

Scriptures:

Psalm 46

Mark 4:35-41

“Be still and know that I am God.”

“God is our refuge and strength,
an ever present help in trouble.

Therefore we will not fear,
though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
though its waters roar and foam
and the mountains quake with their surging.”

So opens our Psalm reading today.

And it goes on to say --- in verse 10 ----

“Be still and know that I am God
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth.”

“Be still and know that I am God.”

Being still ---- truly still in our hearts ----- and recognizing God within this
stillness ----- can be a very difficult thing.

Stillness is not an attribute praised in our culture.

Business ---- multi-tasking ----- productivity ---- on the go --- these are the
things our culture has placed value on ---- rarely ---- if at all ----- stillness.

Being at peace --- calm --- still --- isn't about everything around you being
calm and peaceful --- it's about cultivating calm and peace --- stillness -----
within ourselves ---- regardless of what's happening around us

There is a storm raging at sea in Mark's gospel reading today ---- and the
disciples are being tossed to and fro ---- indeed as verse 37 says the boat was
“nearly swamped”.

The disciples panic ---- because of outer circumstances --- the storm rages --
- and they are flustered and panicked.

And then there is Jesus ----- He's on the very same boat --- same
circumstances ---- only instead of panic ---- He rests calmly ---- at peace.

Verse 38 ---- “Jesus was in the stern --- sleeping on a cushion.”

Same outer conditions ---- raging storm --- completely different inner
dispositions.

Panic ---- fear ----- flustered ----- and then calm --- peace ---- resting.

If our dispositions --- if we allow our dispositions ---- to be dictated
predominantly by what is happening around us --- as opposed to what is
happening with in us ---- we will most certainly live much of our lives --- in
panic and fear --- flustered ---- just as the disciples were filled with panic ---
and fear ----- and were flustered.

Regardless of the circumstances in life --- Christ is right here with us in the
very same boat as we're in.

Amid the struggles we face --- the fears that confront us ---- the panic we
experience --- the sometimes chaos of life ---- we must always remember
Christ is right here with us.

“Sometimes we have to awaken the sleeping Christ that is deep within us.”

Cyril of Alexandria --- writing in the 5th Century ---- said of this passage in
Mark's gospel today ---- “His --- Christ's sleep ---- had the purpose of
maturing the faith of the disciples.”

“His --- Christ's sleep --- had the purpose of maturing the faith of the
disciples.”

Even though Christ is always present in our lives --- deep within us --- He
sometimes lays quiet a little while longer than we might like ----- why?

As Cyril said ----- for the purpose of maturing our faith.

There are circumstances in our lives --- and in our culture that sometimes grind us down a bit and cause us to be fearful and maybe even panic --- we lose heart and become a little discouraged.

There are --- Goliath's ----- Caesar's ----- storms at sea ----- forces that distort God's purposes for life ---- causing anxiety --- and suffering ----- making life a little chaotic.

And these Goliath's --- and Caesar's --- and raging storms --- can have many faces and names ---- but they all ultimately share one thing in common ----- they leave people feeling less than whole ---- in pain ---- discouraged --- and troubled.

For example ---- the Caesar of greed that led to a significant economic collapse in 2008 ----- leaving many hard working humble people out of work ----- losing retirement savings ---- homes and so on.

Bullies stalking school yards ---- cowards pretending not to be by wielding power based on fear and belittling others.

Racism and sexism.

Ruptured relationships.

Someone entering into a church ---- and not just any church but a church that has suffered and battled opposition throughout its long long history ---- and opening fire ----- killing 9 innocent people senselessly ---- 9 people who welcomed in the stranger for prayer.

We may not often know the kind of pain that the families of these 9 people now know ----- but at one point or another we all likely know what it feels like to be under the heel of some kind of dominating force.

There are times in life where we feel threatened ----- confused --- panicked and uncertain --- and these feelings can be justified just as the disciples were justified in feeling panicked.

The ship was ---- after all ---- being taken over by water --- sinking --- “nearly swamped” ----- as verse 37 says.

But we must remember and celebrate and share the good news that that the forces of chaos and confusion ----- are no match for the reign of God present in the person of Jesus Christ.

