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 Title: Our God Reigns – One Year Later
 Text: Mark 4:35-41

On a Personal Note:

It is hard for me to imagine that one year ago to the day the elders placed me on a “compulsory” Sabbatical (The date was Friday the 13th of July, 2007). Their concerns were two-fold: 1) my immediate spiritual health and 2) to begin addressing long standing concerns that preceded my coming and were plaguing the church family. Their resolve was three-fold: 1) to restore me in health, 2) to keep me around for as long as possible and 3) to begin a line of communication with the congregation that would be marked by a) honesty, b) transparency, and 3) vulnerability.

Today, the elders and I would like to begin sharing with you what we have experienced and how we assess the last year. The following messages will be personal and subjective. If I were to use the language of the congregant, I will be speaking to you from the heart. Some of you will find such communication unnecessary and perhaps you will be put off by it, but I believe the significant majority of you will respond positively to what I am going to share. I believe this will be positive because you and I both believe we are a family of families and that we both share a love for Christ and His Church. I believe this past year has been filled with hope and celebration. It is still not as smooth as we would think it needs to be, but it is where God would have us be, and there is a presence of His love in this place.

The larger framework for today’s communication will be Mark 4:35-41. Inside of this passage there is a big idea that is going to control what I will share.

Like the storm in our story, we as a fellowship have gone through a lot of difficult weather. We have feared and we have panicked at the storm. Some have abandoned the ship, some have been overwhelmed by the storm and have spiritually drowned and others have walked away from the Church Jesus purchased with His blood, perhaps, forever. Some have, however, responded with faith in God’s control and compassion and have stayed with us through thick and thin.

For those of you who have remained with us through the storms, I would call us to give God all the glory. He is our mainstay, our hope, our peace, our satisfaction, and our sufficiency. When our eyes are on Him, He becomes our strength in the storm.

Theme: Life is a platform for us to learn God’s control over and compassion for His people.

“Our Lord calls for fearless trust in Him in spite of terrorizing circumstances.” (Royce Gordon Gruenler, “Mark,” in Baker Commentary on the Bible, ed. Walter A. Elwell, [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989], 774).

Our story sits inside of a larger context.

THE BIG PICTURE

Second Cycle - Later Galilean Ministry (3:13 – 6:29)

- The challenge to His ministry (3:1-6)
- The choosing of the 12 apostles (3:13-19)
- The charge of demonic activity (3:20-30)

Beginning of THE BUSY DAY (3:20-5:20)

- The characteristics of God's family (3:31-35)

Teaching by Parables

- The clarifying of His kingdom (4:1-34)

Teaching by Miracles (4:35-5:43)

"This is the first story in a sequence of four stories about healing."

- Jesus will "heal" the storm (4:35-41)
- Jesus will "heal" the demoniac (5:1-20)
- Jesus will "heal" the daughter of Jairus (5:21-24, 35-43)
- Jesus will "heal" the woman bleeding for 12 years (5:25-34)

The Son of Man has power over all things created.

Its Eternal Value:

The circumstances of life are to function as signposts pointing us to God. God wants us to have faith, to believe that He is in control, He is winning, and He cares for you.

My assertion for today is simple. By faith we must embrace the storms of God as our greatest platforms for learning of God. Living by Faith is hard when everything around you appears to be going so well. It is only when nothing is left but God that faith finds a firm footing for growth.

The Present Danger:

Think about what we have just studied in Mark 4:1-34? God is telling His disciples that He is in control, He is winning, and the outcome is certain. If this is believed, then His disciples should experience rest and peace.

The Problem:

Our tendency is to react strongly to adversity and not see it as coming from the hands of a good, gracious, benevolent, kind, and gracious all-loving and all-controlling God who has our best interests in view. All that God does is marked by wisdom and love. He uses the best means to accomplish the highest good.

The Storyline:

Jesus has clearly shown from the parables the distinction between children of light and those who continue to abide in darkness. He has equally shown how the rule or control of God continues to steadily unfold and moves toward ultimate fulfillment with certainty and confidence.

The story before us clearly reinforces these truths. He is God and has absolute authority and control over all things created. I believe the storm was a test to see if they learned what He had just taught. It would appear they had not yet learned what they heard.

In the midst of our storms, individually and corporately, our natural tendency is to panic and run. Jesus wants us to know peace, no matter what is unfolding around us.

