

HEARERS OF THE WORD

Job 38:1, 8-11; Psalm 107; 2 Corinthians 5:14-17; Mark 4:35-41

Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?



Mark 4:35 On that day, when evening had come, Jesus said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” 36 And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. 37 A great wind-storm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. 38 But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” 39 He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. 40 He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” 41 And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

This story is found in Matthew 8:23-27, Luke 8:22-25 and also here in Mark 4:35-41. It provides an instructive example of a Jesus story being used for different purposes in the Gospels. In Matthew, the theme is really discipleship while in Mark faith in Jesus is the focus. Of course, these are not mutually exclusive; nevertheless, each evangelist has his eye on different dimensions of the story.

Mark focuses on faith and on the identity of Jesus.

KIND OF WRITING

As often in Mark, this story is a *chreia*, this time an action *chreia* with important words attached. Jesus’ question and the disciples’ wondering are keys to the text. At the level of the gospel, this is a symbolic tale designed to challenge and assist a church in crisis.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

In the biblical tradition, the sea, a mighty force of nature, was seen symbolically as chaotic and destructive. Of the many examples, perhaps these two might serve to illustrate what is meant. First of all, from today’s first reading:

Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb?— when I made the clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band, and prescribed bounds for it, and set bars and doors, and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stopped?’ (Job 38:8-11)

There is a close alignment between the gospel story and a scene in the marvelous Psalm 107:

Thought for the day

While it is not comfortable, to be in crisis is probably the natural state of the Christian project. Even in Jesus’ day: “Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets. (Luke 6:26) Likewise, quite early on, the story of the storm at sea was read as a kind of allegory, representing the (later) church undergoing trials. The natural feeling of being abandoned is captured in the raw emotion of Mark’s account.

Mark also tells us where to seek help: *Who then is this?* Like the disciples, we have no full understanding of Jesus and yet, like them, to him we turn.

Prayer

Lord, the sea is so wide and my boat is so small. Be with me.

Breton fisherman’s prayer

Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the mighty waters; they saw the deeds of the Lord, his wondrous works in the deep. 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 calamity; they reeled and staggered like drunkards, and were at their wits’ end. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he brought them out from their distress; he made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. Then they were glad because they had quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind. Let them extol him in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders.” (Psalms 107:23-32)

NEW TESTAMENT FOREGROUND

It is often thought that behind the series of story in Mark 4-8, lies two chains or *catenae* of sources, which might have contained the following:

Catena 1

- a. The Stilling of the Storm (4:35-41)
- b. The Gerasene Demoniac (5:1-20)
- c. The Woman with the Haemorrhage (5:25-34)
- d. Jairus' daughter (5:21-23, 35-43)
- e. Feeding of the 5,000 (6:34-44, 53)

Catena 2

- a. Jesus Walks on the Sea (6:45-51)
- b. The Blind Man of Bethsaida (8:22-26)
- c. The Syro-phoenician Woman (7:24b-30)
- d. The Deaf-Mute (7:32-37)
- e. Feeding of the 4,000 (8:1-10)

It is commonly thought that the three miracles at the start, in any case, lead to a climax: (1) authority over nature (and chaos); (2) authority over the devils (and evil); (3) authority over sickness and even life (life and death). The question asked at the end of our reading is *the* question to ask: "Who then is this?"

ST PAUL

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "All things are put in subjection," it is plain that this does not include the one who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all. (1 Corinthians 15:20-28)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 35 Notice the time is given twice, a literary "trait" of Mark. The initiative here belongs to Jesus.

Verse 36 Here, it is the disciples who take Jesus with them, unlike in Matthew, who "corrects" Mark at this point. The other boats mentioned have no role in the story and are omitted in Matthew's version of the story.

Verse 37 A quite dramatic storm, con-

veyed really in the verbs "arose", "beat" and "swamped". There is something of Psalm 107 in this description.

