

Who is this man?

Mark 4:35-41

February 9, 2003

I was scared. Even I was scared. I've fished this lake since I was eight and swum in it since I was four. I know it well; I respect its power; but this was the first time it ever scared me.

I've been in storms, some pretty wild storms. So I know what the boat can do and I know what I can do.

But this time it was different. Too many people in the boat and many of them never in weather like this. They were panicking ... and I was scared. We couldn't make any headway. We couldn't control the boat. The wind was too strong, the waves were too high. The water was coming in fast, too fast, faster than we could push it out. We used the oars to steady the boat, to quarter the waves, but it was no use. We couldn't hold the angle, we couldn't stabilize the boat, we couldn't keep the water out. And the more water we took, the worse it got. We were going nowhere but down. We were going down and Jesus with us.

I don't know why we didn't see it coming. This lake can kick up weather fast with little warning, but we know it so well. I know it better than that. We were so eager to get away, to get away from all the people, to get away from all the clamor, just to get away ... Even Jesus seemed anxious to go.

It was late ... we'd been there all day at the water's edge. We thought we'd have enough light to make the crossing. We wanted to go and Jesus wanted to go, and we've grown used to doing what Jesus wanted. But this time I should have known better. I should have said something. But I didn't ...

So there we were, in the middle of the lake, caught by the sudden squall, and I was scared. I did what I could. Arms and hands and body were busy, pulling on an oar, grabbing a gunwale, heaving a bucketfull ... but my mind was strangely focussed and still ... and watching. Watching the awesome power of the water, watching our frantic and futile gestures in response ... watching my friends, seeing how very real they were in that moment. seeing how very real the wind and the waves were in that moment ... seeing how very real death was in that moment, feeling the weight of death crowd us, crowd us closer than all those people at the water's edge. I tasted my breath and it tasted good. I knew I would die, but I would taste it, too. I looked at my friends and silently shared with them the awful exhilaration fear brings with it. I looked toward Jesus ... and there he was asleep on the stern cushion. I screamed at him.

It's not that I didn't understand his exhaustion. We were exhausted, too. But we were boatmen and it was time for us to do our job. Jesus had been doing his job all day. Jesus had been doing his job for many days. It was crazy ... hordes of people, crowding to listen, pushing close to see, forcing us to the water's edge and beyond. Jesus in the boat speaking in puzzles. People eager to listen even when they couldn't understand. People waiting to see what Jesus would do, waiting to see if the rumors were true, waiting to see something, because maybe there was something. People begging for attention from Jesus. People bitterly challenging Jesus. People demanding strength. People demanding answers.

It was exciting to be near Jesus, to be part of the company of his followers, to be a part of something that was stirring up the countryside. But, at the same time, I wanted to be rid of all these people, to have some time alone with this fascinating and compelling man I had left home for. I was glad we were going away. I was glad we were going away with Jesus. I looked forward to those intimate conversations when Jesus would patiently answer our questions and open our minds and hearts to worlds we had not conceived before. But now the squall and Jesus sleeping.

I screamed at him. *Don't you care? Don't you care that we are about to die?* He seemed to care so much, not just about his ideas or his cause, but about people, about us. But now it all seemed so ironic. Here we are, going down, and a holy man asleep in the stern. When you're going down, what difference does it make who's asleep in the stern?

All that heady talk suddenly seemed so unreal. The storm was real. The storm was everything that was real; the storm was the only thing that was real.

They say that crisis makes a pray-er out of you, but I had no time to pray, no time for the luxury of spiritual conversation. There was no time to think; just the struggle to survive. It was time to live or die. Fear has a marvelous way of clearing away all the fluff. Death has a marvelous way of focussing the mind. You want power. Feel the wave. You want truth. Drink the wind.

I screamed at him. I shook him ... and he woke. He stood up in the stern and he spoke. At least I think he spoke. It was hard to separate the words from the wind. He didn't shout. He didn't plead. He simply spoke. Not to us. Not, it seemed, to God. No, it seemed that Jesus talked back to the wind itself.

And then it was calm Not the stale, ominous calm when the storm collects itself just before unleashing its fury. Not the heavy, burdensome calm when air hangs limp and stifling. Not the dead calm when it seems as if, for a moment, life itself is holding its breath. It was a calm of water moving, almost imperceptibly, but surely moving, gently lifting, gently lifting ... The air was still, but still very much alive -- breathing, filling, enlivening, refreshing.

It didn't happen suddenly. It didn't happen slowly. It just happened. We were in the storm and then it was calm.

The water in the boat sloshed gently back and forth as we bailed. I wanted to look at Jesus, but I didn't dare. I wanted to hear Jesus speak, but I didn't know what to ask.

The lake was still, but my heart was not. The squall had passed, but something else now frightened me even more than the storm. I had looked beyond life's edges, I had been taken through to the other side ... and Jesus was there. Jesus took me there ... to a place I had never been.

I was scared ... *Who is this man?* I knew I would go with him, wherever the way might lead, but ... *Who is this man?* I was still alive, now more alive than ever before ... but my life was no longer my own. Now my life belonged to him ...