If anyone had the chance to listen to what some of the families of the 9 people shot in Emmanuel Church in South Carolina this past week had to say ----- we quickly see that the forces of chaos and confusion --- evil ----- are indeed no match for the reign of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

Forgiveness and mercy were on their lips --- not retaliation but forgiveness and mercy --- evil is no match for the reign of Christ.

Augustine of Hippo writing in the 4th and 5th centuries --- referring to our gospel passage today ---- said -----

“When you have to listen to abuse, that means you are being buffeted by the wind.

When your anger is roused, you are being tossed by the waves.

So when the wind blows and the waves mount high --- the boat is in danger - ----- your heart is imperiled ---- your heart is taking a battering.

On hearing yourself insulted --- you long to retaliate --- but the joy of revenge brings with it another kind of misfortune --- shipwreck,

Why is this?

Because Christ is asleep in you.

What do I mean?

I mean you have forgotten his presence.

Rouse him then ----- remember him --- let him keep watch within you --- pay heed to him.

A temptation arises --- it is the wind.

It disturbs you --- it is the surging of the sea.

This is the moment to awaken Christ.”

For those in the church in Charleston ----- this past week was a moment to awaken Christ --- let the true light of Christ shine ---- let mercy --- grace and forgiveness shine.

So it is for us as we face challenges and difficulties in our lives --- we can be bitter ---- want some kind of revenge or suffering for others ----- retaliation is a lazy form of grief ---- or we can be Christ centered.

The story of the raging sea ---- doesn't just present us with the opportunity to remind ourselves that Jesus shares our predicament amid the storms of life.

It also reminds us that we are called to react differently --- to find peace amidst the storms and have faith amid the storms.

Both the disciples and Jesus are in the exact same circumstances ----- they panic --- He rests.

He reacts completely differently than they do ---- we too are called to react completely differently to the storms and chaos of this world that the rest of the world does.

“Quiet --- Be still.” ----- Jesus said to the waves that day.

The disciples were way too far gone down the panic train ----- for Jesus to simply try quieting and stilling them.

First He had to address the circumstances around them before they could possibly ever be open to His voice.

The quiet --- be still of Christ ---- isn't just for the waves around us --- it's for us too.

Hopefully we hear this long before the waves --- and the chaos of the world nearly swamps us.

The story of the raging sea ---- doesn't just present us with the opportunity to remind ourselves that Jesus shares our predicament amid the storms of life.

It also reminds us that with the power of Jesus we can do something about the storms.

Mark's gospel presents us with far more than just a strategy for coping ---- call on Christ --- awaken the Christ within us.

It's much more than just this.

The panicking disciples on the raging sea ----- also reminds us about the promise of salvation ----- that --- thanks to Christ ----- all will --- eventually ---- and ultimately be well.

For many this can be terrifying.

That's why so many people refuse Christ and go the other way.

They know no different ---- and can do no other ----- than going from panic to panic ----- drama to drama --- never actually stopping long enough to settle their soul ---- and quiet their hearts in the deep rich peace of Christ.

Christ invites us on a far richer journey than just storm at sea --- to next storm at sea.

He invites us into Holy stillness ----- the presence of God.

Look at verse 41 today.

After the disciples have been rescued and the storm settles down their response is terror.

Picking it up at verse 39 -----

“He got up --- rebuked the wind and said to the waves --- “Quiet! Be still!”

Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

He said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

--- and here's the clincher --- their response in verse 41 -----

“They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waters obey him.”

Remember Jesus has healed multiple times already --- and He has been teaching for a while now --- and yet somehow --- amidst the raging storms at sea ----- the disciples somehow experience Him completely differently --- their eyes are opened up to a new reality.

They are suddenly experiencing Christ first hand for themselves in their own personal lives.

He’s healed others ---- taught many ---- called some ----- but now suddenly they are experiencing Him first hand altering their lives --- saving their lives.

When we experience Christ within us awakening.

When we have a personal experience with the Risen one ---- our eyes are opened in new ways too --- we suddenly see things differently.

Fred Craddock ---- said that being brought into the presence of God --- “Is what everybody wants --- and what nobody wants.”

