

NHPC, Overland, MO—6/24/18

"Brother Jesus, Are You Sleeping?"

TEXT: Mark 4: 35-41

*"Are you sleeping? Are you sleeping, brother John? Brother John?"*

These words from a well-known children's song sound so innocent, as if a younger sister is trying to wake up an older brother so they can play together. Even when spoken by children, these words actually have a deeper meaning: *"Brother John! Wake up and play with me. I need a playmate! Do you care enough to wake up and play with me? Or, would you rather sleep?"*

All people, not only children, need friends and companions in life. When our friends are sleeping, we are unsure they still will be our companions and helpers.

If there is a crisis in our life we will wake people up to make sure that they are still there to help us. In the comic strips, we are amused when Blondie wakes up Dagwood so that he can go check out the noise downstairs. It might be a burglar! Burglars are the husband's responsibility!

This is a stereotypical gender role of course, but Blondie also represents a general human dependence on other people. When confronted by an unexpected, or difficult, situation we want help. We need to know that the other people in our lives are still there to help us.

If they are asleep, we will wake them up. When we ask, *"Are you sleeping?"* it is often a cry for help: *"Do you still care*

*about me? Wake up and reassure my troubled soul."*

In our gospel lesson for this morning, the disciples were in a very difficult and dangerous situation. Jesus had commanded them to go on a boat ride with him.

After they pulled away from the shore, they eventually found themselves in the midst of a very heavy rain storm. Water began to fill the boat and the disciples feared for their lives.

They turned to Jesus for help, but he was sleeping! Sleeping? The disciples were shocked. How could Jesus be sleeping at a time like this? They broke his slumber with a question: ***"Do you not care that we are perishing?"*** (Mark 4: 38.)

The disciples did not wake up Jesus by saying, *"Gee whiz! How can you sleep through a thunderstorm?"*

Rather, they were questioning his compassion for them. in this dangerous situation. They were afraid! They were about to drown, but Jesus their leader was sleeping!

Needless to say, after they woke him up, he did come to their rescue. He calmed the winds. He saved their lives, but he also seemed a bit perturbed. He said, ***"Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"*** (Mark 4: 40.)

The implication seems to be that there was no real danger, but since Jesus was

now awake after his nap, he performed a miracle anyway and calmed the wind.

Jesus was also calming the spirits of the disciples. This seems to be the point of this story: Jesus calmed the troubled souls of the disciples, even when there was no real danger.

This story is like a mirror that reflects our own relationship with Jesus Christ. As we examine what happened out there on the lake, we see our own relationship with Jesus. Jesus questioned the faith of the disciples. Does Jesus also question our faith?

What is our reaction in a situation of fear and uncertainty? Do we have faith that Jesus is with us, no matter what? Do we trust Jesus to protect us, always? Well... Yes, we believe in Jesus. But, we also want Jesus to be doing something.

There are so many problems swirling around us, all the way from families separated at the border to climate change and terrorism, and, of course, there are our own personal struggles of health, aches and pains, and loneliness. When is Jesus going to wake and do something about all this?

We believe that Jesus is with us and will save us. But when? And how? When will he wake from his slumbers to save us?

We have these doubts when we become anxious and impatient. We want salvation now! If not now, we want to know when! We read our Bibles and pray, searching for assurances of salvation. We are

looking for Jesus so that he can reassure us that we will be saved.

When we go looking for Jesus in this way, we often discover that Jesus questions our faith. When we read the Bible verses like our gospel for this morning, we hear the same question the disciples heard long ago on that lake: ***"Have you still no faith?"*** (Mark 4: 40.)

This is the key question for Christians in all times and places. Faith is more than believing in Jesus and promises of salvation. Faith is also trusting in Jesus, even when the going gets tough.

Christians are people who claim trust in Jesus in all the moments of our lives. And yet, in times of greatest distress we often panic. Only when there is illness or death in the family do some people begin a frantic search for God. When there is a great national tragedy, like September 11<sup>th</sup>, church pews were full, but soon they are empty again...

As our gospel lesson testifies, Jesus is willing to help people in their moments of greatest need, but he obviously prefers we have faith in him, not just when we face death and tragedy or illness and depression.

I know that I am probably preaching to the choir about this, but we need frequent reminders to live our lives with faith every day.

If you do, you will be better prepared to face moments of distress without panic or deep depression. When illness and death

come knocking, you need not go into a deep funk, because you know that Jesus is already with you. In the midst of a crisis, you know God will provide.

On a personal note, I always thought that the death of my parents would bring great distress to my life. And yet, when my father died almost 20 years ago, the distress and sadness was not nearly as so bad as I thought it would be.

I suppose that there were several reasons for this. He died after several months of a painful battle with cancer. When he died, it was with a sense of relief both for him and our family.

I was also able to stay busy so that I did not dwell too much on his death. And yet, I think that the biggest factor was God's goodness and Jesus' presence in my life I did not go into a panic or a depression because I have faith in the love of God. This trust in God's love did not develop overnight: I grew up experiencing God's love through my family and the church. At the time, I had been preaching and teaching to trust God's love for almost 20 years

And yet, the importance of this didn't really hit home until a moment of personal crisis. I didn't panic or go into a deep depression. Instead the love of God took over because of my trust in God that had been nurtured in me throughout my life.

Although I still miss my Dad, I am not overly depressed about it because my trust in the love and presence of Jesus

keeps me going. And yet, as I look out over the world it sometimes seems as if Jesus is taking a nap. It's tempting to cry out, "*Brother Jesus, are you sleeping?*"

Faced with the many difficulties of modern life, some people panic and begin a frantic search for God and the meaning of life. Often desperate searches for answers to our problems leads people into frustration and panic, sometimes even extremism and violence.

Needless to say, this causes even more problems. If we remain steady in our trust in Jesus Christ, there is no need for overreaction or panic.

Jesus is always with us and will save us, even if it sometimes seems as if he is sleeping. As Christians, we trust that Jesus is with us every day. Because of this constant trust in Jesus, we will not panic in moments of great distress.

Remember that Jesus will save us according to his purpose and timetable. Trust his gracious and loving plan for human life. Live in the world with the assurance of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Let us pray.

"To Jesus Christ, who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests of his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever."

AMEN.