

Seeing the storm coming (12B) (*Mark 4:35-41*)

It's like Jesus knows. How?

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The house where I grew up sits between two towns in the middle of northern Illinois's rich farmland.

It wasn't a convenient place to be as a kid, especially before I was able to drive. The closest store to make a candy run was six miles away via the state highway—a terrifying, day-long adventure on a BMX bike—and school was just as far. But what the location lacked in convenience it more than made up for with a view.

Summer afternoons were the best. With a clear line to the west, you could watch the storms develop as they moved across the prairie, wisps of bleached cotton growing into an explosion of ever-darkening hues. The sun would disappear, the temperature would drop, the wind would pick up, and the trees would bend and groan.

Afternoons were best because I could see it coming, and I was able to prepare for the rumbling deluge that would accompany it. When I knew it was coming in the afternoon, I could even sleep through it, lulled to slumber by the timbre of its percussive drops.

The storms that formed in the evening, though—those that developed in the dark when I wasn't looking—they were startling. Loud noises in the dead of night are not normal in the middle of nowhere. Being roused from sleep by a clap of thunder is not a gentle nudge from the cat.

It seems like the storm in Mark's Gospel catches the disciples by surprise. I'd expect more from former fishermen, frankly. When knowing the weather is critical for one's life and livelihood, I'd expect they'd always be paying attention to the wind and looking to the sky. Of course, they've never been particularly observant about the little things, as far as Mark is concerned.

Jesus is untroubled, sleeping, as if he knew it was coming. Maybe he knew from divine memory—from the time before time, when beginning and end were stretched across the universe. While God was counting hair, the Word watched the radar. Or maybe Jesus took the time to look over his shoulder before they set off to cross the lake. It would be smart, after all, to see if anything was following you before endeavoring to travel across the mysteries that were imagined to lurk in the waters below.

Regardless of how he came to it, Jesus understands what they are facing in a way his disciples do not. The calming of the waves emerges from his own calm about where he is and who he is.