**Sea-change**

Text: Mark 4:35-41

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**Scriptures:** Psalm 107:23-32; Mark 4:35-41

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 211, 313, 107, PH459, 180

**Series:** The gospel of Mark (#12)

**Theme:** When a great storm arose on the Sea of Galilee, threatening to drown the disciples and Jesus in their boat, Christ commanded the wind and the sea to be at peace; resulting in a great calm so that the fear-filled untrusting disciples questioned the identity of Jesus.

**Proposition:** During the storms of life, and always, trust in the man Jesus, the Almighty Son of God.

**Introduction**

Did you know that the ship was an ancient Christian symbol? It depicted the Church *‘tossed on the sea of disbelief, worldliness, and persecution, finally reaching safe harbour with a cargo of human souls’*. Part of the Biblical basis for this symbol comes from God’s saving of Noah’s family during the great global flood (e.g. 1 Pet 3:20-21). The other basis is the protection of the Apostles on the stormy Sea of Galilee

Do you enjoy being in, or on, the sea? Most of us have been to the beach, some enjoy fishing from a boat out at sea. At times, the ocean can be beautiful and calm, but it can change rapidly to become rough and life-threatening. I remember once going out surfing in Australia. It was a beautiful hot sunny day, there was a light offshore breeze. I was enjoying the waves then I realised that I was drifting further and further from the shore. As I started to paddle, I wasn’t making any progress back to shallow water. The wind had picked up and the sea was getting rougher. I began to realise that I was in increasing danger, and I redoubled my efforts to reach the shore. It was with great relief that I finally felt the sand again with my feet.

I experienced a ‘sea-change’ out from the beach. A sea-change is a sudden change in wind and/or waves in the ocean, it is also an expression[[1]](#footnote-1) in the English language to describe a substantial change in perspective, especially one which affects a group of people. It is similar in meaning to a ‘paradigm-shift’ – an important change that happens when the usual way of thinking about or doing something is replaced by a new and different way.

For the disciples, experiencing a storm on the Sea of Galilee, not only was there a physical ‘sea-change’ when the water became dangerously rough and then calm again, there was a deeper inner ‘sea-change’ within them. There was a ‘paradigm-shift’, a radical change in their thinking about the identity of Jesus. We are going to consider three contrasts this morning:

1. Still and Storm
2. God and Man
3. Faith and Fear
4. **Still and Storm**

We have some large lakes in New Zealand. Do you know which ones have the greatest surface area? Lake Taupo – 623 sq.km. Lake Te Anau is next at 348 sq.km, Then Lake Wakatipu (Queenstown) at 289 sq.km. Nearer to us, Lake Ellesmere (with a maximum depth of only 2 meters) is 182 sq.km. A close fifth is Lake Wanaka at 180 sq.km, then at sixth place Lake Manapouri in Fiordland at 143 sq.km.

The Sea of Galilee has an area of 166 sq.km, being 20kms long and 13kms wide. It is a large body of water with a maximum depth of 43m. If it were in New Zealand, it would be our sixth largest lake – larger than Lake Manapouri, but smaller than Lake Wanaka. This inland freshwater lake is fed mainly from the Jordan River which flows through the Sea of Galilee southwards to end in the Dead Sea. If you look at a map of the Palestine, you’ll see that there are only two significant lakes, the Sea of Galilee and the larger salt lake known as Dead Sea (approx. 600 sq.km – almost as big as Lake Taupo).

In the Bible the ‘Sea of Galilee’, is also called the ‘Lake of Gennesaret’ (Luke 5:1), the ‘Sea of Tiberias’ (John 6:1) and in the Old Testament ‘Chinnereth’ (Num 34:11). The lakeside settlements of Capernaum, Bethsaida and Tiberias feature in the gospel accounts. Capernaum, on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee, was the centre of a flourishing fishing industry. It was on the shore of this body of water that Jesus called the fishermen Simon, Andrew, James and John to be His disciples (Mark 1:16-20).