Being brought into the presence of God ---- “Is what everybody wants --- and what nobody wants.”

I’m not sure I’d agree with that categorically --- and Craddock likely isn’t suggesting this ----- but either way he does have a point.

The disciples --- according to verse 41 in Mark’s gospel today were terrified --- not because of the storm --- but by the power of Christ.

Encountering Christ --- experiencing first hand the saving power of Christ can be terrifying.

Until we know that God is gracious and loving and saving --- and not vengeful and punishing --- it can be a bit terrifying to experience His power.

Until we know the true nature of Christ --- the saving loving one ----- who knows all there is to know about us and still loves us --- it can be a bit terrifying to ponder His power and abilities.

Christ doesn't go to the cross to placate an angry God ----- He goes to the cross because that is where human beings are ----- getting wrecked sometimes beaten down by evil in the world ----- and He comes and saves us from this.

“Be still and know that I am God.” ---- is not an easy thing to do.

“Be still and know that I am God
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth.” ----- is not an easy thing to live into.

And notice it's ----- “I will be exalted among the nations” ----- and ----- “I will be exalted in the earth.”

When God is exalted in the earth now --- and not just later on --- it can be terrifying for some because it is destabilizing.

The ways of the world --- can be settled down and hushed and halted in an instant when god decides to act decisively.

When the storm is suddenly halted and the waves stop running in over the gunnels of the boat --- it was terrifying for the disciples --- “Wow ----- what just happened.” ----- they no doubt asked themselves.

Imagine if in an instant ---- the whole of ISIS --- was just settled --- and clamed --- wiped away --- that would be rather dramatic wouldn't it?

“What just happened?” ---- would be on some people's lips.

Some people would react by bracing themselves for a next wave of violence.

“Be still and know that I am God” ---- isn't always easy.

“God is our refuge and strength,
an ever present help in trouble.

Therefore we will not fear,
 though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
 though its waters roar and foam
 and the mountains quake with their surging.”

Isn't always easy.

When things begin to crumble in our lives --- and a storm rages ---- it's easy
 to be fearful --- but -----

“There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
 the holy place where the Most High dwells.

God is within her, she will not fall;
 God will help her at the break of day.
 Nations are in an uproar, kingdoms fall;
 He lifts his voice --- the earth melts.”

God is indeed within us.

And when we recognize --- and celebrate ---- and share this ---- living it out
 ----- we will not fall --- and we will be helped at the break of day.

When God lifts His voice --- the earth melts ----- the storms stop raging ---
 the waves settle down --- and all is well ----- just like that --- in an instant.

When we truly appreciate this ----- then and only then --- can we live in the
 stillness of the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ --- knowing that He is God ----
 - and that His kingdom cannot be shaken and that His reign is forever.

Be still and know that I am God ---- isn't as easy as it sounds.

Imagine how “Be still and know that I am God” -----
 ---- feels for the chronically ill ----- chronic pain --- some of us here today
 can attest to this --- not always easy.

Imagine how --- “Be still and know that I am God” ---
 ----- feels for those working through great loss ----- Charleston South
 Carolina --- and some of us here today.

Be still and know that I am God --- isn't easy ---- but it's true --- and truth always triumphs ease.

This world can sometimes be full of great challenge ----- and great pain ----- suffering ---- we've all experienced it I'm sure.

I stood with some people this week --- who are suffering ---- difficult --- not fun at all for them.

And yet in the end ----- somehow their refrain was less about --- how could this happen --- or wait until I get my hands upon them --- or why me ---- and more about.

“God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.

Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
though its waters roar and foam
and the mountains quake with their surging.

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy place where the Most High dwells.

God is within her, she will not fall;
God will help her at break of day.

Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;
he lifts his voice, the earth melts.

The Lord Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Come and see what the Lord has done,
the desolations he has brought on the earth.

He makes wars cease
to the ends of the earth.

He breaks the bow and shatters the spear;

he burns the shields with fire.

He says, "Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth."

The Lord Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress."

May this be our refrain too ----- even as the storm rages on --- even as we or
someone we know is nearly swamped.

Be still and know that I am God.

Amen.