Verse 38 The details of Mark (stern, cushion) are omitted by both Matthew and Luke (who doesn't even say the Lord was asleep, although he wakes up!). In Mark, Jesus is called "teacher" whereas in Matthew he is called "Lord" and in Luke "Master". It is appropriate for Mark, who underlines the teaching of Jesus, although he gives us actually very little teaching. The demand of the disciples is very direct, even rude. This is softened by both Matthew ("Lord, save us! We are perishing!") and Luke ("Master, Master, we are perishing!"). This is an important moment for interpretation. In what sense could the community of Mark be said to be "perishing"? If the context of writing is Rome under Nero or the Holy Land during the Jewish War, then the members of the community are literally perishing, that is being killed in the persecution. The threat of martyrdom puts tremendous pressure on faith, which may also be said to be perishing, as people abandon the faith for fear of being put to death. This verse then permits a large symbolic / allegorical reading of the passage. The chief concern is not so much a miracle of Jesus but the situation of the church (the disciples in the boat), under persecution (perishing) and being told that they need faith ("Have you still no faith"). If only they could see the identity of Jesus as crucified messiah, their faith in Jesus would help them ("Who then is this?"). In this way, Mark receives a Jesus tradition and makes it relevant to his church at the time of writing.

Verse 39 Only now are we told that Jesus woke up. The words he uses are significant: *Be silent* is used only once more, this time dealing with the a demon. "But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" (Mark 1:25). The effect is immediate and beautifully expressed in Greek where "dead calm" is expressed onomatopoeically as "*galēnē megalē*".

Verse 40 The blunt question "Have you no faith" is also softened by Matthew ("you of little faith") and Luke ("Where is your faith?"). Mark can be very stark and direct in his polemic. The real issue in Mark is "having no faith" and it is linked to a failure to penetrate the true identity of Jesus as Messiah.

Verse 41 Awe and amazement are typical reactions to Jesus in Mark. Usually they "go" nowhere, except in the case of

the disciples who do, eventually, make a tortuous and stumbling journey towards faith. Finally, they ask the "right" question about the identity of this figure. Even after an initial correct reply in Mark 8:27 there is still a distance to go, as we can see from Mark 8-10.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. The image of a boat in a stormy sea is a symbol of life in difficult times and can represent inner turmoil, anxiety and high emotions. When you have been in such circumstances, perhaps a "Jesus person" came to your assistance and calmed you down? Recall that person with gratitude.
2. The image can also be applied to a family, a community, a parish, or any other group. Remember people who have had a gift of bringing peace to troubled situations.
3. The significance of miracles in the Gospels is that they show Jesus as one who brings God's power to bear on human need and suffering. Have there been times when you have been a channel for this healing power of God, holding a crying child in your arms, calming the anxiety of a friend, or being a peacemaker in a group to which you belong?

PRAYER

In the beginning, O God, your word subdued the chaos; in the fullness of time you sent Jesus, your Son, to rebuke the forces of evil and bring forth a new creation.

By that same power, transform all our fear into faith and awe in your saving presence.

We ask this through your Son, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.



Everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

2 Cor 5:11 *Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others; but we ourselves are well known to God, and I hope that we are also well known to your consciences.* 12 *We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you an opportunity to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart.* 13 *For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.*

2 Cor 5:14 For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. 15 And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.

2 Cor 5:16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. 17 So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

A surface meaning can be gleaned from this reading but a deeper look unveils substantial riches for living the faith today.

KIND OF WRITING

The reading is part of a larger “defence” found in 5:11-6:10. In our brief passage, Paul writes in a very condensed way, presuming a wider catechesis to make sense of what he alludes to fleetingly. 1 Corinthians 13 and 14 could also be read.

ORIGIN OF THE READING

The context in the community is, as frequently, the lack of regard for Paul as an apostle. The preceding verses (included above) are a good guide. Paul, who has the gift of visions and tongues, confines himself to rational discourse in the community (following his own advice in 1 Corinthians 14:2, 19). This does not impress those evidently looking for leaders with spectacular, conspicuous gifts.

