
Amidst the Chaos

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A sermon by Canon Wallace Marsh

"He was in the stern, asleep on the cushion ..."

Margaret Ann and I just got through celebrating our second anniversary. The celebration of our anniversary is undoubtedly one of the reasons today's gospel passage takes me back to our honeymoon in Jamaica.

Seeing that we are both fair skinned, I decided to rent a honeymoon hut right on the beach of our all-inclusive resort. Each honeymoon hut was equipped with an amazing porch, so we could run into the ocean, hit up the tiki bar, swim in the pool and quickly return to the shade, without damaging our "Casper White" complexion. Well, after four days on the porch of the honeymoon hut, we decided it was time to venture out, so we signed up for an afternoon of snorkeling.

Later that day, we boarded a boat with about thirty other honeymooners. Our two captains embodied every Jamaican stereotype, with their "calm and free spirited demeanor." Both of them would have been capable of sleeping on the stern. As we boarded, the sea suddenly became choppy and the waves began to grow. Our guides fired up the motor and off we went slamming into breakers, tossed by the waves until we were a mile off the coast.

After a rough twenty-minute ride we arrived at the reef. Thankfully, I made it without having to lean over the side of the boat in front of all the other honeymooners. As we anchored, our guides began to express some concern about the conditions of the sea and the safety of their passengers. Thus, they made the decision that we should all wear lifejackets, so they and other maritime traffic could identify us amidst the waves. I couldn't take being in that boat another second. I strapped on my lifejacket and was the first person to hit the water. I was ready to swim back to shore.

The snorkeling was amazing! The fish and coral reef were beautiful! However, instead of enjoying the scenery my mind was fixed on the realization that I would have to get back on that boat in this rough sea.

About that time, I noticed something large and white swimming in front of me. Realizing what it was, I raised my head from the water in disbelief. As I looked up, my suspicions were confirmed. The resort Hedonism II also had snorkeling on their list of afternoon activities. They had just anchored at our reef.

How do I say it politely, the people jumping in the water to snorkel with us were of the age and body type where bathing suits should be mandatory! The reef was getting crowded, the waves were still choppy and people were swimming into each other. Now, I was ready to board the boat! The sea had become too chaotic!

The sea is chaotic and the disciples experience it firsthand. For people of the first century the sea represented chaos and death. Jesus' calming of the sea is foreshadowing of his victory over death. The disciples ask, "Who is this that even the wind and sea obey?" You and I have the answer to their question: It is He who will defeat sin, Satan and even death.

Yet, one of the things bothers me about this passage (it was obviously a concern of the disciples), how and why is Jesus

sleeping on the stern?

Is Jesus oblivious to the conditions sea? Does Jesus not care that they are about to sink? Or is He just waiting so the conditions will be favorable for an impressive miracle? Yes, Jesus will miraculously calm the waves and quiet the wind. But, perhaps there is another message in this text?

It is a message the disciples cannot grasp at that moment. It is a message that Jesus reveals why Jesus is asleep on the stern. The message is this ""The Boat isn't going to sink! The boat isn't going down because the stern has an unsinkable ballast!

Did any of you all read David McCullough's book or watch the HBO mini-series on John Adams? The book and TV series portray 18th century politics and the sacrifices that were made by our founding fathers and their families. One of the great relationships in John Adams life was the relationship he shared with his wife, Abigail.

Life in colonial America was difficult and unsteady, a time of war and constant danger. Life was chaotic; it was like being in rough seas. Though they spent months and miles apart, John and Abigail stayed connected through their letters. In one of those letters, John referred to Abigail as his "ballast."

A ballast gives weight and stability to a boat in turbulent seas""it keeps the boat from sinking!

Today, we sit in this cathedral nave (Latin word for boat). You can look up and see the keel shape vaulting of our ceiling for a visual image. Most of us step into this nave / boat and pray that Jesus will make the waves, wind, and chaos in our lives go away. He can and does do that. In my experience as a Christian, that prayer is rarely answered on a weekly basis. Why? Because wind, waves and chaos are a part of this life.

In our epistle from 2 Corinthians, Paul acknowledges that the Christian life is not smooth sailing. It is full of "afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, labors, sleepless nights and hunger." One thing that Paul believed, and many of us know firsthand as we sit in this nave (boat)""wind, waves and chaotic seas are just a part of life. Paul believed (and so too should we) that on the stern of his boat (on the stern of this boat) is Christ, an unsinkable ballast!

The good news today: in the midst of the chaos of this life, even in the face of death itself, our ballast will keep us afloat. Paul says it best when he writes: "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Thanks be to God we have a ballast amidst the chaos of life, and that nothing will separate us from the love, peace and presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN.