

## Calming the Winds of Life

Brian W. Keith

“And immediately He...said to them, ‘Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.’  
Then He went up into the boat to them, and the wind ceased.” Mark 6:50, 51

The disciples had been with the Lord for several months when this incident occurred. They had left all to follow Him. They had heard Him teach wonderful new ideas. They had seen Him heal the blind and the crippled. And they had seen him rejected by the religious leaders and warmly received by the multitudes.

Most recently the Lord had taken them to rest in a wilderness area by the Sea of Galilee. But the Lord's fame had so spread that thousands had run to the place. Showing no resentment because His solitude was disturbed, the Lord taught the multitudes. Then, when the hour was late, He miraculously fed the five thousand with five loaves and two fish.

Seeing that He could not escape the needs of the people, the Lord determined to return to a more heavily populated area. At dusk He sent the disciples ahead in the boat, while He spent some time in prayer on the nearby mountains overlooking the Sea of Galilee.

But the disciples ran into a fierce wind, and the relatively short trip dragged on and on. In the depths of night they were only about half way there, apparently making no headway. Then in the fourth watch, sometime between 3 a.m. and sunrise, they saw the Lord walking on the water. In the midst of their struggling with the oars and the darkness the Lord was hard to see, and seemed like a ghost to them. In distress they cried out and He spoke to them, saying, “Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.” Then when He got into the boat the wind ceased, the waves died out, and they were amazed as they finished their journey.

How like the Lord to apparently abandon the disciples, only to come and rescue them when it seemed there was little hope left! But this was not an unusual trait of the Lord's. For everything He said and everything He did was Divine. In this story is a description of one aspect of the spiritual journey we are all engaged on.

Often we feel fed by the Lord. Like the disciples and multitudes we have listened to His teachings – we have been enlightened and excited by the vision of heaven that He gives. And we have then been fed with bread and fishes – we have tasted something of good that the Lord offers us. Perhaps it is a young man who sees the beauty of an eternal concept in marriage, and feels a growing closeness to someone special. Or perhaps it is an older woman recognizing that her use extends far beyond her raised children and begins to find new ways to nurture those around her. In thousands of cases there is the delight in hearing the Lord's words, and joy in sensing that good can come.

Then what happens? The Lord made His disciples get into the boat for a journey. So the Lord places us in a vessel and sets us on our way. What we have learned carries us upon the

seas of this natural life. For we are not meant to remain in a wilderness. Life's journey is to leave deserted places behind and move towards where there are people, where the vision of truth we have received can be fully realized. Indeed, we are challenged to share our truths in every day life situations with others - both acting on it ourselves and communicating it to them.

And where is the Lord at this time? He seems to be at a distance, off on a mountain praying. As we enter into our daily routines, meeting all the demands the home and work place make upon us, it is hard to see the Lord's immediate presence. Where is the Lord as we are making out a shopping list? Where is the Lord when a supervisor is unjustly berating us for a problem at work? More importantly, where is the Lord as we attempt to sort out the shades of gray in moral and ethical questions we face?

In one sense the Lord does seem to be absent, off on a mountain. But He is there because that is the place we have allotted Him. Yes, we might attend a formal worship service from time to time, but we have probably heard His name profaned much more frequently than we have given serious thought to who He is and our relationship with Him. There is some worship in our lives, but its connection with daily life is, at best, tenuous.

And what is the nature of our lives? The disciples had found that what may have seemed like a short trip to the other side was now an arduous journey. It was the dark of the night. They were in the middle of the sea. They had been straining for hours, rowing against the wind, but were apparently making little headway.

Our life journeys can become much more difficult than we had anticipated. The Sea of Galilee is no more than 7 miles across - a very small distance. Yet, the disciples were rowing and rowing and could not reach their destination as they had expected.

Our natural lives can take on this appearance. The principles we embraced in younger years may look tarnished with age. The hopes and dreams, the angelic ideals we may have thought were nearly within our grasp, now appear far off, if we can see them at all. We are in darkness. Imagine how lost the disciples must have felt – at sea with no sense of how far they had come or how far they had to go. We can be equally confused, not knowing what to think. Our lives can seem endless routines, or one crisis followed by another, without any sense of accomplishment, without any end in sight. Although we have gotten somewhere, seen by their being in the middle of the sea, we have a hard time recognizing it. Yes, we have made progress, but it is unseen and unappreciated.

And what is more, all our efforts are like rowing against a strong wind. This mighty wind is the power which false ideas have upon us. Their force distorts our thinking, apparently rendering us motionless. One example of this is the erroneous concept that life in this world is meant to be fair. Perhaps inseminated by our idealism, we often assume that there should be an immediate reward for good and punishment for evil. This is always the case in the long run, but we may want it in the here and now.