RELATED PASSAGES

But as many as attend to religion with a whole heart, these alone are able to control the passions of the flesh, since they

believe that they, like our patriarchs Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, do not die to God, but *live to God*. (4Maccabees 7:18–19)

They knew also that those who die for the sake of God *live to God*, as do Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the patriarchs. (4Maccabees 16:25)

Consequently, just as condemnation for all people came through one transgression, so too through the one righteous act came righteousness leading to life for all people. (Romans 5:18)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 11-13 In v.13 Paul refers to his own experience of visions and tongues, but he does not want their faith or even their regard for him to depend on externals. Hence, he goes within himself to account for his own extraordinary motivation for ministry and preaching.

Verse 14 “Love of Christ” is ambiguous in English as in Greek. Most commentators take it—accurately—to mean Christ’s love for us. This fits well with another verse: *the life I now live in the body, I live because of the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* (Galatians 2:20) That love of Christ was disclosed on the cross, so Paul goes on to speak in this verse of the death of Jesus.

“For all” is also ambiguous. Does it mean “instead of” and / or “for the benefit of”? Probably both, just as long as we keep clear of the Anselmian doctrine of penal substitution (Paul has no doctrine of Jesus’ death as punishment). However, something did happen for us in the death of Jesus that we could not achieve for ourselves. In that sense, “instead of.” His death was really a profound act of compassionate solidarity with broken humanity, disclosing God’s breath-taking love. At the same time, this new reality was also for use, in that sense “for our benefit.”

In what sense may we say, then, that all have died? It could mean that while our physical death still awaits us, yet even now the believer has died to sin by sharing already in Jesus’ own faithfulness. Death and disobedience belong together, as we see from Romans 5. Jesus’ faithfulness disarmed death of its power and in this way, God offers to all humanity a

way out of the destructive power of sin and death.

Verse 15 Paul turns to the consequences of salvation. He repeats that Christ died *for all* and adds a reason: so that all who believe this may live and love as Christ lived and loved. As passage in Romans helps: *The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.* (Romans 6:10–11) The expression “alive to God” is apocalyptic, as may be seen from these two citations above from 4 Maccabees. This means a new level of eschatological living on account of the resurrection of Jesus. NB Paul says Jesus both died *and was raised* for us.

Verse 16 Paul alludes to his pre-conversion estimate of Christ. This was based solely on the cross; the encounter with the risen Lord changed that utterly. The repetition, in a compressed passage, lends great emphasis.

Verse 17 Resurrection—the catalyst that changed everything for Paul—is both apocalyptic and cosmic, hence a new creation (see Gal 6:15). Paul moves the argument quickly forward: *because of the resurrection, whoever believes in Christ is part of the new creation in him.* “Those who live” are that subset of the “all” who have come to Christ. Old categories—especially viewing things “from a human point of view”—simply no longer work. This includes viewing apostles “from a human point of view”! Paul has indeed written allusively (even elusively) but with extraordinary depth and power, disclosing the heart of his apostolate.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Reflect on your own calling and its motivation: what is it that drives you? that keeps you “on mission”?
2. If you were to put contemporary words on “what happened for us in Christ”, what image comes to mind?
3. Looking at things on the basis of appearances is always a risk. How have you woken up to this risk what do you do to see everything in a radically new way?

PRAYER

Faithful God, nothing is more astonishing that your faithful loved to us, disclosed in Jesus’ death and resurrection. Help us to embrace fully this new life so that we may truly be a new creation in Christ. Amen.

Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stopped

Job 38:1 Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind:

8 “Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb?—
9 when I made the clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band,
10 and prescribed bounds for it, and set bars and doors,
11 and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stopped?’

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

The book of Job is read only twice in the whole three-year cycle, which seems something of a pity (5B and 12B), given the subject matter and the brilliance of the book. It should also be said that this reading is chosen not because of its context in Job but on account of the sea and God’s control. The book itself is undoubtedly a great work of *theodicy*, keeping, in the striking phrase of Kierkegaard, “the wound of the negative open.”

KIND OF WRITING

Novel

The book of Job is novel which explores the common human experience of the suffering of a genuinely good person. It may have had a kind of pre-existence, given that the first two chapters are in prose and the closure of the book is also in prose (42:7-17). The substance of the book is contained in the chapters in between, 3:1-42:6, written entirely in the most thrilling poetry.

