My brothers and sisters in Christ, let us pray. Our Lord God of our hearts, minds, souls, and Spirits, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts always be acceptable in Your sight, our strength and our Redeemer, Amen.

We know that divine power can still the waters right? What are some examples? (Genesis 1:2, 6–9; Job 38:8–11; Psalms 65:5–8; 93:3–4; Isaiah 51:10; Jeremiah 5:22). We can get pretty easily distracted in today’s reading in whether and how Jesus calms the seas. Let’s look deeper behind the meaning, because as we’re journeying with Jesus through Mark’s Gospel we’re seeing and getting a sense of what it means that the Kingdom of God has come near and here.

For the next few weeks, our faith will start to get, as they say in the art and painting world, ‘finer definition and deeper coloration’. *Trust* is our very human response to things that happen around us, that we see, and that are out of our control. We’re going to hear about some pretty desperate and maybe hopeless situations: peril at sea, intractable possession of mental illness, chronic and incurable illness, and sickness tipping over into death.

Jesus’ works in Mark, unlike in John’s Gospel, do not stimulate faith. Instead, it’s in reverse: first comes faith, fostering conditions in which God’s power to restore, made real and done by Jesus, can be seen and experienced. In our text today, faith is at work to still a deadly storm: not faith among the *disciples*; they’re totally afraid. But faith seen is the trust of Jesus himself, peacefully asleep (sleep is a metaphor for trust in God). Defenseless, mind stilled, Jesus’ mighty works should be seen and studied not just for their happy endings, but for what they disclose about observers’ faith like ours.

As we look at faith, however, we also inevitably encounter our old foil, fear. Six times in Mark, the disciples are said to be seized by “fear” that blends terror and awe. Two are in the stories of the storms at sea. Two others are in Jerusalem and passion predictions. The others are at the Transfiguration and the empty tomb.

I think one of the greatest things we can learn about and observe in the disciples is these moments of fear and awe themselves. If we observe them with our eyes of faith, we’ll see that all of these moments of fear and awe place us unequivocally in the presence of God. What do we call being present in the midst of God being God? They are epiphanies!

But what would Mark’s church have heard in such stories, and what can they be saying to us? As best we can discern, Mark’s church was living in the shadow of the traumatic war of the Jews against Rome that ended with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. It’s hard for us to imagine total devastation and destruction. Although we as a nation have been involved in many wars, America has never been destroyed by war on a scale of many other parts of the world, including where it’s currently happening in Sudan and Gaza—all that a people have known, buildings, art, culture, historical place and belonging, generations of people, wiped away.

How many times have we heard those same people ask, “how could a just God allow this to happen?” “Where is God in stopping the violence and killing?” “Why is God not answering our prayers?” These are the laments of desperation of a people being destroyed in mind, heart, soul, and collective as well as individual being. It moves **us** to compassion, yes, but stillness, too. For there is no salve, no single combination of words, which can heal. And fear can easily settle into terror, can’t it? Can we enter into that lament and pain, do we feel for our neighbors that way? Can you be a suffering Palestinian in a destroyed Gaza with nowhere to go and no one to help?

If Mark’s account of Jesus’ life and ministry were to be “good news” for the church, it would have to proclaim that message in the midst of the storms through which they were living (and in which many were dying). It would have to shine a light of hope in the nighttime of the life of the church, and not only proclaim the coming “day” of Christ’s longed-for return in power. This story affirms that still in nighttime, when the long and perilous journey of life is in process, faith and trust and fear all coexist in the same boat, where God lies also. It’s never an either/or, it’s a both and, bigger than we can see.

It's been that way from the beginning, that people come to us with the unanswerable and seek the past to again be their present. The losses have been too much—economic, bodily, psychologically, spiritually. The future is not even a possibility. But the church, in its fragility, is still the little boat, braving the storm, in danger of being swamped. Why we matter for people, as we did 2,000 years ago for Mark’s hearers, is that Jesus lies in that boat with us. It feels rocky and dangerous, but we know, if we keep sailing and trust God, the sea will be stilled. The storm passed. Other storms will come. But the fear does not fester and linger. Fear is gone. Hope is back.

I’ll leave you with these final thoughts.

In Mark, belief and unbelief are not static and never entirely absent. Faith waxes and wanes. Faith is like an oscillating fan: veering from one side to another, caught for a time by flawed egoistic humans before getting too much fortune and luck, letting it slip from our grasp, and in then in need of God’s reassurance. But faith depends more on human volition than on cognition, doesn’t it? Faith is justified by works, after all. So, the opposite of these tales of faith formation in the Gospel of Mark is atheism. Atheism allows us to check out completely. The opposite of these stories of faith is fear: a lack of conviction of or rejecting Jesus’ ability to wield God’s peace and will in the world. Remember, the Gospel of Mark constantly tells us that there is no other way than through the cross, that suffering, and death are inevitable. But ultimately, in spite even of death and through our own suffering and demise, God’s power and presence is here for us.

We live in frightening times. We’re right there with Jesus’ disciples in a boat being swamped, terrified that God has gone AWOL and Jesus doesn’t care. This past week there were many pundits and people telling us not to trust justice or mercy. Pray this week that your hearts help expose our society’s fearmongers, driven only by their obscene lust for power. Pray to remind us right here, right now, at our church that God with us, Christ, Immanuel, the Paraclete, remains dedicated to the welfare of allllll people who are scared and suffering.

The boat is sailing into the storm. Will we go forward or turn back? The choice is always ours, depending on if we see who is sleeping down below. Thanks be to God, Amen.