As the public ministry of Jesus became more and more widely known, large numbers of people followed Him, not only from Galilee, but from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, Tyre and Sidon (3:8). Many people were likely drawn mostly by the prospect of being healed from sickness. The crowds also came to hear Him teach. When Jesus taught the parable of the Sower, and likely also the other two ‘kingdom growth’ parables, he did so from a boat on the Sea of Galilee. The crowd listened on the shore (Mark 4:1).

At the end of the day, when evening had come, Jesus said to his disciples “*Let us go across to the other side*” (4:35). The text from Mark’s gospel that we are focussing on today reveals what happened as Jesus and His disciples travelled across the lake to the eastern shore (‘the country of the Gerasenes’). We’ve already had quite a bit of lake geography in this sermon. Here is some more: The Sea of Galilee is a very unusual inland lake. It is some 200 meters below the level of the Mediterranean Sea and is surrounded by high mountains. Sudden violent storms were quite common on the Sea of Galilee. One of these extreme weather events came that evening/night. It whipped up the lake surface into waves so high that the boat was filling up with water.

In that vessel were four experienced fishermen – Simon, Andrew, James and John. They knew the local weather conditions well. They were presumably experts at handling a boat in rough conditions.

Imagine that you are a passenger on a plane which experiences severe turbulence in flight. As you sit there with your seat belt on: feeling the violent ups and downs you wonder ‘*how much can this plane handle before the wings fall off and we crash to the ground*’? Then you notice that the cabin crew are looking really worried and scared. Seasoned travellers only panic when there is a very good reason. The disciples were panicking in the boat that evening. Hear their imploring voices “*Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?*” (v38), likely expressing anxiety and fear.

This was a ‘great windstorm’ with crashing waves that were in the process of sinking the boat. There were no locator beacons, lifejackets or rescue helicopters back then. The threat of death by drowning loomed large. Some of us may have been in boats, but few have been in life- threatening situations at sea. Yet at times, people like you and me find ourselves outside of our ‘comfort zone’, experiencing great pressure and uncertainty. In these times of great fear and anxiety we can feel overwhelmed.

The Sons of Korah express these common human emotions using the imagery of drowning in Psalms 42 and 88: “*All your breakers and your waves have gone over me*” (42:7); “*you overwhelm me with all your waves*” (88:7). Do you know what this feels like? In grief after the death of a husband or wife, son, daughter or friend. In sickness or suffering from an accident. Overwhelmed by the troubles of life a feeling of drowning can come without any physical water around. Does it ever seem to you like Jesus isn’t there with you? – that how disciples felt.

In that boat those grown men likely felt vulnerable and helpless, and they did not know what to do. That’s why they went to find Jesus. He was there in the boat with them. He had not abandoned them. Brothers and sisters in our Lord, neither does He abandon us! (Josh 1:5, Heb 13:5; Matt 28:20). Trust your Lord and Saviour during the storms of life and always! Jesus is the focus of our next point:

1. **God and Man**

Did you know that the world record for staying awake is about 11 days without sleep (set by Randy Gardner in 1965). Even 24 hours without sleep severely affects a person’s ability to function. Pulling ‘all-nighters’ when studying for exams is not a good idea! As human beings, sleep is as vital for our wellbeing and ultimately for our continued life. It is as essential for us as air, water and food. Have you ever had such a busy long day that you are so tired that you can sleep anywhere – even if you are in noisy place? When I was a young boy, my parents once took an incriminating photograph of me on Christmas day slumped forward at the dinner table fast asleep with my head in a bowl full of pudding!

The public ministry of Jesus was very busy. The days were long and filled with preaching, teaching, healing and casting out demons. The crowd pressure was so great that Jesus had no time to eat (3:20). He faced opposition from religious leaders and from His own earthly family (3:21). When He left in the boat to cross the Sea of Galilee after another full day, He fell asleep in the back of the boat (the stern). He was so deeply asleep that not even the loud sound of the storm woke Him up. This is truly remarkable as Mark records! “*He was in the stern, asleep on the cushion*” (Mark 4:38). Here is the astounding truth again revealed in Scripture: In so many ways Jesus is like us. He got worn out, He needed rest. He is a man. He slept.

