

Sermon – Mark 4:35-41  
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Grace Lutheran Church  
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### “The Storm After the Calm”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. Serving in the military to defend the freedoms enjoyed in this country did not mean that those freedoms extended to him. By the end of his career, Don Newcombe would be a legend. He would help the long-suffering Dodgers finally bring a championship to Brooklyn in 1955. But in 1954, he was seen by the white world as just another Black man to be kept away in conditions separate but hardly equal. It was the year the decision came down in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*; the Civil Rights movement was just beginning to stir. But one day in St. Louis, Newcombe took his rights into his own hands. Tired of the miserable conditions at the Adams Hotel, where it got so hot the players would soak their bedsheets to stay cool at night, he and Jackie Robinson made their way to the Chase Hotel, where their white teammates were staying. As Newcombe said, “Look, I just got back from serving my country for two years, I’ll be damned if I’m going to put up with this.” They found the manager of the Chase, who finally told them that the sticking point was the swimming pool. They just couldn’t have Black people sharing the same swimming pool with white people, after all. Robinson nearly fell out of his chair. He exclaimed, “Mister, I don’t even know how to swim.” Newcombe was sure this was a lie – Jackie Robinson, after all, could do anything. But it was good enough for the manager; the color line at the Chase hotel was broken that day. Except in the swimming pool, where the sin of racism was allowed to churn on.

2. Water, for all of its lifegiving properties, has always been cause for fear, its sometimes-calm surface barely concealing the chaos beneath, its gentle waves so easily whipped into a frenzy by the winds. No wonder, then, that people have seen water not just for the danger that it can be, but as a symbol of all the forces that are arrayed against us, from the chaotic to the demonic. To be out on the open water is to be in danger. So it was for Jesus and his disciples that day in Galilee, early in his ministry. The day was coming to an end, and it was time to cross over to the other side. The sea was calm when they set out, and Jesus settled into the stern for a nap. But the calm didn't last. Does it ever? Soon, the disciples despair. Would they reach the other side? Jesus, snoozing away, doesn't even seem to care. But upon waking up, he speaks to the winds and the waves with authority. From his mouth, the words, "Peace! Be still!" are not a plea but a command. And the wind and the waves obey. Calm settles upon waters of Galilee; the other side is reached. All of which leaves the disciples even more afraid than before. The good folks who translated this passage have managed to flatten out the meaning. "And they were filled with a great awe" sound lovely, yes? Nice and worshipful. But what Mark actually wrote is, "They were afraid with a terrible fear." Who is this in the boat with them? What have they gotten themselves into?
3. We just finished one of the best weeks of the year at Grace. Our Scuba-themed Vacation Bible School helped seventy or so kids, not to mention the rest of us, dive deep into friendship with God. Through stations and songs and general silliness, we grew into a deeper understanding of who God is and how God acts in this world. Each day had its point, simple and clear. On Monday, we learned that God is a friend who is real. And on Tuesday, we learned that God is a friend who loves. I confess that, all general metaphysical handwringing notwithstanding, it's never the first that has challenged me. My very run-of-the-mill wandering from the faith during my college years had nothing to do with whether there is a God. Honestly, this all makes a lot more

sense if you factor in some sort of divine agency. It was the second part, God is a friend who loves, that left me wondering. I believed God was out there somewhere. I just wasn't sure, based on my own experiences and what I saw in the world, that God cared at all. Because when you're in a tiny boat in the middle of a great big storm, it sure doesn't always feel like it.

4. Which is exactly how the disciples feel in the boat in the storm. They wake Jesus up not simply to tell him that they're about to die but to ask him if he even cares. Well, as it turns out, he does. Deeply. With greater depth than the sea itself. Peace, he speaks. Be still! That's enough now, sea. Thus far shall you come, but no farther. Of course, the disciples are more afraid than ever. There is only One whom the waves obey, and that is the One who spoke the sea into being. Who is this in the boat with them? It can be none other than God, somehow incarnate, somehow present. Somehow not just a force out there somewhere, but in the boat with them. His presence does not rid the world, or our lives, of storms. But this presence assures us that we will always get to the other side, his presence not cause for fear but faith.
5. Later, Jesus will find himself once more in the midst of a storm. The chaos will come for him, concealed no longer under a calm surface. The sinful powers of this world will rage against him. The demonic powers from beyond this world will rise up in full strength. Sin, death, and the devil will do their worst. And Christ will reach out his arms once more. "Thus far shall you come, and no father," we can almost hear him say from Calvary's cross. With his death their proud waves are stopped, stilled, forever. And in his rising, our fears are put away and the far shore is now certain, no matter how far off it seems.
6. Jesus is the answer to both questions: Is God real? Does God care? Yes. So much so that Jesus is not simply waiting for us on the other side, but in the boat with us, in all things. At all times. He invites us simply to believe, which

before it becomes intellectual understanding is simply childlike trust that God is with us and for us. This faith is given to us through Word and, of all things, water. We have gone under the floodwaters, entered into death and come out dripping and alive. The baptized life calls us into the deep waters, like Don Newcombe and Jackie Robinson, who may have been perfectly willing to give up the swimming pool but by no means avoided the deep waters of sin and racism, fighting for themselves and those who would follow. We, too, have work to do, speaking peace and stillness in the name of the One who can make it so. But the destination is secure. In fact, in a sense, we're already there. Put your fears aside. The Jesus we shall one day see in glory is the Jesus with us, with you, even now. Amen.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.