Questions:

1. Do you believe what God is saying?
2. Do you have a faith that cancels or crowds out fear?
3. They questioned whether or not God really cares. Have you ever been there? Have you ever been brought to the place where you wondered if God really cared? Have you ever been there? Have you ever been brought to the house of why? Why is this happening to me? Have you ever seen the blackness of doubt? Have you ever tasted the emptiness of unbelief?
4. What we confess casually in the light, we must cling to desperately in the night.
5. We come here gladly (for the most part) on Sunday Mornings and listen to the unfolding of God's Word. But this study is not the test as to whether or not you heard what was taught. After church, when you go your way, that will determine how well you believe what Jesus is saying.
6. Will WBC face more storms? Will we go through hard times? What is God trying to teach us? Where does our focus need to be? Most storms are a matter of perspective. From whose vantage point are we viewing the storms of life: God or mans?

The Holy Spirit is calling to us from this passage to consider three ideas:

To Know: The Holy Spirit desires for us to know that God is in control, and the events of life are in His hand and under His plan. They are expressions of His love, mercy, grace, and kindness.

To Choose: The Holy Spirit desires for us to choose to live in light of Him and to understand your circumstances by what you know to be true.

To Feel: The Holy Spirit desires for us to feel the joy of resting in Him. The Holy Spirit invites you today to make a simple gesture of submission to the loving hand of God by affirming His control and saying that He is enough no matter what and He is all you need in the absence of everything else.

The passage in a "NUT SHELL"

1. There is instruction explaining who God is and what He is doing (Mark 4:1-34)
2. There is a test to see if the students learned the instruction (Mark 4:35-41; 5:1ff)
3. There is a pass or fail grade (Mark 4:38)
4. There is further instruction (Mark 4:39, 40)
5. There is, if needed, a grade by the teacher (Mark 4:40)

Introduction:

I am going to strip the passage down to its bare bones. Notice the following features within the story:

First, the day referenced in verse 35 began in verse 1 where he spoke before a numerically significant crowd. This is called THE BUSY DAY.

Second, Jesus was going to explain the meaning of His public instruction to His disciples. I want to believe that what follows is a part of this “private” instruction. When we find ourselves in the deep place, let us not forget that God is teaching us. This is a time of great instruction.

Third, the events that are about to unfold were intentional (v. 35). Luke 8:22 tells us that Jesus led them into the boat and across the Sea. Notice His intent. It was to go to the other side. Sometimes we desire to dictate what this looks like. God wins, but we sometimes want to control or shape what that win looks like for us.

Fourth, the events we encounter in life are not uncommon but widely experienced by many. Notice verse 36, “And other boats were with him.” This same idea is present in 1 Corinthians 10:13. These other ships did not have the comfort of an immediate presence. They struggled in His physical absence. Consider how great their trial might have appeared.

Finally, verse 37 tells us that their day did not get easier – it got HARDER! Once in the boat they met an incredible storm.

Matthew Henry rightly notes how, “The end of a toil may perhaps be but the beginning of a toss.” (Matthew Henry’s Commentary on Mark 4)

The storm was so great the boat was being buffeted (like a boxer beating a bag or an opponent). It was filled to overflow with water. Matthew 8:24 tells us it was “covered” with water. The boat was sinking.

“When those accustomed to fish upon that deep thus spake, the danger must have been imminent.” <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/jamieson/jfb.xi.ii.v.html>

It is in this context that we have our story. Let us now note the actions of two groups: the disciples and our Lord.

The Outline:

- I. The response of the disciples to the storm.
 - A. They were very afraid (v.38)

Remember these were fishermen. They were use to storms and hard weather. Yet this storm was so terrible that they feared for their lives. They were afraid they were going to die. The danger was real and they were terrified. Why did they fear?

B. They had no faith.

1. They had no faith in God's control.
 - a. Who led them into the storm? He said, "let us pass over to the other side." Could a storm now stop Him from fulfilling His objective?
 - b. Who controls the storm?

In passing, let us note how God is bigger (Isa. 40:12), smarter (Isa. 40:13-14), and greater (Isa. 40:15) than man. God is more than the sum total of His attributes. God is BIG and man is small.

The Bible is persistent in showing us that God is in control of life's storms.

- Joseph and his brothers (Gen. 50:20)
- Samson's disobedience (Judges 14:1-4)
- A randomly shot arrow (1 Kings 22:34)
- The story of Job (Job 1:21; 13:15)

Job is a classic example of one who exercised biblical faith in the midst of life's storms. Job 1:21 - "the Lord gives, . . ." Job 13:15 - "though he slay me, . . ."