Yet, for God, sleep is unnecessary. He is eternally awake. “*He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep*” (Ps 121:4). Jesus laid aside His divine power of eternal wakefulness to take on human flesh and become ‘one of us’ (Phil 2:6-7); a person who needs sleep on a daily basis. “*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin*” (Heb 4:15).

If your life is calm and tranquil this morning – Praise God! If you are experiencing some kind of a ‘sea-change’ in your life, remember that Jesus understands. He knows what it is like. He is a sympathetic, understanding, Saviour. All here have slept (perhaps some of us in sermons😊), but not one of us has ever calmed a storm. Only God is capable of such an incredible act. Why? because it is very, very difficult. Let me explain.

The complexity of weather systems can be expressed this way “A butterfly flaps his wings in Panama and it snows in Japan”? All air surrounding planet earth is connected. Small changes in one part of the atmosphere have an effect elsewhere. The atmospheric system is so complex and variable that the best computer models and satellite images still cannot make completely reliable weather predictions – especially when a large storm system is approaching. In order to calm a storm as Jesus did, it is necessary to instantaneously make the air pressure and temperature around the lake the same but also to make further minor adjustments to a large area of the earth’s atmosphere in order to keep the wind still. This is why there is no human technology available to instantly stop the wind. To do so requires an intricate use of immense power over a large part of the atmosphere. It’s just not possible for anyone apart from God to do this.

Stopping air movement one thing – but what about waves? Wave motion continues after wind dies down. That’s why you often see swell at sea and surf on the beach on a calm day. Stopping wave motion instantly is also impossible for us. Children, with your parents’ permission you could try this experiment at home in the bath. Start a wave sloshing up and down the bath and then try to calm it down quickly. You can’t – it takes time to subside. Jesus calmed the rough waters of the Sea of Galilee instantly. When He was woken up, He ‘rebuked the wind’ and said to the sea ‘peace! be still!’ (Mark 4:39). Jesus commanded the Creation just by speaking words.

This should not surprise us anymore than that Jesus had been sleeping because Jesus is not only fully human, He is also fully God. It was God spoke the whole creation into existence with His word. It was God who caused the sea to retreat and dry up when He delivered the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt. The Psalmist writes in Ps 89:9: “*You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them*”.

God, and God alone, controls chaotic sea, as we read from Psalm 107 earlier. “*For he commanded and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea. They mounted up to heaven; they went down to the depths; their courage melted away in their evil plight; they reeled and staggered like drunken men and were at their wits' end. Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed” (Psalm 107:25-29).*

Jesus is the **Almighty** Son of God. If you are in a small boat on troubled waters, it is very good to have Almighty God with you. In the storms of life, it is good to have Almighty God with you. It is good to know that He has the power that you and I lack. It is good to know that He can handle a crisis when we can’t. However complex, entangled, chaotic or seemingly hopeless your situation, now or in the future. Trust in Christ. He can deal with all the storms in your life. Congregation, the best way to live is to have Jesus with us. To follow Him. Because of who He is and what He has done. During the storms of life and always,trust in Jesus, the Almighty Son of God. Have faith, not fear, which brings us to our third point:

1. **Faith** **and Fear**

It must have suddenly become very quiet after Jesus commanded the storm to cease and the wind and waves became calm. Then He spoke again, this time to His disciples, and asked them two questions: “*Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?*” (v40). The Greek word translated afraid has the sense of ‘fainthearted, timid and cowardly’. The disciples lacked courage in the face of the storm. They didn’t yet trust Jesus with their lives. In His second question, Jesus connects this lack of courage to a lack of faith, a lack of belief in Him.

Jesus had been preaching this message to all who would listen: "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel*." The disciples had heard the message, but they still did not believe that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the ruler of the Kingdom of God. Their lack of faith hadn’t become clear as they sat under His teaching, any more than whether we actually believe is clear when we are sitting in a church pew (or standing in a pulpit). Faith (or lack of it) is often most clearly seen when we experience a sudden change of circumstances. James wisely recognizes this abiding reality when he writes: “*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness*” (James 1.2-3).

