

## FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

### Matthew 8:23-27

Jesus had been preaching and teaching all day. He was tired. Sometimes people joke that preachers work only one day a week, and that would be awesome if that were true, but the fact of the matter is that in this one day alone Jesus had done an inordinate amount of work. Understandably, then, He was tired.

But before we get to Him falling asleep, why don't we refresh our memory about what He'd been teaching. There were two especially pertinent parables He'd taught that day. First, He'd taught the parable of the sower, which went like this:

***“A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold.”*** As he said these things, he called out, ***“He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”*** (Luke 8:4-8)

Second, He'd taught the parable of the mustard seed, which went like this:

***“With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”*** (Mark 4:30-32)

In other words, He'd taught two parables about the nature of faith. One warned about the fleeting nature of the faith of some, how their faith withers and dies when it faces adversities. The other praised the power of faith, how it, though a small thing sown in the heart, lays hold of and produces marvelous things. And as He spoke of faith, He provided those listening, including His disciples, with signs for their faith, performing a number of miracles demonstrating His power over sin, death, and the devil.

And so Jesus had been teaching all day, and He was tired, and as they set out to sea, He fell asleep. Can you blame Him? So far, so good. His disciples, like good friends, let Him get His rest and navigate the boat to their destination.

But then a storm arose. The Greek used can indicate a tempest or an earthquake. This was a big deal. This was a monster storm. And the worst part was that they were on a boat, stuck in the middle of it, and not on a modern day sturdy vessel of steel, but on an ancient fishing boat. I don't even think they had GPS. If you've ever been caught in a storm at sea, or have seen one approaching as you hurried to shore, you know somewhat how they must have felt. Yet even then they don't wake Jesus right away. They let Him keep sleeping, and they strain at the oars.

But the storm wasn't letting up. The boat was swamped with water. This wasn't a scoop a puddle out with a bucket sort of thing. This was a sinking ship, knee-deep in water, no way we're going to stay afloat, and I don't want to die without seeing a Lion's Super Bowl sort of thing. And what was Jesus doing? He was still sleeping like a baby. The storm didn't seem to be bothering Him in the least. And the disciples couldn't let Him be any longer. And so out the window went all they'd just heard Him teach and seen Him do that day.

St. Luke records these words of the disciples: ***“Master, Master, we are perishing!”*** St. Mark has these: ***“Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”*** Matthew has still other words in our lesson: ***“Save us, Lord; we are perishing.”*** So what did they really say? Who’s right, Luke, Mark, or Matthew? They all are, of course. The disciples were scared, and they’re all yelling different things, frantic to survive this nightmare.

What is the worst prayer they offer? I would have to go with St. Mark’s: ***“Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”*** This was an accusation more than a petition. They were questioning Jesus’ goodness, His providence, His love for them. Faith doesn’t pay like that. No, that is lingering unbelief. What is their best prayer? I would have to go with St. Matthew’s: ***“Save us, Lord; we are perishing.”*** ***“Lord, save us,”*** is never a bad prayer. In fact, that’s what the word *hosanna* means.

So why does Jesus rebuke the disciples so harshly? Obviously, Mark’s prayer deserved a censure, but such a harsh one? It was a terrifying moment. Why shouldn’t the disciples be a little shaken? Was He mad they woke Him? Was He mad they turned to Him in need? Was He mad that they were scared? What was it? After all, what does the Lord urge us to do through the psalmist in Psalm 50? He says, ***“Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me”*** (verse 15). Should we be afraid to do just that? Will Jesus rebuke us as He did the disciples?

The disciples faith was hardly something to brag about at this point. I think they would have been the first to admit that. But they’d turned to the right person at the right time, hadn’t they? They surely had. And notice what Jesus says to them: ***“Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?”*** and not, ***“Why are you afraid, O you of no faith?”***

It reminds me of one of my favorite accounts in Scripture (Mark 9:14-28). It happened right after the Transfiguration, which we celebrate next Sunday. A father came to Jesus frantic for Him to heal his demon-possessed son. He begged, ***“If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.”*** Jesus replied, ***“All things are possible for one who believes.”*** And that’s when the man speaks some words that I’ve often been able to identify with when turning to the Lord in trying times. I don’t know why, but they always come to mind in the King James translation, so I’ll give them to you in that: ***“Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.”*** Not bad, huh? Doubt is not a virtue, but it often unfortunately a reality for the Christian, and we do well not to deny it in order to maintain some hypocritical and Pharisaical veneer that does no one any good, especially ourselves. We do well to confront it, turn to the Lord with the disciples, and pray, ***“Save me, Lord.”*** We do well to join with the demon-possessed boy’s father and petition, ***“Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.”***

Jesus says, ***“Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?”*** But then what does He do? He answers their prayer. He saves them. He speaks but a few words and calms the storm, so that not just any calm comes upon the waters, but a great calm, equal to the storm that had moments earlier ravaged them. And that is your Jesus too. Will He at times bid you to believe more, to grow in faith, to do a better job of remembering His teaching, of calling to mind all that He has done and said for you in Scripture and throughout your life? Sure. We all must be chastised at times. But in the end He will also hear you, and He will do for you what is best, because that He is Jesus, and that is what Jesus, ***“He who saves,”*** crucified and risen for sinners, like those in the boat, like us in this sanctuary, does. Amen.