- The atrocities of the Tribulation (Rev. 17:16, 17)

I cannot explain how the purpose of God is worked through the will of man, only that He does. Why do we assume that the storms within a church are always sinful? When churches go through hard times, let us not assume that something is grossly wrong. Let us assume that God is doing a work that is good.

Making it personal:

Right now you are in a storm. God has led you there in ways that are incapable of being understood. Will you trust Him to teach you truth, and will you rest in Him to guide you to the other shore?

God brought us into a storm to instruct us. Do you believe God?

2. They had no faith in God's compassion (v.38).

This is the question that plagues all of us in our most trying moments, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

“In Luke (Lu 8:24) this is doubled—in token of their life-and-death earnestness—
‘Master, Master.’” <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/jamieson/jfb.xi.ii.v.html>

Who do you think said this? Their cry was one of fear, panic, and bewilderment. They questioned whether God really cares.

They assumed that God’s apparent inactivity and notable silence was because of indifference or absence. They failed to know and see God in each detail.

“The panic stricken disciples woke Him with a cry of reproach at His apparent indifference to their situation.” (BKC, 122). Their cry was one of fear, panic, and bewilderment. They questioned whether or not God really cares. Have you ever been there? Have you ever been brought to the place where you wondered if God really cared? Have you ever been brought to the house of why? Why is this happening to me? Have you ever seen the blackness of doubt? Have you ever tasted the emptiness of unbelief?

II. The response of our Lord to the storms.

I use the plural “storms” because there were two storms present. One was in the weather and the other in the hearts of His disciples.

A. His response to the weather.

1. He slept!

We would be amiss if we failed to remember the other “prophet” who slept in a boat in the midst of an intense storm. “Jonah’s sought to silence God’s displeasure by sleeping, Jesus sought to celebrate God’s control by resting.”

2. He stopped the storm.

“He that made the seas, can make them *quiet*.” (Matthew Henry’s Commentary on Mark 4)

He “muzzled” it. As a wild dog muzzled, it could no longer bite them.

“The sudden hushing of the wind would not at once have calmed the sea, whose commotion would have settled only after a considerable time. But the word of command was given to both elements at once.” <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/jamieson/jfb.xi.ii.v.html>

Before we continue with this text, we need to note the immediate context provided by Mark 5:1 and following. As soon as they leave the boat, an aggressive demoniac meets them. I have to believe their hearts were still racing and faint from the storm and now they are immediately met by another “storm.” What do you think their initial response

might have been (i.e. flight!)? I am sure that many thoughts were running through their minds. In addition, I would presume the predominate thought would be one of panic!

Will WBC face more storms? Will we go through hard times? What is God trying to teach us? Where does our focus need to be? Most storms are a matter of perspective. From whose vantage point are we viewing the storms of life: God or mans?

- B. His response to the disciples (v.40).
 - 1. He calmed their fears by stopping the storm (v.39)
 - 2. He questioned their faith (v.40)

In light of all He was teaching and doing, He fully expected them to respond in faith to life's storms.

III. The response of the disciples to the Lord of Glory (v. 41).

Consider the contrast between the disciples in 4:41 and that of the demons in 5:6 and 7.

“Exhausted with the fatigues of the day, He was but a moment ago in a deep sleep, undisturbed by the howling tempest, and we had to waken Him with the cry of our terror; but rising at our call, His majesty was felt by the raging elements, for they were instantly hushed – 'WHAT MANNER OF MAN IS THIS?'"

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/jamieson/jfb.xi.ii.v.html>

SHEPHERDING THE PEOPLE: (What's the NEXT STEP?)

First, a question - How big is your fear? How big is your God? Fear vs. Faith

Second, an observation - Difficulties are but opportunities for Him to display His power.

What has God taught me? How have I changed?

1. When I came to WBC, I came simply in obedience to the Lord's direction. I did not come thinking I was a shepherd. What God has done to me is changed my heart to be a shepherd of sheep. I care for your souls. I care about every single person who has been a part of this church and left. I care for their souls and pray they find another flock and shepherd as soon as possible. Only time will tell if you see me as a shepherd.
2. I have a conviction birthed from God that all sheep need shepherds. The idea of shepherd and sheep are inseparably linked. Neither one can exist independent of the other.
3. As shepherds we do care about your sorrows and your joys. We joy in your joy and sorrow in your hurt and concerns. I can explain this on two fronts. First, as a

member of one body we feel your joy and your pain. Second, as shepherds God has knit our hearts to those of the sheep.

