

Weatherproof: Job 38:1-11; Mark 4:35-41

by [Jim Callahan](#) in the [June 7, 2000](#) issue

In considering Mark's story of Jesus's stilling the storm and rebuking the wind, the Book of Job is helpful. It reminds us that in the Old Testament creation is described in part as a great struggle between God and the sea. In fact, the sea is presented as a monster that only God's ineffable power can tame. If you have ever been caught on a small fishing boat in a squall on the Gulf of Mexico or the Atlantic or any other large body of water, you can identify with the plight of Jesus and his terrified disciples on this occasion.

Jesus had been teaching the multitudes gathered to hear him along the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Except for the holistic objections of the scribes, it had been a fruitful and, as we are wont to say, "uplifting" occasion. He had taught the people through the parables that had gained him fame and the rapt attention of the faithful. They were so caught up in the power and strength of what was taking place that there was no time even for eating.

Realizing that he was skipping meals, Jesus's mother came down with the rest of the family to have a mother's word with her son. He did not take this at all kindly and proclaimed that the motley crowd in front of him was his true family of mother and brothers and sisters. So much for family values. It had been an exhausting and wearying day, and when evening came, he and his tired Twelve climbed into a fishing boat and headed out to sea.

As it turned out, the sea was no more hospitable than the scribes had been. In Mark's words, "A great storm of wind arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already filling." The disciples were filling too—with fear. And there was no Franklin D. Roosevelt to tell them that fear was the only thing they had to fear. There were huge, surging black waves, whipped by a driving wind and crashing in on their small craft. Their oars had no more effect on the turbulent sea than toothpicks, even though some of them were fishermen. They were accustomed to wind and wave, but to nothing like this.

We know. Jesus was there. The trip was his idea. Only Jesus had nodded off, dead to the world, catching a few Zs in the back of the boat, and apparently unperturbed by what was going on. Of course, the men shook him awake and asked (screamed!) in bewilderment and desperation, "Do you not care?"

Here all amusement stops. Here is echoed the heartbreaking desperation of all saints and sinners alike, whose prayers for themselves and those they love seem to bounce back from the ceiling or from an infinite, empty space or from wherever God seems absent. Here is formed the poorly disguised cynicism of those who plead earnestly to heaven but later tell their believing friends that "he must have been asleep in the boat." This is holy ground, where we dare not scoff but rather weep, because in the human condition not all our storm-swept sea journeys end as happily or safely as the one Mark relates.

Mark knew this. His Gospel is addressed to believers who knew every kind of terror, every kind of loss, but who yet endured and yet believed. His Gospel was written, as were those of the other evangelists, to assure believers that their losses and grief, their sorrows and anguish, were not the last word. Maybe that's why Jesus could snore through the storm and against the wind—because the Son of man knew and trusted that glorious surmise like no one else in the world.

When awakened, Jesus commanded the wind to be quiet and the waves to be still. Then he had the audacity to ask his disciples why they were afraid. His soaked-to-the-skin companions could only marvel and ask that most important question, "Who is this man, that even the wind and the waves obey him?"

We need to remember that the ones who voiced this response were Galileans. They lived where wind and wave were vital to the safety of their being, their lives and livelihoods. That Jesus could command them was a most propitious sign. It meant that the things which could overcome them had been overcome. The thought foreshadowed Jesus's beautiful statement to them that would come later: "In the world, you shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer—I have overcome the world!" (John 16:33).

Here we discover Mark's purpose, not just in this miracle story but in all of his Gospel: to tell us "who this man is" and how he may be trusted. Not only is he the Savior of the world, he is also our close, storm-proof companion, our fellow traveler. Like all who follow him, he bears the marks and the scars of the journey; they are part of his beauty. They are part of us, and the part that he loves the most as he bids us join him.