Poetry

Job contains the very best poetry in the Bible and hence it is often called the jewel in the crown of Biblical literature. Because of its density and power, it is not to be read quickly, as if the ideas could be simply harvested at a cerebral level. On the contrary, as a great work of art, it is first of all to be experienced, which means reading in such a way as to let the book take hold of the reader.

Wisdom literature

Many of the salient features of wisdom literature are registered in the book of Job: (1) a minimum of interest in the great acts of divine salvation proclaimed

by the Torah and the prophets; (2) little interest in Israel as a nation or in its history; (3) a questioning attitude about the problems of life: why there is suffering, inequality and death, and why the wicked prosper; (4) a search for how to master life and understand how humans should behave before God; (5) a great interest in the universal human experiences that affect all people and not just believers in YHWH; (6) a joy in the contemplation of creation and God as Creator.

ORIGIN OF THE READING

Our reading comes from that very point in the book of Job, when finally a kind of answer is given. Not before time: the book’s preceding thirty-seven chapters amount to an immense pile-up of questions, accusations, attacks, disputes and arguments. In Hebrew, Job 38:1 begins with the verb “answered” thereby releasing the tension of the book.

Outline of Job:

- I: The Prologue (1-3)
- II: The Dialogue (3-28)
 - A: first cycle of discourses
 - B: second cycle of discourses
 - C: third cycle of discourses
 - D: a hymn in praise of Wisdom
 - E: conclusion of the dialogue
- III: The Discourses of Elihu (29-37)
- IV: The Discourses of YHWH (39-42)
- V: Epilogue (42:7-17)

The book contains not only prose and poetry, but also what we may call colliding perspectives on God, good and evil and humanity. The perspectives do collide, as evidenced in the Lord’s final commendation of Job, *for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has* (Job 42:7) and the apparent contradiction of reward at the end with the gift of ten more children. Given the complex literary and theological stances in the book, giving a date is quite tricky. Many scholars, however, would see it as exilic or early post-exilic.

RELATED PASSAGES

The classic examples from the Pss are Pss 37 and 73. See longing for justice embedded in the *lex talionis*: *If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for*

eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe. (Exodus 21:23-25)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 1 The Lord’s first speech is presented as an “answer”, even though it turns out to be a radical questioning of Job’s capacity to understand, effectively giving “an answer answerless” in the words of Elizabeth I. A storm often accompanies a theophany: Pss 18:7-15[8-16]; 50:3; 68:8[9]; Ezek 1:4; Nah 1:3; Zech 9:14). YHWH: absent in the poetry until now.

Verse 8 YHWH began by referring to himself as a kind cosmic engineer. While staying with view, vv. 8-11 develop it in the direction of motherhood and babysitting (!). The first clue in the word “womb”; of course, Genesis 1 is to be borne in mind.

Verse 9 We are to think of the mighty ocean at night. At the same time, maternal image endures with the unexpected swaddling band, in effect, a nappy!

Verse 10 The imagery may suggest a prison, but with maternity in mind perhaps we are to think of a playpen for a child. For God’s power, managing something so fierce as the sea is a doddle, comparable to a mother minding a child.

Verse 11 Words solemn in the context, but also domestic, familiar to every parent. The message to Job is: I have this power and you don’t even come near to grasping it in all its magnificence.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. No one escapes the great question of squaring the goodness and omnipotence of God with the tragic present of evil. It can be great (an atrocity, perhaps) or quite personal (loss or illness etc.). How can it arise for me? How have I coped?
2. Undoubtedly, we are even more aware of the vast complexity of the cosmos, which can indeed be overwhelming. How do I live with the presence of the creator.

PRAYER

O God, you are the very ground of our being, closer to us than we are to ourselves. May we always come before you with awe and stand before presence in silent wonder. Help us have faith in your providence, especially we find ourselves at a loss before the troubles of life.

THE LITURGY

Job 38:1, 8-11; Psalm 107; 2 Corinthians 5:14-17; Mark 4:35-41

READINGS 1 AND 3

The brief passage from Job illustrates the mysterious power of the creator and prepares us for the stilling of the storm from Mark. Behind both readings is a question: who then is this?

