

Mark 4:35-41 – “Who then is this?”

1. A Moment of Crisis

Have you had a moment of crisis in your life?

A moment in time, where factors are so out of control, that you think –
“I’ve got absolutely no control over what happens to me.”

Well, there was a rescue boat that came...

The 1998 Sydney to Hobart yacht race – winds started at 45-50 knots and then built up to 75 knots, waves up to 6 metres

The back of the waves were blown off – it was like launching off a 3 storey building ...

- 5 yachts sank, 55 crew members rescued and 5 people lost their lives

There was a moment of crisis – abandon ship – or not...

- What is the thought process that goes on, in that situation of extreme danger?
- What is the course of action to take, when you’re on the edge of perishing?

In Mark’s chapter 4, Jesus’ followers had a moment of crisis.

And that moment of crisis came on the Sea of Galilee.

A fierce windstorm had swept through, and they were caught out, in the middle of the lake.

2. The Existential Question – “Don’t you care that we are perishing?” (v. 38)

So, the disciples find themselves in a situation that is beyond their control... << vv. 35-41 >>

Now, if you remember from last week, and the parable of the sower,
As we read this story, we should be thinking what type of soil are the disciples?
Will they be ‘the path’ – where the word has no impact?
Will they be “the rocky ground” – where they wilt under pressure?
Will they be “the seed among thorns” – choked by the worldly concerns?
Or with they be “the good soil” – that produces a harvest of righteousness?

With this question in our minds, the disciples make a seemingly simple trip across the lake.
There was a bit of flotilla, as there were other boats with them,
And there wasn’t much advanced planning – as they were using the boat Jesus previously was teaching from.
We know that James and John were fishermen, so they had some professionals to guide them.

But the day trip turns to disaster.
The description of “a great windstorm” doesn’t sound that threatening to us,
But just as the “Sydney to Hobart Disaster” brings to mind the tragic events to us,
So for the Jewish community –
 “a great windstorm” recalls the events of Jonah, and the great storm he survived.
That is, deeply embedded in the Jewish psyche is a connection between the sea and uncontrolled power.
 Between any significant body of water and the raging chaos that takes lives.

And just as Jonah was asleep in the back of the boat (soon to be tossed overboard),
So too Jesus, the teacher, the leader of this frightened rabble is asleep on the boat.

So they wake Jesus up and ask the question – “Teacher, don’t you care that we are perishing?”
This is the first time that the disciples address Jesus directly, in Mark’s gospel.
And this first question of Jesus is a very fundamental question,
 But did you notice the presupposition in their question?
 “Don’t you care”

It is fascinating how their whole experience of Jesus has gone out the window.
Jesus has just explained to them that he cares about them, he’s revealed the truth about parables to them.
Jesus has demonstrated time and again his care for those around him, like the paralytic.
But rationality goes out the window when the disciples are put under duress.
Don’t you care, Jesus...

3. The Faith Question – “Why are you afraid? Have you yet no faith?” (v. 40)

So, they’ve woken their master, their teacher – what will he do in response? << vv. 39-40 >>

Jesus speaks and totally transforms the situation.

The “great storm” now becomes “the great calm”.

The uncontrollable wind now becomes nothing more than a gentle breeze, if that.

Jesus acts here, not only as ruler of the spiritual realm, as earlier,

Jesus acts here, as ruler, lord over creation itself.

For just as God stopped the storm when Jonah was chucked overboard,
So here Jesus stops the storm by simple command.

So the purpose here – to show that Jesus has the authority to do it – he transforms the sea.

But then Jesus asks a question of the disciples – well actually, a double headed question.

The question drives at the heart of the matter – “why are you afraid?”

Fear arises in the moment of crisis – for the disciples greatly fear the sea, the windstorm, their mortality.

But Jesus connects fear to ‘lack of faith’. Jesus’ second question reads – “Have you yet no faith”

Thus, Jesus defines ‘fear’ as the complete opposite to ‘faith’.

Why is fear the opposite of faith?

Well, just think for a moment, simply in terms of the economy of fear.