4. The church, although at times showing itself as a business, is not a business and any time a church tries to run itself as a business, it will fail. Its failure will not be marked by numerical decline or financial poverty. In fact, if run like a business it might grow significantly larger and financially prosperous. But when it stops being a family of families, its heart-beat and passion for Christ and His church will die. The church needs men and women who can handle numbers and have a sense for structure and administration, but more than anything else the church needs people who have a passion for Christ and His Church.
5. The position of Elder is a divinely appointed position. It is possible to have false shepherds, but the men who occupy this position are godly and worthy of our respect. My respect for the men who have served with me and who currently serve with me as elders is genuine. My love for them is true.
6. The idea of Christ and His Church are indivisibly linked. The two are joined at the hip. You cannot love Christ and not His Church.
7. One's perception often creates their reality. Only perspective determines if your cup is half full or half empty. Either way the cup is the same.
8. Negativity almost always appears to be more contagious and irrepressible than optimism and hope. Yet, by faith we believe God is winning. For some people, the elders as an "idea" will never be good enough. Although every one of us is respected individually, somehow collectively some still treat us with contempt. We are sorry for past hurts or present blunders, but we ask that you forgive us and help with the healing process. If you remain bitter and negative you will miss what God is doing in your midst.
9. I have changed, and I have had people tell me as much. Some would suggest it has been for the worse and others for the better. But let me tell you my perspective on this. I believe I have become more "soulish." What do I mean by "soulish"? I am letting go of the temporal and sight-based world and beginning to live by the eternal and faith-based life. I am no longer allowing my sight to shape my reality. I am learning to truly live by faith, to accept and to believe that what God says is true.
10. My approval ratings by the sheep will never form my personal self-worth or importance before God. Who I am in Christ continues to be my bedrock. What you think of me affects me emotionally, but what God thinks of me in Christ is my unbridled joy.
11. My relationship with my wife and my children are my priorities. Through the years I have given assent to this idea, but only in this year have I made this real. Nothing I do in the area of gifting or work must ever rob me of these two relationships. My work will never make me feel guilty when a job appears undone. You would be wrong if you concluded that my wife and I or my children and I have a perfect marriage or relationship. But I can, without reservation, say to you that I love my wife and children and their love for me is unconditional. I would sacrifice everything I own and my own life for the sustaining of these relationships. I will not go into any sort of intimate detail as to what my wife

means to me, but that quiet, careful, thought-filled and reserved woman, wife, and mother is a constant mainstay to my loud, careless, thoughtless and unreserved (and at times embarrassing) behavior.

12. I equally understand the role of deacon and congregant. In the absence of either one, the church will not exist in a state of health. I respect and celebrate the unique gifting that each individual brings to the body of Jesus Christ, both locally and universally. Those who exercise their gifting in their area of ability and passions are a true delight for us to behold.
13. The blood-bought church of Jesus Christ will always have problems while on earth, but it is still blood-bought and His church thus it must never be criticized, castigated, or abandoned. As such, I will not be negative toward the church, nor will I allow others to be negative toward the church.
14. The church is to be generational. No generation can rightly abandon the church, either the young or the old.
15. In addition, I am learning to live each day as a shadow of Jesus Christ. God is teaching me to see Him in everyone and in everything. I am living the Latin phrase, "Carpe Deum." You are loved, and my love and interest in you is divine. It is neither in me nor my make-up to care, but despite myself I find myself drawn to the sheep of Waukesha Bible Church.
16. Finally, God continues to teach me by my experiences two immutable truths. First, He is in control and secondly, He really cares. There is no detail that escapes His notice or affection.

Third, let me leave you with four action steps.

1. Learn to know who God is in a practical, relational manner. This will only happen by spending time with Him.
2. Learn to see your circumstances through God's eyes and not yours. If you live by sight, you will struggle. You must learn to live by faith.
3. Right now acknowledge God in your storm.
4. Learn the promises of God and believe that nothing will fail of all that He has promised.

Fourth, wrapping it up - For the Congregant/Sheep

Perhaps your life is buffeted, filled and covered by life's trials. Right now, you need to see the control of God and the compassion of God. Jesus Christ our Lord is Master of all circumstances and sufficient for every emergency. Have faith in God and fear will leave.

Divorce, death, physical ailments, child rearing, job change, and unemployment, how deep is the water in your boat? Friend, God is in control and He really cares. Come to Him now and find His rest.

By the way, who said, "Carest though not that we perish?" I would probably guess Peter! Did Peter learn? 1 Peter 5:7 - "casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." God is in control and God cares for you.