

Sermon preached at Gisborne, 20 June 2021

Our Lord and our God, now as we hear your word, fill us with your spirit. Soften our hearts that we may delight in your presence. Sharpen our minds that we may discern your truth. Shape our wills that we may desire your ways. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

1 Samuel 17:32-49; Mark 4:35-41

Peace in the midst of a storm

Storms are caused by bad weather. But there are other storms that we may experience in the course of life. In either way, some storms are dangerous enough to change the direction of one's life entirely. In another, we may overcome them with hope and endurance. Today, Jesus shows us how we live in the storms. We'll find it through his word – 'rebuke,' as it helps us see two different world – a world of storms and a world of peace of God. This peace is given to us when we are faith in Christ that makes us peace bearers to bring peace to those who are living in the storms in the world.

1. Rebuke the storm of life

In Mark 4:35-41, we hear that a great (*megas*) storm threatens to sink the boats. As seasoned fishermen, the disciples know that it is no ordinary storm. Their words - "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" only show how desperate they are. Then Jesus wakes up and rebukes (*epitimaō*) the wind. It is the same word when Jesus rebukes an unclean spirit that has been tormenting a man.¹ In doing so, he breaks the power of the unclean spirit, which is the representative of evil forces.² Jesus also demonstrates that the sovereignty of God begins to make its way. Now, here on the stormy sea, the commanding word of Jesus overcomes the demonic force of the wind and the waves. In both cases, Jesus' action of a rebuke liberates the man from his unclean spirit and the disciples from the fear of death. When Jesus acts on something in this way, he stands entirely on the side of God, who alone has the right to overcome the godless powers.

The storm caused by the violent wind, or the unclean spirit tormenting the man, or the fever that has made Peter's mother in law fall ill are not unique examples, but they can happen in

¹ Mark 1:25

² In Luke 4:39, through the same word 'rebuke,' Jesus defeats Peter's mother-in-law's fever, which is also thought of as demonic.

life. By rebuking the evil powers, Jesus allows us to see the two different world – a world dominated by the godless powers and a world where peace of God is. Only faith in God enables us to see and live in the latter.

2. Living in the peace of God

“Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” It is an honest expression of the disciples in such a desperate situation. Although the situation looks hopeless, but they are seeking help from Jesus. Their cry for help is heard and immediately answered. Jesus does not rebuke them for fearing the storm as his double command ‘peace, be still’ is to the wind and the sea. Still, the command is also given to the disciples who are already overcome by fear, not by faith. The moment of the rebuke makes the disciples wake up from sleep in the world of despair, which allows them to see the world of hope. They become to themselves as the wind and the sea become calm. The moment of rebuke helps the disciples see themselves standing between the two worlds. It also helps that there is nothing they are afraid of as all is under God’s sovereign power.

Jesus ministry is always marked by similar activities like this performed on the border of two worlds. He chooses to go to marginal spaces such as near a graveyard,³ at a deathbed,⁴ in the wilderness,⁵ or a mountaintop.⁶ Wherever he goes, a desolate place is transformed into a sacred place like a temple of God as his words drive the fear of storms and fill the place with the peace of God. In such liminal places, Jesus opens minds to new possibilities and sets people free to enter into a new future in freedom and wholeness. In doing so, the reign of God extends divine holiness and a commitment to human well-being to places that we might have thought were beyond the limits. To him, no place is desolate. No one is abandoned. As the disciples see it at first hand, after the rebuke, their fear is gone, and the faith in God is restored, and the storm in the sea die away.

3. The church as the peace deliverer to the stormy world

In 1 Samuel 17:32, we see another storm scene and people’s different responses to it. No one dared to fight with Goliath – the giant Philistine except David. Although David was not trained

³ Mark 5:2-3

⁴ Mark 5:40

⁵ Mark 1:4-9

⁶ Mark 3:13

as a soldier, he didn't even want to wear the armour and the sword offered by Saul. His only weapons were the shepherd staff and five smooth stones from the wadi. Even so, David was able to face Goliath calmly in the name of God. Similar to Jesus, who rebukes the storm and the sea to make them calm, for David, it was the faith in God that overcome the present evil powers – Goliath and the Philistines including his own fear for life. The faith in God granted him the peace of God in the midst of the battle.

In our story time, we heard Yaser's story. The question was, "Do you find a storm and peace in this story? If so, where does this peace come from?" Yaser's five children have gone through tough things that any children may not have had. The words of Achmed make us feel sad. "I am tired of waiting here all day. We just stand in the rain. But I will tell you something: after everything we have been through, a bit of rain can't hurt me." He is still a young boy. Yet, he seems more mature than his peers, who may not have gone through such an ordeal. The ordeal has made him grow. In addition, standing in a queue outside of the registration office creates a clear borderline of two different worlds – a world of storms and a world of security and freedom. Achmed is able to endure the rain because he has hope for asylum, which will grant them refugee status in Germany. Hope is the source of Achmed's resilience and persistence. Hope to live in a new country makes him stay strong. In the end, peace is already there as hope and peace go hand in hand. We - Christians also live in the peace of God because of hope in Christ.

What do all these stories tell us – the church today? Our faith lives are often affected by unexpected storms in life: it can be caused by health, family issues, aging, finance, loneliness, to name a few. In the life of the church, we also experience storms. When we do, we often forget about hope or peace of God that are already there. When this sort of dementia continues, we will lose not only the right direction to go forward, but also our identity as followers of Christ. Then we become like others who are continually living in the world of storms, not knowing how to overcome it. Yet Jesus tells us this - "I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!"⁷ Faith in Christ enables us to rebuke the storms and command them to be calm because we are in the peace of the risen Lord. We pray for our faith today and tomorrow and always so that we will stay strong in the peace of God. We will continually be the bearers of peace to the

John 16:33

world of storms which needs someone like us who can rebuke the storms and liberate them from their sufferings. Amen.