

Following Jesus into the Storm

Thomas Robinson, *Learning at Jesus' Side*, 3, June 3, 2012

Matthew 8:23-34

Stilling the Earthquake/Storm

²³ And when he got into the boat, **his disciples followed him.** ²⁴ And behold, there arose a **great storm** (*seismos*, earthquake) on the sea, so that the boat was being **swamped by the waves**; but he was **asleep**.

²⁵ And they went and woke him, saying, "**Lord, save! We are perishing.**"

²⁶ And he said to them, "*Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?*"

Then he rose and **rebuked the winds and the sea**, and there was a **great calm**.

²⁷ And the men marveled, saying, "*What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?*"

Healing Two Gadarene Men with Demons

²⁸ And when he came to the other side, to the **country of the Gadarenes**, two **demon-possessed men** met him, coming out of the **tombs**, so **fierce** that no one could pass that way.

²⁹ And behold, they cried out, "*What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?*"

³⁰ Now a **herd of many pigs** was feeding at some distance from them. ³¹ And the demons begged him, saying, "*If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of pigs.*"

³² And he said to them, "**Go.**"

So they came out and went into the pigs, and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank **into the sea** and drowned in the waters. ³³ The herdsmen fled, and going into the city they told everything, especially what had happened to the demon-possessed men.

³⁴ And behold, **all the city came out to meet Jesus**, and when they saw him, they **begged him to leave their region**.

Matthew 4:17-19

¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*"

¹⁸ While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ And he said to them, "**Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.**"

Psalms 65:5-8

⁵ By awesome deeds you answer us with righteousness, O God of our salvation, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas; ⁶ the one who by his strength established the mountains, being girded with might; ⁷ who stills the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples, ⁸ so that those who dwell at the ends of the earth are in awe at your signs.

Matthew 12:41

⁴¹ The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

Storms that Strip the Coverings from Identity

Matthew is leading us to see Jesus/the Gospel. It's important that we not just be told but that we see! He has led us from announcing God's kingdom, to his powerful call of disciples, to his authoritative teaching (fulfilling/transforming the Law and Prophets), into a march of actions that challenge people to follow him (deeds of the Messiah, 11:2): touching leper; authority to Centurion; Suffering Servant; homeless Son of Man. Matthew calls us to see! Here we watch as Jesus stills two storms: the sea and demon-possessed humanity.

These are events that are powerfully described in Mark's Gospel (4:35-5:20), which Matthew has. He wants us to use them as windows, symbolic narratives that help us see what's at stake in Jesus' identity for disciples. Mt moves, shortens, and changes the narratives to give new focus (for example, from 27 to 11 vv.; "Lord, save"; two men with demons, etc.). He knows people can read Mark for details, but he wants us to see these events in a flow of others.

Stilling the Storm of Chaos

In Israel's scriptures the sea is almost always dangerous, chaotic, threatening. Israelites at heart were wilderness nomads with their back to the sea (unlike Canaanites/Phoenicians). From creation ("darkness on the face of the deep") to the flood, waters are the chaos from which the creator brings order. The Exodus came by making dry land through the sea.

Mt highlights the cosmic chaos by calling the storm a great *seismos* / earthquake, like those at Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection (27:54; 28:2), here a metaphor for earthshaking waves. The wave are overwhelming the boat but Jesus is asleep, unconcerned, at peace. These fishermen know they're about to drown. They rouse Jesus: "Lord, Save! We are perishing."

Jesus challenges their fear and "little faith." They had heard and seen so much, but still imagined dangers that were beyond Jesus. They/we are learning that nothing is beyond him. But every human is limited, vulnerable! The question presses in: "What sort of man is this?"

Stilling the Storm of Demons

Jesus goes to Gentile territory. From a traditional Jewish point of view everything was as bad as possible: two demon-possessed men (stand for all), unclean tombs, ferocity, danger, herds of unclean swine. We live in a world of demons, powerful, denied, dehumanizing.

Ironically, it is the demons' fear that leads them to cry out Jesus' identity as messiah/"Son of God" the one expected to judge and punish everything demonic, to bring new life, renewal.

There is no contest of warring powers. Jesus says only one word: "Go." There is healing, cleansing, but also a lot of disruption. The demons obey but the Gentile people are not ready. The whole city (!) begs Jesus to leave. They were ok with their demons and swine. They didn't want disruption. Jesus withdraws for a time, but his ultimate aim is disruptive healing for all nations in his creation. Making individuals disciples, changing families, communities, nations, the world, overcoming death itself, the Satan's weapon of fear.

What Sort of Man is this?

Jesus is a sort of Anti-Jonah. Jonah flees demonic, Gentile Nineveh; stopped by storm; asleep; thrown into sea; calm. Fish returns him to land; preaches; Nineveh repents; Jonah is angry. A parable of God's love for all people, even the most ferocious.

Jesus is revealing his claim and authority to give life, order, healing to every part of creation – even the most chaotic, destructive, demonic. What sort of people will disciples be as they continue that claim? They learn fearlessness in the face of chaos, confidence in their Lord.