So how then do we react when we see injustice, or harm being done? a young mother afflicted with a serious illness? or a vicious criminal walk free? We may rail at God, angered by His lack of compassion, by His inability to help. We may set Him off on a distant mountain and think Him uncaring. Why? Because strong winds gave us false expectations, they deceived us into thinking that this world is all, or at least much more important than it really is in the grand scope of existence.

But for those who keep on struggling, the Lord can walk upon the waters. Even in the darkest times of our lives, He can walk by. Note that it says, "He would have passed them by." The Lord is with us, but we may not notice it. He will not force Himself into our lives. He stands at the door and knocks, but does not force His way in. We can be so caught up in our own efforts, our successes and failures, in feeling sorry for ourselves or the problems around us, that we are not aware of Him and it seems as if He would pass by without stopping.

Yet, we can cry out to the Lord, as the disciples did. How? For one, we can at last recognize that we do need help, that our feeble attempts to make ourselves happy cannot succeed for long, or that our concentrated efforts to ignore any spiritual reality lead nowhere. We cry out to Him when, in grief over the loss of something we know to be valuable, we are at last willing to look at the world from His perspective. We also cry out to Him when in humility we acknowledge we need His guidance to believe, to have a purpose in existing.

In whatever way we cry out to Him, He immediately answers. And what is His message? "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." An amazing statement. He did not reassure them that the wind would cease, or empathize with their troubles. He told them to cheer up! Even as we are rowing against the wind He tells us to set aside our fears or problems, trust in His presence, and be of good cheer. For worry itself is one the greatest drags on our spiritual life.

The hells constantly try to focus our attention on ourselves - our problems, our worries, our failures. For the more they can do this, the less able we are to be useful or caring to others. The Writings note doubts are like small grains of sand which are relatively insignificant by themselves. But if they are brought close to the eye, they blind us to seeing the grand panorama of glorious truth the Lord displays before us (AC 6479).

If we can set some worries aside, the Lord can then get into our boats – enter our lives so we sense His love and closeness. This happens when we sincerely go to the Word – not to find a specific answer to a question, but just to sense the Lord's concern for us. It also happens when we put our problems aside and find ways to help others. He is with us as we journey – taking His truth and gradually having it penetrate our minds and our way of life. This stills the wind, the confusion recedes. Distorted thinking is set aside, it no longer halts our progress, it no longer prevents us from having a calm enter our lives.

This does not change the fact that we still have to keep rowing. The disciples were only halfway there. There will always be hellish currents to contend with, the weariness of apathy,

and the hidden rocks of evil. But with the Lord's direction, with a faithfulness to seeking His truth and following His way, the rowing can move us forward.

Then we are amazed and marvel at the Lord's doings. We see His power and His love. We are awestruck by it, knowing that without Him we can do nothing.

We can be rescued from fighting the winds at sea each day, each week, and each year. It does not happen once or twice and then all is well. We regularly lose our ways and need to see the Lord walking with us. If we will cry out to Him when we seem to be making no headway, then His words will guide us, His presence will comfort us. It will not miraculously remove all difficulties from our lives. But it will give us the vision and strength to continue rowing. It will bring us good cheer, for we will see that the Lord is indeed with us, and we have nothing to fear. Amen.

Lessons:       Mark 6:45-51  
                  AE 514:21

## Mark 6

<sup>45</sup> Immediately He made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while He sent the multitude away. <sup>46</sup> And when He had sent them away, He departed to the mountain to pray. <sup>47</sup> Now when evening came, the boat was in the middle of the sea; and He *was* alone on the land. <sup>48</sup> Then He saw them straining at rowing, for the wind was against them. Now about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea, and would have passed them by. <sup>49</sup> And when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed it was a ghost, and cried out; <sup>50</sup> for they all saw Him and were troubled. But immediately He talked with them and said to them, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." <sup>51</sup> Then He went up into the boat to them, and the wind ceased. And they were greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure, and marveled.

AE 514:21

All the details here ... signify Divine spiritual things, which nevertheless, do not appear in the letter; as the sea, the Lord walking upon it, the fourth watch in which He came to the disciples, the ship, Jesus entering into it, and thence rebuking the wind and the waves of the sea, with other particulars. But it is not necessary to explain what the spiritual things here separately signify, except to state that the sea signifies the ultimate of heaven and of the church, because in the ultimate borders of the heavens there are seas. The walking of the Lord upon the sea, signified the presence and influx of the Lord into them also, and thence life from the Divine with those who are in the ultimates of heaven; the life of these from the Divine was represented by the Lord walking upon the sea.... To walk, also, in the Word, signifies to live. This taking place in the fourth watch, signified the first state of the church, when it is daybreak and the morning is at hand, for then good begins to act by means of truth, and then the coming of the Lord takes place; the sea being in the meantime in commotion from the wind, and the Lord calming it, signifies the preceding natural state of the life, which state is turbulent, and, as it were, tempestuous; but when the state is next to the morning, which is the first state of the church with man, there is tranquillity of mind because the Lord is then present in the good of love.