

Other Little Boats

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on June 19, 1994.
 Scripture Lessons: 1 Samuel 17:32-49; Psalm 9:9-20; 2 Corinthians 6:1-13; Mark 4:35-41.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Jesus ends a busy day teaching and healing by the lake side. He needs some rest. He says to his closest friends, "Let's go to the other side of the lake." They put him in the boat and set sail. Other boats travel with him. Jesus stretches out in the back of the boat and falls asleep. Suddenly, a violent sweeps across the lake. Waves crash over the open boat. The boat starts to sink. Jesus sleeps through it all. The disciples are sure they're about to die. They wake up Jesus and cry out, "Don't you care that we're about to drown?" Jesus, then, speaks to the wind and waves, "Peace, be still!" The wind immediately stops. The waves calm down. Everything is suddenly peaceful and calm. Jesus turns to his disciples and asks, "Do you still have no faith?" Meaning, "Do you still have no faith that I care about perishing people? Do you still have no faith that I'm Lord of all nature?"

The gospels of Matthew and Luke contain versions of this very same story. Both borrow large portions of Mark's Gospel in telling their story of Jesus. But when they recount the story of Jesus calming the storm, they ^{don't}~~didn't~~ mention the other boats that were with Jesus. *The other boats ...*

Why did Mark mention these other boats? Well, maybe he just wanted to make an historical observation. The problem with that, however, is that the Gospel writers weren't interested in giving bits of trivial historical details like modern historical writers. They were interested, primarily, in telling us how God has acted in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to save a perishing

world. For example, the Gospel writers never describe what Jesus looked like, what color hair and eyes he had, how tall he was - they weren't interested in historical trivia. They tell us who Jesus is and what he's done for the salvation of the world. So I don't think Mark mentioned these other boats just because he has an eye for historical detail.

I believe he tells us about these other boats because he wants us to know something about God's grace for perishing men and woman. The storms of life sweep down over all of us. We're all in peril on the sea. When this happens, Christians call out to God through Christ. When we come through the storms we know we have Christ to thank. And we trust that Christ will bring us safely through the final storm of death. But not everybody has Jesus in the boat with them. Those in the other boats experience the storm. They also experience the calm after the storm. But they don't ^{know} Jesus calmed the storm. They don't know their salvation comes through Christ. Those other boats tell us about God's love, grace and mercy to others who don't have Jesus in the boat with them.

We live in a pluralistic age. We're surrounded by many boats of faith - Buddhists, Sikhs, Mormons, followers of Hare Krishna, Jehovah's Witnesses, and secular people who claim no faith in any god. In many ways they're with Christians in our concern for peace and for the sick and poor, but they don't share our faith in Christ.

This pluralism undermines the faith of many Christians in Jesus Christ as Lord. It need not, but it does. We're tempted to relativize our faith in Christ by

whereas earlier they believed they were making truth claims about Christ that were universally true

saying things like, "There are many ways to God." We have a tendency to keep our faith in Christ private and in the realm of feelings. We also realize that religion is at the root of so much bloodshed and conflict in the world. Protestants and Catholics murder one another in Northern Ireland. Christians and Moslems kill one another in Bosnia. Christian, Jewish and Moslem fanatics terrorize one another in Palestine. Sikhs and Hindus in India destroy one another's holy places. In a pluralistic world it seems arrogant, dangerous, even provocative to say that Jesus Christ is Lord of history and the only savior of the world.

And yet Christians can't help but want all people in the world to know Jesus. Christians want all people to ~~know and~~ believe that God has come among us in Jesus Christ to take our sins upon himself and save the world. So many people in the world, and in our town, don't know that Christ is ^{in control} ~~the savior~~. When they experience deliverance they don't thank God through Jesus Christ. When the surgeon says to them, "I got it all. You're going to live," they don't know that Christ has healed them, ~~through doctors and medication~~. When they arrive safely home from a business trip or vacation, they don't know that it's God in Christ who gives them safety. When they survive storms in their marriage they don't realize that Christ brought them safely through.

