

Our Gospel story today takes place directly after Jesus teaches to the crowd using parables, the stories to demonstrate what the kingdom of heaven is like. Jesus and his disciples gathered up the few things they had, hauled themselves into the boat, and went on their way across the water to continue their mission of teaching, healing, and ministering. They're still in this space of learning about the kingdom of heaven when they enter this boat for the next part of their journey.

It's one powerful thing to hear the stories and allow them to grow and change you, help you to know God more closely through them. And it's entirely another thing to physically feel the impact and presence and power of God in your immediate physical body and surroundings. Our story today highlights this incredible power of what it is to experience God in a directly physical and miraculous way.

Oftentimes our spiritual journeys take us inward in a mental, heart, and spiritual space, where words and stories are needed for nurturing. And it's good to notice where we are mentally, what our hearts are telling us, where we can use words to comfort and guide us. Prayer and scripture reading and hymn lyrics are ways we can use words to deepen our faith, and for these gifts of spiritual connection, we certainly give thanks and praise. And there is something about an embodied experience of faith that teaches us about God in a whole new way.

Imagine for a moment that you are in this boat alongside Jesus and the disciples. You're tending the boat and chatting with your friends about what Jesus said and taught about the kingdom of heaven - there are still some things you're working through internally because Jesus took the extra time with you to process what the stories meant, he explained everything in private after the public parts of the storytelling. And then, this small to mid-size fishing boat that you're in starts rocking back and forth in a bit of an eerie way, and you see the waves growing larger and larger as the moment goes on. You know a few of the folks with you were fishermen before they dropped their nets and followed Jesus, just as you dropped your past vocation to follow Jesus with everything you were and had, and

you are comforted and pray that they have a better idea of what to do in this particular situation because you're started to get alarmed. The waves get bigger, the boat starts getting swampy, and the fishermen around you do know enough to know this is not a good situation. This is a violent storm, the kind that would make you board up your windows and get further and further inside. But you're feeling these breathtaking gusts of wind, giant waves spraying you, very solid reasons to start panicking and hoping and praying for your very life to make it out of here. You start calling for Jesus, in whom you have great faith for your life and what was to come, "Teacher! Please! Do you not see what is happening around us?! Don't you care that we're likely about to die?!" You are deep into this panic, friend, and it's for a very good reason.

Then Jesus, your teacher, your dear friend, the one whom you follow out of great love and hope, gets up, with one wave of his arms calms that wind down, rebukes this violence, casts down the waves, stills this boat and cries, "Peace! Be Still!". And just like that, the storm is done. That's it. The water is in a dead calm. Barely any rocking of the boat. And you are stunned with what has just happened. Just a moment ago you literally thought you were about to die and then Peace! You are still. The water is still. The wind is still. The boat has stilled.

You know up to this point that Jesus has incredible power, that He truly is the Messiah, the Son of God, the promised human and divine Christ who out of great love will save us all. But this is a saving on a whole different level. You believe the words of Jesus in a whole new way because they had the power to transform the chaos in the world around you and bring dead calm. It's not just words and stories anymore, but a real and physical revealing of what God's kingdom is like. The unexpected and life-saving things are possible and real. The swirling chaos and feeling like you're going to die can be calmed. Even the created world itself, which we ourselves cannot control as much as we might like to try, obeys the word of God, the words and actions of Jesus. There is a new way of being with Christ in the world. He is capable of miraculous and revelatory things that indeed save our lives and change the world.

Jesus calming this storm reveals more about who he is, in this world, in this moment, rather than what is to come. When we pray for God's kingdom to come, we pray to know the power of Jesus in this time and place. We pray to have even a glimpse of this power, strong and rooted enough in love and peace that even creation itself obeys.

And, this power of Jesus often surprises us. The disciples thought Jesus didn't care that they were dying and were highly convinced this storm would kill them but instead Jesus shattered their expectations and their fear to bring about a calm that could only be described as dead. Unmoving. Great. Complete.

Instead of striving towards our own speculations for what calm or peace or any of these other solutions are, dear friends, maybe it's about trusting in the power of God through Christ Jesus, that things will come about as they need to. That trust doesn't absolve us of responsibility or action, of course - even the disciples were still managing the boat and keeping everything going towards the next destination for ministry and teaching amidst this great storm. But knowing Jesus more deeply, in his divine power evidenced in this story, as well as in his humanity, is perhaps what we need most.

Jesus is what unites us now in our humanness and with the disciples in their humanness in this moment of fear and revelation. What we label as a storm in our life may not be the same storm as someone else, and we may have boats of various sizes and strengths and helpful equipment on board. But regardless of any of those things, Jesus is in the boat with us. Jesus, in his humanness, needed a nap and relied on his friends to make sure he got to his destination safely. Jesus also, in his divinity, has power that creation itself obeys and we find life in that power of love revealed to us in these moments of miracles, in our bodies, minds, and spirits. Jesus shows up for us and reveals the living God to us, each and every day.

These words, "Peace! Be still!" can and should be powerful reminders for us both in our mental/spiritual space and in our physical bodies. God is with us in the midst of whatever storms come our way. Jesus is in the boat with us, no matter what kind of boat it may be. We are reminded in these words

of Jesus that peace and calm are very possible. That we need not be afraid when our surroundings seem like they might lead us to perishing, that we will return somehow, some way, by the grace of God, to peace and being still. For this revealing of God's power, the life-saving peace of Jesus, and hope for what the kingdom of heaven is and will truly be for us and the world, we give God our unending thanks and praise. Amen.