through His death on the cross, and out of His grace and mercy He grants peace, the peace that passes all understanding. That peace is with you in this life through faith, and by faith that peace will be yours for eternity.

In the name of Jesus, amen.