

## Ruler of All Nature

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on the 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time, August 11, 1996. Scripture Lessons: Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28; Psalm 105:1-6, 16-22, 45b; Romans 10:5-15; Matthew 14:22-33.

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

The sea covers almost 75% of the earth's surface. It supplies us with food and minerals. It helps regulate the air temperature. It supplies the moisture for rainfall. If there were no sea, life could not exist on our planet. The sea seethes with energy. Waves striking a 60 mile stretch of coast contain enough energy to supply electrical power for a million homes. The problem for scientists is how to tap this energy.

The sea is awesome. For example, Rachel Carson tells in her book, The Sea Around Us, of a wave measurement in the Pacific ocean. The ship, the *Ramapo* - was battered by the waves for seven days, Rachel Carson tells us in her book, The Sea Around Us. The winds were against them constantly. Winds over 70 miles an hour battered them. One of the officers standing on the bridge saw a great sea wave rising astern at a level above the crow's nest which he knew was 112 feet above the keel of the ship. Imagine standing on the bridge of a ship and seeing a wave approach almost as high as the steeple of the church. The sea is awesome. "I am haunted by waters", wrote Norman Maclean in his poignant story, A River Runs Through It.

It's not hard to understand why some people worshiped the sea. The ancient Greeks were so impressed by its power that they called the sea, *Oceanus*, the name of the father of gods and men. The British agnostic, Bertrand Russell, wrote, "I wondered how anyone

could believe in God in the presence of something so much greater and more powerful as the sea."

The Bible tells us who created the sea and why it was created. Scientists attempt to tell us how. Scientists tell us that a billion years ago water existed only in the earth's atmosphere as steam. The surface of the earth was molten rock. As the surface temperature of the earth fell below the boiling point of water rain began to fall on the bare, rocky surface of the earth. It rained without let up for thousands of years. It rained with the force of a tropical downpour. The rain filled all the depressions and formed the seas.

That's what modern scientists say. The Bible says, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." And "God said, Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas: and God saw that it was good."

The Bible tells us that the seas were created by the Word of God. One day Norman Maclean was fishing with his father, a Presbyterian minister. His father took a break from fishing to read his Greek New Testament. As they sat by the river, Maclean's father spoke. "It says the Word was in the beginning, and that's right. I used to think water was first, but if you listen carefully you will hear that the words are underneath the water."

Christians believe that before the Sea existed, the Word that would eventually become flesh already existed from eternity.

Christians believe not only that God created the sea by his Word, we believe that God rules the sea by his Word. The Psalmist wrote, "You rule the raging of the sea" ( Psalm 89:9). And the Old Testament book of Job says that the Lord "treads upon the waves of the sea." The Lord is in control of the sea. The Psalmist wrote that the Lord "commanded and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea.... (and) he made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed." The Lord rules the wind and waves. The Lord is ruler of all nature.

The New Testament makes absolutely clear that the God who rules the sea is none other than a palestinian Jew who was crucified outside the gates of Jerusalem around A.D. 30. The early Christians were greeted with ridicule and derision when they claimed that a crucified Jew was the ruler of all nature. But Christians joyfully sing, "Fairest Lord Jesus, Ruler of all nature."

I tell you all of this because it's the background of the story in Matthew that we read for our Gospel lesson this morning. In that story we see a tiny ship tossed in the fury of a midnight storm on the sea of Galilee. Jesus wasn't in the boat. Jesus was praying in the hills. But early in the morning, after the disciples had been tossed about all night, Jesus came walking on the sea. And when he got into the boat, the wind suddenly ceased. "And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'"

I know that some Christians are uneasy about this kind of narrative because it tells of a miracle. Some Christians find the miraculous embarrassing and try to explain it away in naturalistic terms - like, Jesus didn't really walk on the water, he just knew where the rocks were. But I want you to think. What Jesus did was, without a doubt, a miracle. Nevertheless, that miracle of walking on the water is nothing like the miracle on which the Christian faith is built: the miracle of the incarnation in which God became a palestinian Jew. God got crucified. God died, was buried, and rose again from the dead.

Now let me ask you this. What kind of world do we believe in? Christians believe in a world that is ruled by the One who walked on the storm-tossed Sea of Galilee to his disciples overcome with fear and despair. Christians believe that God's love, grace and providence is found not only in a church, but in the mountains and on the seas and even in outer space. Christians believe that we live in a world in which there's no place and no experience outside the love of God?

Christians can say, with John Greenleaf Whittier,

I know not where his islands lift  
Their fronded palms in air;  
I only know I cannot drift  
Beyond his love and care.

This past week some of us were thrilled to hear that scientists may have found evidence for life on Mars. Millions of years ago, scientists surmise, a huge meteor struck the surface of the planet Mars and caused debris from Mars to scatter into outer space. About 16,000 years ago one of those fragments entered our atmosphere and landed in Antarctica. Scientific analysis of the

meteorite indicates life forms may have been present on Mars millions of years ago. What an exciting thought.

The former Princeton Seminary Professor and scientist, Stanley Jaki, writes, that a Christian can look forward with confidence to an eventual encounter with intellects from other solar systems, because the encounter will be between beings who will know of a universal brotherhood based on common dependence on the Creator whose Word became flesh and lived among us on planet earth.

Some Christians don't think of God as Lord of all nature. Many Christians think of God simply as a therapist whose job it is to make us feel better. And the Lord certainly does come to us in the storms of life to heal our hurts. William Barclay's twenty one year old daughter and her fiance were both drowned in a yachting accident. Barclay said that God did not stop that accident at sea, but he did still the storm in his own heart, so that somehow his wife and he came through that terrible time on their own two feet.

Christians believe that God is so much more than a therapist. Christ is the ruler of all nature. But Christ's rule is still a hidden reign. Earthquakes, avalanches, mud slides, epidemics, and floods take the lives of millions of men, women, and children and hide the fact that Christ is ruler of all nature. Nevertheless, there are signs that he is ruler of all nature - such as when he walked on the water and calmed the storm. And Christians believe that one day he will be openly recognized as ruler of all nature.

Until then we trust. We must trust. We must risk all that we have, betting all on that One who comes to us in Christ. And we bear witness to others to his hidden reign.

We have a God who made the world in the beginning; who endowed it with life and light and order and goodness; who made the mountains rise; who spread the flowing seas abroad, who built the lofty skies. And that same faithful God in Christ comes to us when our world is in confusion, when our lives are a sea of troubles and he hears our cries. He pours out his love on us from a cross and rises triumphant over all our evil. And he can make us new creations by his love.

AMEN

Let us pray:

O Savior, whose almighty word  
The wind and waves submissive heard,  
Who walked upon the foaming deep,  
And calm amid its rage did sleep:  
O hear us when we cry to thee.