THE RESPONSORIAL PSALM

This excerpt from the wonderful Ps 107 (106) is really an anticipation of the Gospel rather than a response to the first reading. It is brief poetic vignette, capturing the both threat and rescue, with all the attendant emotions.

SUNDAY INTRODUCTIONS

First reading

Job 38:1, 8-11

Job is a book full of questions and finally in chapter 8, someone answers. This “someone”—the Lord—remains at the same time profoundly mysterious, as his questions demonstrate.

Second reading

2 Corinthians 5:14-17

Because we have Paul’s own words, occasionally he gives us a window on his inner world: what inspired him? What kept him going? The reading is quite condensed, so you have to listen carefully!

Gospel

Mark 4:35-41

The whole of Mark’s Gospel is really focused on the great question which comes at the end of this reading: ‘Who can this be? Even the wind and the sea obey him.’ Its a question we too ask today.

WEEKDAY INTRODUCTIONS

Monday 21 June

Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, Religious

Genesis 12:1-9

The story of Abraham, our father in faith, begins today and our reading is the foundational scene. In the preceding chapter 11, Abraham is mentioned almost casually and then, all of a sudden, he is called in an extraordinary way by

God. The promise given to Abraham—that he will be a blessing to all the tribes of the earth—was seen by Paul to be fulfilled in Jesus.

Matthew 7:1-5

It seems to be human nature that we see more easily in others the faults we have ourselves. We should reflect on our judgements because they hold a mirror to ourselves. The tone is humorous and deadly serious at the same time.

Tuesday 22 June

Sts John Fisher, bishop, and Thomas More, martyrs

Genesis 13: 2, 5-18

A realistic and sombre note is struck in this reading: Abraham and Lot “had too many possessions to be able to live together.” Not unknown today, alas. The solution is nothing if not pragmatic.

Matthew 7:6, 12-14

The reading opens with a familiar saying which is unexpectedly obscure. Perhaps it is a remnant of a Jewish-Christian negative attitude to the Gentile mission (dogs and pigs). As it stands in this Gospel (only), it seems to refer to the kingdom and the need for discernment before your proclaim it.

Wednesday 23 June

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

Our reading is both deep and mysterious. In effect, it is a renewal of God’s promise to Abraham and the renewal takes the form of a covenant ceremony. By walking through the halved animals, Abraham says “may this happen to me” if I break the agreement.

Matthew 7:15-20

The early church had an abundance of prophets, some genuine, others false. How to tell the difference? According to their fruits, of course.

Thursday 24 June

The Birthday of John the Baptist

Isaiah 49:1-6

The meaning of “forming in the womb”, a prophetic idiom, makes this a suitable reading for the feast, anticipating the Gospel. Ultimately, the reading points

beyond John the Baptist to Jesus as the light of the nations.

Acts 13:22-26

It is not possible to tell the story of salvation, or indeed that of Jesus, without mentioning John the Baptist, as we see in this reading.

Luke 1:57-66, 80

Our Gospel is devoted mainly to the naming of John the Baptist and the reaction to his birth. We too are invited to “treasure these things in our heart.”

Friday 25 June

Genesis 17:1, 9-10, 15-22

Even in unlikely old age (ninety-nine!), Abraham places his trust in God, truly “our father in faith.”

Matthew 8:1-4

We may miss the main point here: touching people who are ritually unclean made you unclean in turn. Jesus shocks by touching the man, thus breaking the strict purity laws.

Saturday 26 June

Genesis 18:1-15

Known in the Orthodox tradition as *The Hospitality of Abraham*, this wonderful scene has reverberated both in Scripture and in art. It is alluded to in Hebrews: *Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.* (Hebrews 13:2) It also inspired the much-loved Old Testament Trinity of Rublev.

Matthew 8:5-17

To whom was Jesus sent? According to himself, to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel.” In this Gospel, we overhear the realisation of the early church that Gentiles too could come to faith in Jesus. Cf. *Then Peter started speaking: “I now truly understand that God does not show favouritism in dealing with people, but in every nation the person who fears him and does what is right is welcomed before him.”* (Acts 10:34–35)