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Very, very early tomorrow morning, I will board a plane and head to DC to visit my mother in Maryland for a few days. Perhaps I've had that upcoming flight in the back of my mind more than I realized, because one of the first words that came to my mind when I looked over the Gospel text for this morning was turbulence. I think when we hear the word turbulence, we most often think of turbulence in the air, experienced as sometimes dramatic jerking and shaking of the airplane as it moves through places of rough air in flight. I don't know of anyone who enjoys turbulence, either in the air, or, as we hear in our text today from Mark, on the sea.

The disciples found themselves in the boat with Jesus, experiencing tremendous turbulence as the violent storm raged around them. Filled with fear as the boat was in danger of sinking, the disciples were certain they would perish. And in the midst of this storm and chaos, Jesus was asleep on the cushion in the stern. How was that possible? First of all, how could someone sleep through the boat being tossed to and fro by the waves, and second, how in the world could Jesus not share in their very real feelings of terror and fear of drowning?

Having been roused from his slumber by the disciples, Jesus rebukes the wind and calms the sea. What deeds of power! It's worth noting here that the word for rebuke in this story is the same one used in the recounting of Jesus' first healing act in Mark's gospel when he rebukes the unclean spirit. This is one way of connecting Jesus' acts of great power and authority in the gospel.

I have to share with you a neat moment from this past weeks' Vacation Bible School. If you've ever participated in VBS as a child or as a volunteer, you know that it's mostly about having a good time. And this week was no exception. We had games, music, crafts, story time, and, of course, yummy snacks. The sneaky part of VBS is that there's some covert opportunities in there for children to grow in their faith. For instance, one of the theme stories was the one about Zacchaeus, so not only did they sing the old

favorite song about Zacchaeus, they heard the story from the Bible and learned that it was about forgiveness and being able to change. That's good stuff. I got to lead story time and guide some conversation about the Bible story for the day. The wonderful part of that setting was hearing the children think through and answer questions as we talked about each story. You will be pleased to know that these kiddos are actually paying attention and asking good questions. As we spoke about the calling of the disciples, one student asked what a disciple was. Good question! We toss the word disciple around and don't really think about what means. I did what every good tech-enabled teacher does and opened Google to search for the word. My laptop was connected to the screen we used to watch the story videos, so they could see what came up in the search results. We found that it comes from a blend of old Latin and French root words that are related to learning and being a learner. So being a disciple is more than being a follower of Jesus, the way we commonly think of it. It's also about learning about and from Jesus. We also know that once we learn something, we in turn share it with others.

Back to the disciples in the boat with Jesus. They had been called by Jesus to join him and had been witnesses to what he had done so far in these early chapters of Mark's gospel. Slowly but surely, they were getting to know Jesus as a person but also to see what he was able to do. The disciples still had a lot of learning to do, however. In time, they would understand that Jesus came to bring about the Kingdom of God, and all the changes that came along with it.

Jesus would challenge and overthrow authorities and the things and people that hold power in the world. Jesus would bring order out of chaos and life out of death. The storm and raging sea in our gospel today are prime examples of the threat of death. In the face of that threat, Jesus is able to bring about calm and safety. In this action, Jesus is showing the disciples more of who he is. This is Jesus, the Messiah, the son of God. We see in this story that the disciples don't yet fully know who Jesus is, because after he calms the storm, they ask each other "Who then is this, that even the wind and sea obey him?" The text says they were filled with "great awe," but an even more accurate translation here might be that they were terrified.

What a contrast in that boat: Jesus not being freaked out and the disciples being terrified. They still have more to learn about who Jesus is.

As disciples of Jesus, we, too, have more to learn. In the face of our own storms, we tremble and quake (and try to find ways to control and calm things on our own and in our own time). When we feel like our very lives are threatened, we forget where our safety comes from. Consider the words Jesus spoke to the sea: "Peace! Be still!" How often do we need to hear those words, and even dare to speak those words to the things that feel threatening to us?

There are so many things that have felt (and still feel) like storms in our lives. Most recently here at Saint Andrew, it's been the pandemic and how to handle the re-gathering and re-opening planning, the call process, and pastoral transitions. Any of these would be quite an experience, but the combination understandably feels like a tempest-tossed whirlwind! In facing these challenges, we have called upon our faith. Our faith is rooted in what we know. We know that the God who calls us is faithful and equips us for life and ministry together. Joined together with the varied gifts we have to share; we are able to be the body of Christ for the world. Like the disciples in our text today, we have concerns, and we feel afraid sometimes. But we know more than they did at the time of the storm on the sea. We know that Jesus holds the power over death and the grave, the things that threaten us most. Knowing what we do, then, we have the ability to recall the words Jesus spoke that day, "Peace! Be still!" and we can speak those words to our hearts and minds.

The thing I love the most in this story of the raging storm is that Jesus rebuked the wind and not the disciples. Yes, he asked them why they were afraid, but he didn't chastise or shame them. To me, that's an act of real grace. We are not chastised for feeling afraid or scared in the face of difficult times. Our faith (or lack thereof) isn't questioned. Instead, we receive grace, forgiveness, and new opportunities to learn and grown in that faith.

Whatever storms you feel swirling around you this day, may you be strengthened by God's love and promise to see you through them. Peace, dear ones. Be still.

Amen.