

Lord, Don't You Even Care?
3rd Sunday after Pentecost, June 21, 2009
Mark 4:35-41

At one time or another, almost every parent has heard it. "I hate you! You don't understand! How could you let this happen? *Don't you even care?*" I know, this isn't the best way to start a Father's Day sermon, but it does ring true. Almost every kid is convinced that Dad and Mom are the biggest cludges in the universe; out of touch; dictators and fun stomper-outers. Sometimes that conviction busts loose in words that cut to the quick. *Don't you even care what happens to me?*

Looking back at *my* teenage years over the abyss that separates me from acne, mini-skirts, and 3rd period gym class, I conclude that those words (which I only whispered because I'd have been grounded for life and had my mouth washed out with soap) don't always spring from being rebellious and bratty. Sometimes they're grounded in fear: fear that life was about to overwhelm me, and fear that I couldn't count on my mom for support, help, or even understanding.

Don't you even care what happens to me? Kids make foolish, impulsive choices, and usually don't have a clue about consequences until they're drowning in them. Friends urge crazy stunts, promising their full support - until the stunt fails and somebody gets hurt or caught, at which time friends tend to disappear. Hormones rage; identity crises

abound; and it's maddening and terrifying when parents seem to *float* on the seas of emotional upheaval that leave *me* green at the gills. How can they be so calm? Don't they see my misery? Why don't they do something - or at least act like they understand? Don't they even care?

You don't have to be a teenager to feel like life is a stormy sea! A sudden illness, family tragedy, job loss, or the consequences of our foolish, impulsive, or even deliberate choices cause us to go from "smooth sailing" to "leaning over the edge seasick" in an instant. It's bad enough when people around us sometimes seem oblivious to our misery. What's worse is the fear that God is equally unruffled: serene in his heaven while we flounder on the high seas of a life-threatening crisis. The Psalms voice this fear: *Wake up, Lord! Stir up your power and come! Don't you care that the nations mock us, saying, 'Where is your God?'* Doesn't that describe us at times? Life threatens to overwhelm us, and we fear that *even God* won't support, help, or understand us. Sometimes we mutter under our breath, afraid that God will ground *us* for eternity and wash out our mouths with extra-heavy-duty soap. But other times we holler; shake our fist; stomp our feet, and make it clear that we're mad, frustrated, and scared. "I hate you! You don't understand! How could you let this happen? Don't you even *care?*"

Jesus' disciples were no exception. Maybe they were even more agitated, because they'd seen Jesus demonstrate God's care and power

up close and personal. They'd watched Jesus give demons the heave-ho; they'd seen him heal sick people with a word or touch. They hung onto his words as if they were carved in Sinai stone, though they were often unsure of their significance. Yet when a violent storm swept across the lake and threatened to swamp their boat, there was Jesus, asleep on a cushion in the back of the boat, acting as if the waves were rocking a baby's cradle and the winds were murmuring a gentle lullaby!

Where was Jesus' power on *their* behalf? He helped everybody else; what about them? Would he let them flounder? Sure, if he had the power of God in his fingertips, *he'd* weather the storm. He could walk on the waves if the boat capsized. That was well and good for him; but what about them? "Teacher," they shouted, hoping their voices would penetrate Jesus' apparently-deaf ears, "don't you even care that *we* are perishing? *Don't just stand - or lie - there; do something!*"

Jesus showed great presence of mind considering that he'd just been shaken out of a dead sleep. He sized up the situation and said to the wind and waves, "Don't just do something - stand there!" And just like that, the external storm was over; but Jesus created a new, internal one for his followers. Because the next thing he did was chide the disciples for their fear, *which was grounded in their lack of faith.*

At this point, their fear of the storm was replaced by fear of the One who stilled it; and Jesus *didn't* chide them for that!

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, says the Psalmist. When the disciples first woke Jesus, they called him Teacher. Now that title just wasn't adequate; but what *should* they call Jesus, whom they thought they knew so well? Master, perhaps? Lord? Surely not... *God?*! The disciples grappled with something so uncanny, so awe-inspiring, that fear was an appropriate response!

That's common in Holy Scripture when God demonstrates his power: sensible people are terrified! Yes, they're often quickly comforted; then they can worship, praise, rejoice and adore. But first, they're properly thunderstruck when confronted with God's power. In fact, the only people who *aren't* afraid are people who *really should be!*

That brings us back to us. We pray for God to help us when we're confused and afraid. When he does, have *we* ever stopped dead in our tracks, taken a deep, shaky breath, and asked, "Who *is* this, that even the wind and waves of tribulation obey him?"

Elsewhere in the Gospels, Jesus tells his followers to fear nothing and no one but God - not even the devil himself. The worst the devil can do is to kill your body. God has power over body and soul; fear him, Jesus says, and *everything* else falls into place, come what may. This

fear has nothing to do with lack of confidence or trust in God, though; it's not like a child's fear that an all-too-fallible parent doesn't care, understand, or have the ability to help.

No, the fear of God that Jesus would have us feel is based in the knowledge that God really does hold our lives in his hands; and that even if he lets seas of sorrow and suffering, or waves of tragedy and loss sweep over us, *God will never permit any of those things snatch us from his care.* Jesus could sleep secure in the boat, even if it foundered, for the same reason that he could leave a garden and go to the Cross: because ultimately he trusted that God the Father would never let anything snatch his dear Son from his hands. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus' final words are taken from a bedtime psalm: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." And that's what Jesus would have us firmly believe and say, no matter what. St. Paul puts it so beautifully: "I am convinced - *convinced!* - that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is ours in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The conclusion I draw from pondering this is that we'd be safer with Jesus on the bottom of the sea, than we'd be in a boat without him there. We're safer in his presence, even if he seems to be asleep, than we are when we try to solve our crisis by ourselves. We're better

off riding out the worst storms of life, clinging to his hand, than we'd be without him on even the smoothest of life voyages. Even when the high seas of sin, evil and death threaten to destroy us, *we will weather them in confidence because Jesus has commanded and conquered them.*

Next week, I'm preaching at a church I served as interim pastor; I'm using the lessons for the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul; and the phrase that I focus on is this: "Everything is yours, whether the world, or life, or death, or the present, or the future; *for you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God.*"

Jesus graciously stilled the storm for his disciples; he continually speaks words of peace, pardon and calm throughout our lives; and he will command the Final Storm of death to cease and desist from troubling his beloved people. For all of this, may we be more than grateful. May we be awestruck. May we tremble, at least a bit, as we contemplate the mercy of this One who commands even the forces of sin, evil and death to obey him. And then, may we worship him; follow him; love and serve him gladly, come what may, fearless and faithful. May we weather all of life's storm secure in the confident knowledge that we indeed belong to Christ; and he belongs to his Father; and no power exists in all the world that can shake us loose from his embrace. Amen.