Do you enjoy eating bananas? I do. They are an incredible fruit, wrapped up in a well- designed, convenient, easy-to-peel curved yellow pouch. If you apply pressure to a banana – for example by standing on it, then the skin will burst and what was invisible on the inside will come oozing out. That is what happens to people like us when we are under intense pressure; when we are scared, very anxious, or if we think our lives or something else that is of great value to us is being threatened. What is on the inside of us becomes visible. It just comes out. Like the words from your mouth if you suddenly stub your toe or accidently hit your finger with a hammer or when you are driving on a busy road and someone suddenly cuts you off.

For the disciples on that boat on the Sea of Galilee what was inside them came out. Their lack of courage, their lack of faith, became visible. Now there is nothing hidden from God. He knows exactly what is inside of us all (Psalm 139:1-2). The divine purpose of trials, of storms in life, of sea-changes is not so that God can see whether we have faith or not, it is so that **we** can see. In His lovingkindness and grace, God gives us eyes to see what may otherwise be invisible to us when we come under uncomfortable pressure.

There were two dramatic physical sea-changes on that boat trip across the lake. A great windstorm had arisen and then Jesus had stilled the storm. There was another ‘sea-change’ in within the disciples. They had been afraid of the storm, now they experienced a different kind of fear! Mark finishes his account of this event with these words: ‘*And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?"*’ (Mark 4:41). The Greek words translated ‘great fear’ are different from the word ‘afraid’ in the previous verse. Literally, God’s Word says, ‘*they feared with a great fear*’. This conveys that the disciples were more afraid after the storm had ceased than they had been when their lives were in danger. How can that be?

Because they saw the glory of Jesus revealed through His command of Creation. They knew that only God could do what Jesus had done. The ‘fear’ word in verse 41 is also used when Peter James and John later saw the transfiguration of Jesus (Mark 9:2). When the women found the empty tomb of Jesus and were told by the angel “*You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen*” (Mark 16:6) Mark records that they fled from the tomb and that they were afraid (same word). This is not a lack of courage or faith; it is the reverent fear of God. It is not a paralyzing fear but the only response of a person who has encountered God at work. Through the trauma of this seemingly near-death experience, the disciples were being led to see who Jesus really is. In the storm they had lacked faith, but later they would come to confess to Jesus ‘*you are the Christ*’ (Mark 8:29).

How is your fear this morning? Perhaps you are like the disciples, lacking courage to face storms in life? That storm on the Sea of Galilee was too much for them, but not for Jesus. Likewise ‘sea changes’ in your life may be too much for you but they are more than manageable for Christ. He has the power which you lack. Trust Him. Know Him. He is both man and God. Able to understand. Able to act. Able to save. He is perfect Lord, He is One to be with, the One to follow.

If you have a ‘sea-change’ in your life and you are struggling, pray “*Lord Jesus, help me*”. Remember these deeply theological words of truth: “*With Christ in my vessel I can smile at the storm, smile at the storm*”. “*With Christ in my vessel I can smile at the storm, as we go sailing home*”. Life on earth is stormy. ‘Sea-changes’ happen unexpectedly. The Christian life can be especially turbulent. God uses pressure to show us what we are like inside in order to drive us to seek refuge in Him.

I’m not asking you to go surfing this morning in an offshore breeze! But I am inviting you to come to the Lord Jesus Christ. Get onboard with Him. It may be a rough journey – probably will be- but there is no better place to be. No safer place to live your life. He is an awesome Saviour. Powerful and mighty. Gentle and forgiving. During the storms of life and always,trust in Jesus, the Almighty Son of God.

AMEN.

1. The term originally appears in William Shakespeare's The Tempest in a song sung by a supernatural spirit, Ariel, to Ferdinand, a prince of Naples, after Ferdinand's father's apparent death by drowning: [↑](#footnote-ref-1)