

“Divine Power”

Mark 4: 35-41

Proper 7B, Boise, 2021

If you want the full answer to that question, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?,” just take my Inquirers’ Class when it starts up again in August. I’ll explain it all, the Person of Christ and His two natures, Divine and human. Having the sea obey Him was, of course, a demonstration of Divine power. King Cnut attempted the same, and got a very different result.

God’s command of the seas is the subject of quite a number of OT texts, beginning with the Creation in Genesis 1. The most dramatic description is the one we read earlier from Job. The prolonged debate Job had been conducting about the ways of God with his friends came to an abrupt end when “the LORD answered [him] out of the whirlwind” [Job 38: 1].

Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?

Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?

Tell me if you have understanding.

Or who shut in the sea with doors

when it burst out from the womb,

when I made clouds its garment

and thick clouds its swaddling band,

and prescribed limits for it

and set bars and doors,

and said, “Thus far shall you come, and no farther,

and here shall your proud waves be stayed? [Job 38: 1-2, 4, 8-11].

Scientists today claim to have a lot more knowledge than people in Job’s time about how the cosmos is put together. But if their equations are right, should we not marvel all the more at its creation, at the power that was once concentrated in that primordial particle that expanded to give the universe its present size? And should we not marvel even more than that at the mysterious cause that lies behind that stupendous beginning? And although the modern

understanding of the earth's formation differs considerably from the description we get here in the Bible, we will still do well to resort to those verses in Job to register our amazement. Yes, where were any of us when the Creator "laid the foundation of the earth" or "shut in the seas with doors . . . and prescribed limits for [them]?"

A sailor today, even one on an aircraft carrier or massive container ship, has respect for the power of the sea. Think of the fright of the mariners in ancient times, then, who were caught in a storm, being "carried up to heaven" on the crest of a tall wave and "down again to the deep." "They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunk man, and are at their wits' end" [Ps 107: 26-27], we recited in the Psalm. Their respect for the power of nature is exceeded only by that shown to the One who gives it such power and can control it.

So when they cry unto the LORD in their trouble,
He delivers them out of their distress.
For He makes the storm to cease,
so that the waves are still.
Then they are glad, because they are at rest,
and so He brings them into the haven where they desire to be
[vv. 28-30].

Some of you have been making your way through the OT narrative, as I suggested you do at the beginning of the year. I'm sure you have noticed by now that, by and large, it is the story of one nation, Israel, and its God, Yahweh — the LORD in capital letters. Because the story is of one nation, we give much weight to the first few chapters before Israel's ancestor, Abraham, is summoned for his mission. To get the significance of Yahweh's dealings with Israel, we must first understand that He is the Creator of all. He is not just a tribal deity in competition with Baal, Dagon, and the others in the region. We learn in the first two chapters of the Bible that Yahweh fashioned everything and thus has all the power, and, hence, the other deities are not really gods at all. They are either fallen angels or the products of men's imaginations. The LORD has all the

power, and He can use it both to create and to destroy.

Aren't we glad, then, that He exhibits other qualities too — truth, goodness, beauty, and what in Hebrew is called His *hesed* — an all-important word in Scripture that is translated in the KJV as “mercy” or “lovingkindness,” and in the version that we use in our readings here as “steadfast love”? The Divine love never degenerates into mere sentimentality, because it is the love of the all-powerful Creator who does not change. And His power is not something we should want to escape — if such were possible — because it is the power of a loving God that shows itself in mankind's redemption. Love and power are not opposed at the highest level of reality; they go together so well that they can never be separated.

On Trinity Sunday we learned that the Divine Son is “of one Being with” the Divine Father, and thus has all His same qualities. When the Son became incarnate and joined Himself to our kind of being, the being that is human, all those Divine qualities — truth, goodness, beauty, mercy, love, and power — were present in the Jew Jesus of Nazareth. A storm arose while He was with His disciples on the Sea of Galilee. The Divine Son awoke from His human sleep and commanded the wind to cease and the waters to be calm, in order that He might protect those whom He loved. This picture we have in today's Gospel is a miniature of mankind's salvation. The raging sea, though very much a physical reality for Jesus' disciples, is also a symbol of the evil powers unleashed in the Fall which threaten to engulf and destroy us. The power of the Creator is against them. As God, through His Son, brought a wonderful order from the watery abyss in the six days of creation, so He prevents a return to that same formlessness by His Anointed One, Jesus. The power to create, preserve, and redeem is exercised by the One who loves. “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?” Who else could it be?

It is no coincidence that our final hymn today, which also uses the imagery of stormy seas, was written by an Englishman. Although the United States has a large navy, it is really a continental country. Most Americans have little experience of the sea outside of those floating cities that we call cruise ships. But no member of an island nation lives far from the sea. England is a sea-faring nation with many songs, poems, and stories about the perils faced by those who travel on it. Our local Shakespeare Theater will be performing *The Tempest* in August. Hence, Charles Wesley was well understood by his countrymen when he compared sailing through a storm to the journey that every Christian soul must make to reach its Heavenly home, a dangerous journey fraught with countless temptations.

Jesus, Lover of my soul,
let me to thy bosom fly,
while the nearer waters roll,
while the tempest still is nigh:
hide me, O my Saviour hide,
till the storm of life is past;
safe into the haven guide,
O receive my soul at last.

Even so.

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