

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Mark 4:35-41

Year B - Proper 7, Text: Mark 4:35-41
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The incident outlined in this pericope from Mark 4:35–41 contains vivid details from the perspective of an eyewitness. It speaks of events that take place after sundown on a day that Jesus devoted to the teaching of parables, and describes Jesus' power over the storms and the sea.

Verse 4:35: Jesus asks His disciples to take Him from the west side of the Sea of Galilee to its southeast coast. (This and all subsequent voyages on the Sea of Galilee, are ordered by Jesus.)

Without a doubt, the disciples are deeply disturbed by Jesus' request. The region is not Jewish territory! It is the Decapolis. Gentiles live there — and they have pigs! After the group arrives at their destination, we are told that only Jesus gets out of the boat (5:1–2).

Verse 4:36: Although this verse makes reference to other boats accompanying Jesus on His journey across the Sea of Galilee, no further mention is made of those boats. Possibly they are blown off course, or lost in the storm that overtakes Jesus' boat.

Verse 4:37: “A great windstorm” (“a great hurricane of wind”) overtakes the travelers. Still today, cold currents of air pass from west to east over the bowl in which the Sea of Galilee lies, and striking low-lying air there, create turbulence. Mark describes waves breaking over the sides of the boat — with the dangerous result that the boat begins to fill with water.

Verse 4:38: Perhaps exhausted, perhaps merely to test the disciples' faith in His presence, Jesus is sleeping in the boat's stern with His head resting on a pillow of some kind. (See Jonah 1:5–6.)

The disciples, who are familiar with the Sea of Galilee and its moods, are overcome by panic and cry out in terror to the sleeping Jesus: “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”

Perhaps they sense some indifference on Jesus' part to their plight. (Matthew and Luke moderate their

cry; see Matthew 8:23–25 and Luke 8:24.) Their cry reflects that of men who sense that they are in mortal danger and are about to die!

Verse 4:39: Jesus wakes up, and scolds the wind and addresses the sea, “Peace! Be still!” The effect is instantaneous!

Verse 4:40: It is now Jesus' turn to reproach the disciples — this time because of their cowardice and lack of faith (Greek *pistis* = utter trust in the power of God). Jesus' rebuke is not gentle; later He will address similar charges against them (Mark 7:18).

Verse 4:41: The disciples have seen that Jesus' words were immediately effective. Something akin to faith is born of their fear. Although the storm has come and gone, they now have to deal with a reality of another order: “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?”

It is important to note that when carrying out His ministry, Jesus does not go around proclaiming, “I am the Messiah” in words. He reveals His identity through His actions (see Isaiah 35:5–6).

Furthermore, although the Jewish people were afraid of the winds and the sea, they took comfort in the fact that God had power over these things (see Psalm 107:23–32). In stilling the storm on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus makes a profound theological statement: “I am the Creator and the Lord of creation!”

In this incident, Mark highlights the double motif of Jesus' power and the disciples' failure. A crucial issue surfaces: Will the disciples understand who Jesus is and His purpose in going to the Decapolis region — or will they not?

A point to ponder in relation to the verses that follow in Mark 5:1–20:

As noted earlier, Jesus began His ministry to the Jews in a synagogue in Capernaum by casting a demon out

of a man. He began His ministry to the Gentiles with a massive exorcism: by casting out a host of demons from a man in the Decapolis. The demons enter into pigs and drown themselves in the Sea of Galilee. By the drowning of the swine, Gentile land itself is exorcized — cleansed of Gentile pollution.

This cleansing of Gentile uncleanness gives a clue to the purpose of his crossing of the lake. Jesus' mastering of the elements facilitates His passage to the Gentiles. The crossing symbolizes the opening of new frontiers. But do the disciples understand this?