

Rev. Danny Mackey  
Fourth Sunday after Epiphany  
February 3, 2019  
Matthew 8:23-27  
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Muncie, Ind.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

*“What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?”*

Why doesn't God perform amazing, jaw-dropping miracles like He used to? We've all heard the stories of the Old Testament of the manna in the wilderness, the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. We just read about the astonishing miracle of Jesus calming a great and violent storm with but a single word! Why doesn't God do that kind of stuff today?

We really could use some miracles today, couldn't we? Again, the news agencies are all abuzz with talks about the cold wintry storms and arctic temperatures, as well as all the cultural storms we're facing. Hey, Jesus, we got some storms for you to stop! The problem is that even if Jesus were to stop them, who would notice? Sure, some people would notice, like those who already believe in Christ. But then again, even if the cold came and the snows piled up and they were stuck in their homes for a week or more, those Christians would still thank God for preserving their lives. And if some succumbed to the weather or the violence of our culture and they died, we Christians would still thank God for their faith and for preserving their eternal lives.

Sure, some might notice, but then they'd follow Jesus around like the crowds did, wanting their bellies filled with another free lunch. But would it go much beyond that? No, once Jesus starts talking about dying and rising, eating His body and blood, or anything else truly important, they'd be gone because they don't realize who Jesus truly is. Remember that those crowds of thousands were gone on Good Friday. All that was left was a congregation of 120 disciples.

Truly, the apostles didn't understand Jesus right away, either. This rabbi—this Jesus of Nazareth they've been following around for just a little while—was more than they expected. *“What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?”* People were flocking to this man; and crowds showed up wherever He was. The sick came to Him with their diseases. Demons fled before Him. Yet, the apostles still didn't understand what was going

on. This man was a rabbi, a teacher. He told parables about the kingdom of the heavens. He gave lessons in morality.

Their understanding was like that of Nicodemus, who paid Jesus a late-night garden visit. Nicodemus said to Jesus, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him” (Jn 3:2). Because of the miracles Jesus performed, people were willing to listen to Him. But when Jesus began talking about really why He came, people wouldn’t believe it.

*“What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?”*

The apostles knew He was a great teacher, but they hadn’t thought much beyond that to what it all meant. Here, on this boat in a great and violent tempest, Jesus shows Himself to be more than a teacher. Here, in the middle of the night on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus shows Himself to be God—and not just any god, but the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land, as Jonah says.

Now, in order to understand the magnitude of this all, we need to understand the mindset of the Scriptures—we need to know our Old Testament. Not just anybody can control the weather. Not just anybody can tell creation what to do. In fact, the only person who has that power is God Himself. Job learns this when God says, “Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth...when I [the Lord] said, ‘This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt?’” Who has the authority to command creation? Only the Creator Himself does.

We should never be mistaken about who and what Jesus is. We should never turn Jesus into some mere moral teacher or example of how we’re supposed to live. Yet, that’s what so many are doing today. It shouldn’t surprise us. They did it in Jesus’ day; they did it during the first few decades of the Church; they’ve done it throughout the last 2,000 years in one way or another. The Church is always battling against false teachers and their false christs—that’s one reason we’re called the Church Militant.

We turn Jesus into a moral teacher and example when we make the faith into a bunch of rules to live by. We turn Him into something He’s not with all this talk about “Christian living.” Just go to the section at Wal-Mart with the so-called Christian books to see what I’m talking about. Look at books by authors like Joyce Meyer, Max Lucado, and even Tim Tebow. There you’ll see Jesus the self-help guru: some Jesus other than the Jesus of the

Bible. While learning to live god-pleasing lives is very important, we learn it better from the Bible than any other book written by man. Moreover, if you want to learn to be a Christian, come to Church and be taught by the Liturgy, with the Word read and proclaimed, the prayers, and the holy meal of Christ's body and blood. We learn best what it means to be Christian when we learn what Christ has done and continues to do for us.