We who know that God has come to us in Jesus Christ know that all salvation comes through Christ. Salvation comes, not by chance; not by our hard work, nor because we're good and deserve salvation. Salvation comes through God's grace in Jesus Christ. Doctors, medicine, and modern technology are means

to healing, but the source of healing is God whom we know through Christ. Therefore, whenever we experience salvation we praise God through Jesus Christ.

We believe that God's love for us in Christ is an inclusive love - there's a wideness in God's mercy, like the wideness of the sea - but we're exclusive in attributing all salvation to Jesus Christ. Those in other boats will not be saved by their own religion.^{any more than we find are.} Religion, not even the Christian religion, has never saved any one. Only God who is known through Christ saves. Nor will those in the other boats be saved by their own efforts.^{any more than we find are} No matter how hard we try to bail out our boats, the final storm is so terrible that we can never hope to be saved by our own efforts. Only Christ saves.

We Christians have a great responsibility to tell our neighbors and the whole world that Jesus saves and has saved. I hate it when the wrong person gets the credit for doing something great. A few years ago ^a ~~the wrong~~ scientist ^{failed to} get credit for a life saving medical discovery.^{The scientist who actually made the discovery was. The credit was given to someone else.} Her friends were justifiably angry that she hadn't received the glory and praise she deserved. Her friends wanted her to get the credit. They were happy that thousands of people were being healed as a result of her research, but they wanted her to receive the honor and praise. That's the way Christians should feel when Christ doesn't get the honor and praise he deserves.

Christians feel, or should feel, pain and frustration whenever anyone other than the Lord Jesus Christ gets the ultimate praise and glory for our deliverance, healing, reconciliation or salvation. We're grateful for doctors and diplomats who

work for healing and peace in the world but we ultimately glorify Christ who works through earthen vessels. Christians deeply desire, or should deeply desire, all people, everywhere to glorify God through Jesus Christ. We tell others the good news of Jesus Christ because we want him to get all the credit for our salvation. We send out missionaries throughout the world, not just to heal and teach, but to bear witness to God's love, grace and mercy in Jesus Christ.

Because we know God through our Lord Jesus Christ, we have hope for those who die, not having known about Jesus - those countless people who lived and died before Jesus was born - and those countless millions who have been born and died since Christ's death and resurrection without having known him and trusted him as their Lord and Savior. We don't presume to know who, finally, will be saved or lost. But we know that Christ cares deeply for perishing sinners. Whoever makes it safely through that last storm, arrives safely by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Salvation comes from God. It's a miracle. We have no human potential to save ourselves. Only God, in Christ, can save. And God has saved us through Christ's life, death and resurrection. We believe that at one specific point in history God gave a definitive disclosure of Himself in Jesus of Nazareth. On the cross Jesus did for the world what no other has done or could do. In this one particular man God took all the unbelief, sin, and tragedy of the world upon himself. On the cross, the storm was stilled. On the cross, Jesus perished so that none of us need perish. Satan's head was crushed and trampled under foot. Death

received a mortal blow in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This is the good news God calls each one of us to bear witness to no matter how old or young we are. How can we as individual Christians bear more effective witness, in word and deed, to God's grace, love and mercy in Jesus Christ? How can this particular church bear bold and winsome witness, in word and deed, to Jesus Christ? This should be the top priority of our church. It should have priority over rebuilding. It should have priority over fund raising. How can we bear witness more effectively to God's grace in Jesus Christ? We need to talk about this in our homes. We need to talk about it in our committee meetings and Bible studies; in the Deacons and Session meetings.

We have good news to tell our neighbors, friends and enemies - Jesus Christ cares about this perishing world. Jesus is Lord of all nature. Jesus Christ has, in fact, saved this perishing world through his life, death and resurrection. What else can we do but repent of allowing other priorities to displace this great priority. What else can we do but believe the good news!

Let us pray: O God our defender, storms rage about us and cause us to be afraid. Rescue your people from despair, deliver your sons and daughters from fear, and preserve us all from unbelief; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

*This theme is found in several gospel stories. Jesus heals the servant of a centurion, heals a man born blind, turns water to wine, and heals the son of an official. In each case the person is healed without any faith in Christ; without knowing that Christ has healed him. Is this not an analogy of how God saves us through Christ before we can recognize who he is and what he has done for us.