## Calming the Storm

### The Texts

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<td>23Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. Without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him, saying, “Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!”</td>
<td>35That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, “Let us go over to the other side.” Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped.</td>
<td>22One day Jesus said to his disciples, “Let’s go over to the other side of the lake.” So they got into a boat and set out. As they sailed, he fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger.</td>
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<td>24Without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him, saying, “Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!”</td>
<td>36Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” He got up, rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm.</td>
<td>25The disciples went and woke him, saying, “Master, Master, we’re going to drown!” He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm.</td>
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<td>25The men were amazed and asked, “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!”</td>
<td>37A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped.</td>
<td>26“Where is your faith?” he asked his disciples. In fear and amazement they asked one another, “Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him.”</td>
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<td>26He replied, “You of little faith, why are you so afraid?” Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.</td>
<td>38Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.</td>
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<td>27The men were amazed and asked, “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!”</td>
<td>39He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.</td>
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<td>28He said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”</td>
<td>40He said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”</td>
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<td>29They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”</td>
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### The Context

The story of Jesus calming the storm is found in all three Synoptic Gospels: Matthew 8:23-27, Mark 4:35-41 and Luke 8:22-25. Mark’s gospel (generally dated between 65-75 CE) is widely accepted as the earliest source of this narrative. The narrative is remarkable for its graphic description of the storm, with the waves breaking into the boat so it began to fill, and for the contrast between the calmness of Jesus and the terror of the disciples.

Jews were generally not great seafarers and regarded the sea with some fear, as it symbolised the chaos before creation in Genesis 1:2. However, the Old Testament / Hebrew Bible also records God’s power and control over the sea, so this narrative is told against a background of passages such as Genesis 1:6-7; Exodus 14:21-31; Psalm 107:23-33; Jonah...
1:1-16. Mark narrates 6 boat trips, but only two in any detail. It is worth noting that in ancient mythology, the sea symbolised the powers of chaos and evil. See e.g. Genesis 1.

The Lake of Galilee is more than 180 metres below sea level and therefore prone to sudden storms sweeping down off the hills. Although they are on the Lake of Galilee, it is described as if it were a sea.

There are some similarities between this narrative and Jesus walking on the water in Mark 6:45-53. In both accounts the disciples leave the crowds; the wind is against them; they are afraid; the wind ceases; both have 'the other side' as the destination, which may refer to Gentile territory, in other words, unknown territory.

**Differences between the Gospel Accounts**

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<tr>
<th>Matthew</th>
<th>Mark</th>
<th>Luke</th>
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<td>Matthew 8:26 mentions their 'little faith'.</td>
<td>Mark is harsher than Matthew and Luke in his presentation of the disciples.</td>
<td>Luke 8:25 attributes their cries to forgetful faith rather than a complete absence of it.</td>
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<td>Matthew has the disciples cry out, 'Save us'. This may symbolically refer to Jesus' mission to save his people from their sins (Mt 1:21).</td>
<td>Luke has the disciples address Jesus as 'Master' rather than teacher, suggesting a belief of Jesus as 'Lord' rather than just a teacher.</td>
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<td>Matthew omits the mention of a cushion, which may not be for brevity but because he wants to illustrate Jesus' previous statement that the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head in Matthew 8:20.</td>
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**Interpreting Miracle Stories**

Today Jesus' miracles are seen as posing a problem - 'Did they really happen? If so, how? From the gospels it can be understood that Jesus did not perform miracles to produce proof of his divine identity, or wonder at his actions. Rather, they were works of divine compassion and signs of a new age, the Kingdom of God.

One approach is to view the gospel miracle stories as largely historically accurate. Thus, conservative theologians would argue that the account is substantially historic, based on the authors' and disciples' understanding of Christ. If the great miracle of the Incarnation is accepted, namely that Jesus became human, flesh and blood, then the objection to other miracles is lost. They would say that if you eliminate the supernatural, what is left is not the Christ of the Gospels. So it is proposed that Jesus trusted in God and his trust was not deceived. Christians should therefore show the same trust.
Another approach is to view the language of the gospel miracle stories as largely metaphorical. Thus, the question is not, Did this really happen? but rather What does this mean? These theologians might suggest that Jesus’ command was addressed not to the wind but to the disciples. This gets over the miraculous calming of the sea. But this doesn’t seem justified, because they still lack faith after the calm.

Alternatively, they might also suggest that Mark may have wanted to use the narrative to infer that Jesus, who could calm the storm, was present still amid the storms and stresses of life faced by the early church, in particular perhaps symbolising the storms of persecution they experienced. But there is no indication that Mark intended this. Matthew addressed a predominantly Jewish urban congregation, the majority of whom rarely faced life-threatening storms at sea, but such an interpretation would also be meaningful to them as they faced persecution.

A third interpretation of this miracle story suggests that the context is of the early Christian community trying to overcome the developing social divisions between Jewish and Gentile (non-Jewish) Christians. These early Christians were struggling to make the passage of integration and hence the difficulties of the boat en route to the Gentile shores. The hostility towards integrating Jew and Gentile threatened to drown the community but Mark insists Jesus will rescue the project and silence the winds of opposition.

Finally, miracle workers were quite common in Jesus’ time but they would be performing mostly healings and exorcisms. What was significant in Jesus’ case was the source of the power which enabled miracles to be performed.

**Theological Issues**

**Christology**
Mark’s aim is not to amaze his readers as if by magic. What he wishes to do (and it is amazing in a different way) is to reveal God’s power at work in Jesus. So this narrative raises the important issue of the identity of Jesus. ‘Who then is this?’ The disciples focus on Jesus, not the event itself. On whose authority and with whose power was this accomplished? As it was a common belief that God had created the seas and alone was in control of them (Psalm 65: 7; 89:8f; 104:7) it followed that God’s power was at work in Jesus. This pointed to Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ, whom God was going to send to inaugurate a new age.

**Miracles**
Miracles in the Gospels were never exhibitions of power. They were, as the John’s Gospel calls them, ‘signs’ for people to enable spiritual discernment of the new age of God’s kingdom, which came into being with Jesus. Jesus’ teaching described the kingdom of God and his actions made it real.

Most modern scholars recognise that Jesus performed healings and exorcisms; how they explain them varies depending on the interpretative approach taken.

**Discipleship**
A common theme in the gospels is the difficulty the disciples have in understanding who Jesus is and the significance of what he does. They often misunderstand what he is talking about and, instead of faith, show fear and mistrust. This highlights how difficult it was to grasp the underlying meaning of Jesus’ words and actions, even in his presence. It remains a timeless challenge.
Fear and Faith
Faith brings courage and confidence; fear results from a person's inability to trust in God's power to provide. Jesus here is the example. He trusts God's power. No mere storm can defeat God's purpose. The disciples should have been reassured by Jesus' presence but their fear overtook their faith. Faith does not just happen. It has to be struggled for and needs to be constantly reapplied. Again, this narrative seeks to reassure those whose faith wavers and courage fails.

Calming the Storm Online

www.stepintothepicture.co.uk/ministry.html
(Excellent series of biblical art together with matching scripture story and artist’s notes)

www.jesuswalk.com/lessons/8_22-25.htm
(A very readable commentary that includes pictures of boats in first century Palestine)

http://re-xs.ucsm.ac.uk/gcseres/revision/marksgosp/mg3/sav.html
(Some differing interpretations of this and other miracle stories)

www.jennysmith.net/search-lds-media.php
(Free clipart for a huge number of bible stories)

www.sermons4kids.com/peace-be-still.html
(From the Sermons for Kids series, a simple explanation for younger students)

(Google Image Search for Calming of the Storm)