But some who call themselves Christian don't really want to be Christian. Instead of seeking Christ, they seek a license for immorality. "Jesus loves me, so I can do whatever I want!" How did Jonah going his own way work out for him? God our Father isn't a permissive wimp. Yet churches are using this line of thought to allow for all kinds of disgusting and immoral behavior today. Sin is called an acceptable "lifestyle." But sin is never acceptable to God—not in them, or in you. Don't turn Jesus into some divine doormat by walking all over Him with your constant sin.

No, this Jesus is greater than that. This Jesus is the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land—that means the heavens and the earth and everything therein! He proves it by making the proud waves halt. He proves it with the simple words, "Quiet! Be still!" Instantly, the wind and waves threatening to overcome the apostles are stopped. Then the apostles ask the right question: "*What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?*"

The only person who could save the apostles from this terrifying storm was the Creator. The only person who can preserve you from the storms of this world is the Creator. The only person who can rescue you from all harm—from the devil, the world, or your own sinful flesh—is the Creator. That's exactly how the Old Testament puts it. Over and over again in the Psalms we see that Yahweh's power to save goes hand in hand with His might as the Creator. Psalm 107 puts it very well:

*For he commanded and raised the stormy wind,  
which lifted up the waves of the sea.  
They mounted up to heaven; they went down to the depths;  
their courage melted away in their evil plight;  
...and were at their wits' end.  
Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,  
and he delivered them from their distress.  
He made the storm be still,  
and the waves of the sea were hushed.*

God does something greater than calming storms. God does something greater than scaring us with storms and tempests. God saves us, us children of men. So, we ask the question with the apostles, "*What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?*" And the answer is that Jesus is our Creator and our Redeemer. Jesus is the God who made us, who sustains us, and in whom we have hope.

Our epistle lesson speaks of this hope. St. Paul writes that our current struggles don't compare to the glory that awaits us. Along with all of creation, we eagerly await the redemption of our bodies and "for in this hope we were saved." Our Creator, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, by whom all things were made, came from heaven for us sinful men and for our salvation. He reconciled the world to God the Father in His own body and blood on the cross of Calvary. "*What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?*" He is the Creator who took on the creation in His own body and paid for our redemption in order that creation will be restored. At His Word, all storms and struggles and sufferings will cease. At His Word, all of us will be made safe and saved for the glory that awaits us.

Our salvation is the greatest miracle that Jesus performs. God no longer gives us voices in burning bushes. He no longer talks to us through the raging and terrifying storms. No, God grants us an ever-greater miracle: salvation through the forgiveness of our sins. This is the greatest miracle that Jesus performs.

His greatest miracle He performed in His death and resurrection: on the cross and from the tomb. When His enemies demanded a sign to answer "*What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?*" He gave them the sign of Jonah. "For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." There, in His death and resurrection, you truly see who your Creator is. And the gifts of His dying and rising are given to you today through God's Word and Sacraments. God performed the miracle of salvation in the waters of your Baptism. The God who created you joined you to His death and resurrection in Baptism. You have been made in the image of Christ, the Creator and Redeemer.

Whenever you partake of Jesus' body and blood in the Lord's Supper, God is also re-creating you in His image. In a very real sense, the old saying "You are what you eat" is true here. As you partake of Christ Jesus, you are re-created in the image of Him who died and rose again. All this is accomplished through the power of the Word. It is through the Word

that you are reconciled to God. It is through the Word that you receive the greatest miracle that Christ performs: salvation through the forgiveness of your sins.

Therefore, look not to flashy signs and talks of miracles, but to the miracle Jesus accomplished on the cross and from the tomb. Look to the Word that confesses Christ and Him crucified and risen. Look to your salvation through the forgiveness of sins. And when you hear the question "*What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?*" you can answer, "He is my Creator and my Redeemer!" He is the One who has rescued you from all storms—and the only One who ever could. To God alone be the glory.

In Jesus' name.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in + Christ Jesus.