

SERMON KRIJTBURG SATURDAY, JUNE 19TH 2021

on Mark 4, 35 – 41

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There obviously is a lot of storm, my dear friends, wind and high seas in today's readings. Job is speechless. The disciples are terrified and Jesus is asleep. But once they woke Him up and Jesus made all calm down again, two questions remain to be answered. Jesus' question: "Why are you so frightened? How is it that you have no faith?" And the question that obsesses the disciples: "Who can this be? Even the wind and the sea obey Him." A question from Jesus and one from his disciples. And the gospel does not give us the answers. So we are stuck with these questions. We will have to find an answer.

Now we don't have to find the answers that worked for people in Jesus' time. We live today. And there are plenty of storms threatening us, our way of life, perhaps even our life. We are just about weathering the storm of the Corona Pandemic. It might just possibly have frightened you. Perhaps you prayed to be saved. Perhaps you turned to Jesus, woke Him up, expecting Him to face the storm, rebuke the virus and return us to the safety of normal life. Perhaps you prayed for someone else who caught Corona and did not make it. That would have been a frightening experience. Is God asleep?

Or may be you are frightened by the prospect of unstoppable climate change. You do whatever is in your power to reduce your carbon footprint, but the plastic waste still clutters up our streets and kills the life in our oceans. Perhaps you decided to put it all into God's hand acknowledging your impotence, but again, it looks as though He is asleep. At least there does not seem to be any action coming from that corner.

Or is it the storm of violence that lately seems to reign more and more in our streets. Knives and guns are turning up to settle disputes in our neighborhoods and make our environment unsafe. One can well feel threatened, especially being a man or woman of color. The eight o'clock news does very little to put us at ease, does it? Yes, there are many gales blowing and waves breaking into our boat and I can imagine many a reason to turn to God with the words of the disciples: "Lord do you not care? We are going down!" And up comes Jesus with his question: "Why are you afraid? How is it that you have no faith?"

Why are we afraid? It seems such a silly question. Of course we are afraid. We only have one life and would love to live it to the full. We hold on to what we built up and, more important, we hold on to the people we love and care about and would not want to lose or get hurt. In situations of danger of any kind we suddenly feel our vulnerability and impotence and look for a greater power to come to our aid, our defence. We realize how powerless we are. That is why we are afraid.

"How is it that you have no faith?" I would think that us, turning to God for help, turning to God in our prayer, proves our faith, doesn't it? What was Jesus expecting if not: us turning to Him, trusting Him? Yes, once woken up by his disciples Jesus did what they asked of Him. He helped them survive. But somehow He did not seem to be pleased with being woken up.

Why did they wake Him up? Was it because they needed an extra pair of hands to trim the sail, to bail out the water or to keep the boat on course? Or did they actually expect Him to perform a miracle, as they had seen Him do before, and save their ship and themselves?

We find the answer in the second question, the question that stayed with the disciples once they were safely back on land. They ask themselves: "Who can this be?" After all they had experienced with Jesus they still not understood that He was sent by God, the Father, with a

name that said it all. Jesus means; God saves. No, I do get the impression that they have woken Jesus because they needed another pair of able hands. Expecting a miracle or even heavenly help did not come up in their unbelieving minds. And Jesus is disappointed: "How is it that you have no faith?" You use me as a deckhand, but do not believe in who I really am. If you had believed that in Me God is in your midst, you would have had no reason to be afraid. You would have known that you were safe.

Now back to us here in this church in Amsterdam, with the end of our pandemic in sight, but plenty of other storms around. Why are we afraid? Not all the time afraid, but fear and anxiety are just around the corner. Why are we afraid? I agree that there are many reasons to feel unsafe, threatened in today's world and it is quite normal, certainly in a community of believers, that we turn to God for help. But how do we pray? What is it we expect God to do for us? Are we going to use God to do for us what we, in our limitation are unable to achieve? Do we feel we have to wake God and to bring our needs to his attention, because He might forget or not notice them from the beginning? Do we use God as an extra pair of very powerful hands to get done what we feel unable to manage? If so, I would think that God would be very disappointed and say to us what Jesus said to his disciples: "How is it that you have no faith?"

God wants us to rely on His presence in our life, as Jesus, sleeping in the stern of the boat, hoped that his disciples would rely on his presence. But Jesus, asleep in the middle of a storm, is a perfect symbol of God feeling absent in our needs. Our God is a hidden God, and it is very difficult to hand oneself over trustingly into the arm of a God you cannot see. It feels that we have to weather the storms of our life ourselves. But our faith tells us that we are not alone. Our Lord promised to be with us every day, whether we see Him or not, until the end of our days, Amen.