

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth; for His word is truth. Amen

The Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany (2022)

Jesus, a Man of Authority.

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“And the men marveled, saying, “What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?”” (Matthew 8:27, ESV)

The Gospel Reading for today is often presented as an allegory of life. Disciples of Christ are buffet by the storms of life, can we say sin, and our Lord Jesus rescues us from this stormy danger, and I must admit, there was a time when I saw this understanding from reading this Gospel in that light.

It was easy for me to visualize the apostle’s description of the storm on the Sea of Galilee, the waves washing over the gunnels of the disciple’s little boat, threatening to swamp it. This image recalled my time of service in the Navy when serving aboard ship I experienced very heavy seas. Seas capable of capsizing and sinking the ship. And although gripped by fear, I faithfully followed the authority of my superiors and carried out my duties and God saw the ship safely through the storm. But this is not the focus of our Gospel Reading for today. Instead its focus is Christological, that is, the study of the life of Christ, and its focus is on the authority of Jesus and how this authority manifests itself in the lives of those who follow Him.

To get a true understanding of the significance of the Gospel Reading for today we must first start with the preceding section; Matthew 8:18-22. In those verses, Jesus commands the apostles to get in the boat and go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Immediately after giving this order, two men approach Jesus saying they too want to follow Him, and this leads to St. Matthew’s narrative leading to the disciples fearing the storm. These two men, who want to follow Jesus, truly have no concept of what it means to follow Him, nor do they have an understanding of or faith in the purpose, the priority, and the extent of our Lord’s authority.

The first man, a scribe, comes to Jesus, saying ***“Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.”*** Addressing Jesus as “Teacher” and saying he desired to become a follower of Jesus, shows us that this man is not yet a disciple of Jesus nor does he know what it means to become a follower of Jesus. Scripture is clear, no one can initiate a saving relationship with the Son of God. the Son of God calls His disciples. Therefore, no one can come to Jesus unless they are drawn to Him by the Father (John 6:44). So in response to this fellow’s statement, Jesus says, ***“Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” (Matthew 8:19-20, ESV)***

These words of Jesus imply that this scribe has no concept of the difficulty he will face as a follower of Christ. Although Jesus is the Son of God, He will not use His authority for His own comfort or self-promotion, much less the comfort or self-promotion of his disciples. Therefore, to follow Jesus means one must surrender all of their own guarantees of comfort or stable existence. Instead of promoting Himself, our Lord’s authority will cause Him to give Himself even unto death for others. Therefore, all who wish to follow Him will need to understand the humble purpose of Jesus’ authority. Moreover, only the call of Jesus, His choosing of His disciples, will bring them to a proper understanding, to faith in Him, trusting in His humble, sacrificial, self-giving authority. Only by the divine will of God can a follower of Jesus rejoice in Christ’s call and take up his own

cross, following Jesus in the way of suffering and death, confident of the resurrection. Our Lord's response is a distressing response to the scribe and to all natural men.

Another, a second man, approaches Jesus and says he wants to follow Him too, but first he asks, ***“Lord, let me . . . go and bury my father.”*** To which Jesus answers, ***“Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.”***” (Matthew 8:21-22, ESV)

Now we're not certain what the situation was for this man who wanted to bury his father, but our Lord's answer says to him, nothing should get in the way of you following Me. What's clear in the man's request is that he wanted to follow Jesus, but he wanted to follow on his own terms, he had something to do that took precedence over his following Jesus. Thus, Jesus challenges his allegiance, saying, if you want to go and bury your father instead of following me, what else in the future may get in your way of following me? Where will you draw the line? Which relationship will be primary for him, Jesus or family? We cannot look at this as a question of faithfulness, for Jesus knows we're all sinners, falling short of God's commandments. But no one can be a disciple of Jesus if he lessens the authority of Jesus to be on a level equal to human authorities. Allegiance to Christ must be a disciples first priority. Jesus makes it clear, ***“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”*** (Matthew 10:37, ESV)

Who among us would look our Lord in the eye and say to Him, “You're not first in my life?” I dare say none of us. But Jesus knows that we who are His disciples will not always fully acknowledge His authority or place Him first and foremost in our lives. Each of you at your confirmation took an oath that said Jesus will always be the authority in your life. You were asked at your confirmation:

Do you renounce the devil? Do you renounce all his works? Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it? And you answered, *“I do, by the grace of God.”*

These words affirmed that you, as a child of God through Baptism into Christ, promised, by the grace of God, that as a disciple of His, you would follow Jesus to the end of your days, recognizing and obeying His authority. Let the dead, bury the dead. If we place earthly obligations ahead of Jesus, we fail to adhere to the authority of Jesus and thus we sin, and like all sin, it must be repented of.

