

A Storytelling Commentary on Mark 4:35-41

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In this story, Jesus is calming the powers of chaos. For Mark's audience, the storm brought to mind bigger-than-life, mythical, images and stories and songs of antiquity. The chaos dragon lived in the sea and a common belief in the ancient world was that storms in the sea were caused by the sudden rising of the chaos dragon. Storms were a kind of tidal wave caused by the great dragon, a symbol for the cosmic powers of evil. The chaos dragon is in the background of stories in the Old Testament and some of the Psalms. The story of the flood in Genesis reflects the Ancient Near Eastern myths of the chaos dragon. It is a sign of the powers against God. Contemporary movies have developed a large repertoire of signs of the powers of evil.

Jesus' attitude at the beginning of this story is one of exhaustion. He's been teaching all day and is tired. You want to convey that exhaustion in your telling. The implication of the boats being with him is that this was a kind of boat party on the lake. They were all going across the sea with Jesus and his disciples. It was a wonderful evening and everything was hunky dory. The windstorm suddenly changed all of that.

The possibility was very real on the Sea of Galilee that a really bad storm would sink your boat. So the disciples woke up Jesus and told him that they were about to be swamped by the waves. Jesus' sleep implies indifference. That's why they ask him, "Teacher, don't you care if we are about to die?" It doesn't matter whether he was exhausted. To them what matters is that he is indifferent to their situation. This is a frequent experience of God in which God appears to be indifferent to situations of life when we are about to be overwhelmed by the powers of chaos. This story gives a context for the experience of God's seeming indifference to our being overwhelmed.

Jesus then wakes up and rebukes the wind. It is appropriate to speak loudly to indicate a tone of rebuke. The rebuke isn't necessarily as loud as I did it, but remember that Jesus is trying to address the sea and to get the powers of chaos to calm down. Jesus commands the powers and they obey. Jesus' response to the disciples is to ask, "Why are you afraid?" This is a serious question for the disciples and for the listening audience. Jesus' implication is that the disciples' fear results from their having no faith. His expectation is that by now they would have faith. Address this question, as Mark did, to the audience as the disciples.

The contrast in the story needs to be made as graphic as possible between the volume of the storm and Jesus' rebuke, and the calm and Jesus' questions to the disciples as he sat in the boat in this suddenly calm sea.

The disciples' question to each other is the question of guys who have witnessed a miracle. They were filled with awe and they were saying to one another, "Well who *is*

this that even the wind and the sea obey him!?" The demonstration of power over the powers of chaos that Jesus demonstrated is the substance of faith and confidence in his ability. But it raises the question for the disciples and the audience about his identity. Only God has this kind of power.

It is also significant to notice that what Jesus says to the sea is "Peace." Peace here means on the one hand "calm," but it also means "peace." There is a connection between the power of evil manifested in the storm, and the power of evil that is manifested in conflict and war. There is a connection between the storms of life and the storms of history, which Jesus calms. The gift of Jesus Christ is the gift of peace and of true stillness in the midst of great storms.