The disciples fear the lake, the windstorm, the waves – because their lives look like coming to an end.

The disciples have shown their mindset in the statement – “Don’t you care”.

And yet, the disciples have the Lord of the Universe, the Forgiver of Sins, with them

And yet, the disciples have the Kingdom-bringing king in their midst.

Of all people, he’s the one who can do something! And yet, the fear, and they do not trust him.

So, with 20-20 hindsight, what is the rational choice to make?

To trust in the one who is all-powerful, all-conquering, all-caring?

Or to let the fear of the sea swamp that rational thought?

The disciples have just demonstrated the soil on the rocky ground.

For the disciples have been put into an extreme situation, and they fail to trust their Lord and his word.

4. The Identity Question – “Who then is this?” (v. 41)

Well, how do the disciples react to Jesus stilling the storm?

Will they bow and worship their king? Will they recognize his authority? V. 41 << vv. 41 >>

Now, there’s a huge connection being made here, that we miss.

The phrase – “with great awe”, literally reads – “they feared with great fear”.

That is, the disciples have simply undergone a transferral of their emotions.

The disciples fear of the storm and the wind and the waves,

Has now been transferred so that they fear Jesus.

And so they ask the identity question – “Who then is this?”

Whilst this question remains unanswered in this short episode, I’ll line up three answers from Mark’s gospel.

And how this question is answered in our passion reading today.

First, the next episode involving, Jesus, his disciples, the sea and a boat – 6:50.

Jesus states – “Take heart; It is I” literally – “I am”.

That is, as Jesus passes by the disciples, walking on water

– the point is that this man is doing only what God can do. This man is God.

Second, Jesus pointedly asks his disciples the question – “Who do you say I am?” – 8:29

Peter answers correctly – “You are the messiah”

Jesus then refuses to predict his own glorious victory in battle over the Roman army and all oppressors.

Jesus, shockingly promises that he ‘must suffer, be rejected, and killed, and after three days rise.

Third, from our passion reading – the clearest, sharpest, most insightful answer to the question.

A Roman centurion, of all people, stands at the foot of the cross, as Jesus breathes his last,

And declares – “Surely this man was God’s son!”

Who then is this?

God’s chosen king, God’s own Son – laying down his life for his people.

This man – we celebrate some 2000 years later, in this week of all weeks in the year,

Because this man – is paradoxically the king of all, and yet the servant of all,

The one man who rightly could demand allegiance of all, and yet gives up his life for all.

This man who long awaited messiah, and yet this the suffering servant.

5. Questions for today

Finally, then, this short passage answers some questions that are commonly asked today.

a. Does God care?

First question – does God care?

Many people hurl the accusation at God – if you are there, then what are you doing?
If you are in control, then why did this tragedy happen?

So, to answer, on the small scale – the disciples asked this exact question of Jesus – teacher don't you care?
And their reason is often our reason – they were perishing, and so we are perishing.

And yet, Jesus resoundingly answers this question – yes, I care, yes I stopped the storm.
Even more for us, Jesus resoundingly answers us – yes, I care, yes I will lay down my own life for you.
Yes, I care, I will defeat death itself, I will give you the sure and certain resurrection hope!

b. Is faith irrational?

Second question, is faith irrational?

You know, on the one hand, there's the wonderful world of science and reason.
On the other, there's the crazy, insane world of religion, irrationality and 'faith'.

Jesus answers the disciples

Just as it is perfectly rational to fear your own death in the face of the terrible storm,
So it is perfectly rational to trust the only one who can stop the storm.

Jesus answers our question,

Just as it is perfectly rational to fear own death, however that may occur,
So it is perfectly rational to entrust your life to the only one who has defeated death.

c. Who is the real Jesus?

Finally, the question is asked today – who is the real Jesus?

I mean, if you look at the church, and what the church around the world says about Jesus
Jesus could be a un-reachable priest, your spiritual BFF, your wrist-band companion, ...

Jesus answers our question – I am the messiah, I am God, I am the crucified king.

Let's pray.