Completing His discussion with these men, the disciples of Jesus then follow Him into the boat and start out across the Sea of Galilee when suddenly a great storm comes up. The waves began to threaten to swamp the boat, possibly sinking it. All this time our Lord is asleep in the back of the boat, fearing nothing, especially the angry weather. But not so the disciple, they were greatly afraid. So fearful in fact that St. Matthew tells us ***“They went and woke [Jesus], saying, “Save us, Lord; we are perishing.”***” When awakened, Jesus looks at His disciples and asks, ***“Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?”*** Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm,” (Matthew 8:25-26, ESV) and ***“The men marveled, saying, “What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?”***” (v. 27)

These disciples, these men, do not know who Jesus is! Yes, He has called them to be His disciples, but they, do not really know who He is, they do not know His true identity or how He has authority over nature. Now their lack of knowledge does not mean they are not His disciples, because Jesus does not say they are without faith. Therefore, they must have some faith. Indeed, their faith is focused on *“What sort of man this is?”* Thus, they are far from where they need to be regarding an answer to their question.

As I said earlier, many pastors desire to allegorically preach this sermon, but this is a problem. When a pastor implies that Jesus will protect you from the storms of life, the reality of life in this world is that Jesus does not always protect us from the storms of life. In the Gospel Reading for today, Jesus makes the storm go away, and the disciples are saved from drowning. But in our genuine Christian experience the Lord doesn't always make the danger go away. More often than we like to admit, the danger remains, even prevails. Disciples of Jesus die, churches are destroyed by storms, and the Christian faith is persecuted. Moreover, our Lord Jesus Himself, whom the disciples follow, who has the authority to control nature, life, and death, will go to the Altar of the Cross where the Father will not spare Him from death. Thus, Christians should avoid the temptation to read this Gospel as a parable on discipleship. Our Gospel Reading for today speaks primarily of the authority of Jesus. This Gospel message is Christological, inviting its readers to come to a deeper understanding of our Lord Jesus who answers our question, ***“What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?”***

The One who can heal and cast out demons by means of His word, now rebukes the wind, and it obeys. The creation responds to the One who possesses the authority of the Creator. Thus, the implicit Christology of our text is orthodox, inescapable, and stunning. This man, who is not the Father in heaven, is nevertheless God, the same God of the OT who created the world and who reigns over it. He is also God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, the Word, ***“who is the head of all rule and authority,” (Colossians 2:10, ESV)*** able to calm the chaos and restore peace to fallen creation.

As followers of Jesus Christ, you and I know that the creation is no longer the ***“very good”*** place that God originally made. It has been corrupted by sin and thus it is unpredictable and dangerous. Living in this corrupted world makes it difficult for us to imagine a perfect world. But even in this fallen world, the heavens are able to ***“declare the glory God” (Ps. 19:1, ESV)***.

Our text shows us the One who not only calms the storms of the sea, but it shows us the One who will restore all of creation to the original goodness which God created. This restoration will take place through Jesus, for He alone has the authority to accomplish it. Through Baptism our sins were washed away, and in those blessed waters we were given faith to believe in Jesus and we were made children of God, children awaiting the Day when Christ shall usher in the new heaven and the new earth, the new creation into which the redeemed in Christ shall be raised to life everlasting.

St. Matthew shows, the disciples in the boat do not yet understand the authority of Jesus, but we who have been given the gift of faith to believe, and Holy Scripture to see God revealed in Christ Jesus, we understand. We understand that He came to undo the damage caused by sin by His death and resurrection, gained the victory over sin, death, and the devil. This wonderful gift called faith leads us to turn to God in repentance, confessing our sins, assured that they are forgiven by our Father in heaven for the sake of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Thus, filled with this faith and knowledge, we wait for the day of His return, knowing the creation will continue to groan in agony because of its corruption. But we also know that on the Last Day, the Son of God will rebuke this creation, and all will be calm, and we shall live forever in the newly created heaven and earth. Even though we are of little faith, He has come with authority to declare that faith righteous, and to grant us life everlasting in His heavenly home where there will be no storms, no agony, no pain. Only serene joy and great jubilation with the One who has all authority in heaven and earth, our Lord Jesus Christ. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

