

## God and the Storm



*A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. (Mark 4:37)* We all know what it's like to be in that boat. It's all smooth sailing, until out of nowhere it seems, the wind and waves rise up. And we realize we're not on some relaxing cruise, but rather, at the mercy of a vast and frightening sea, besieged by great storms over which we have no control.

One of my moments in the storm was a few weeks ago. I had driven down to North Carolina to visit family I hadn't seen since just before the pandemic hit. It was a restful, blessed few days. Then, two hours into the trip home, the storm came up. Two trucks jockeying on the freeway ahead started spewing a fusillade of rocks, too many and too fast to dodge. I saw a large stone arc toward me and screamed. It barely missed the windshield, and shattered the sunroof. Had that rock hit the windshield, or the roof been open, I might not be here telling you this story.

The fragile boats on which we sail life's seas are tossed by all manner of storms. Maybe your storm has been the isolation and anxious unknowns of the pandemic itself. Maybe it's that serious illness or job loss that just wasn't part of the plan. Or the literal storm that damaged your home or cut your power for days. Maybe it's the social and political turmoil in our nation and beyond, leading you to question if there's anything left that remains constant and true.

Thinking how close we had come to serious injury, and upset that the car I had lovingly detailed was now full of glass shards and in the body shop for extensive repairs, I recalled Jason Isbell's song 24 Frames:

*You thought God was an architect, now you know,  
He's sort of like a pipe bomb ready to blow,  
And everything you built that's all for show  
Goes up in flames,  
In twenty-four frames.*

Which is exactly what happened to poor old Job. Job, according to the ancient book that bears his name, was a "blameless and upright man," (Job 1:1) who sailed on pretty smooth waters. Until the storm came along. Now, his boat was not just in danger of being swamped - It had broken apart and sunk. Job is left clinging to the merest timber, tossed by the waves and gasping for air. Yet he still has breath to complain - Why me Lord?! Answering out of the whirlwind, God launches into a diatribe against Job "Gird up your loins and declare to me: Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" (Job 38:3-4) In short, who do you think you are to feel so entitled?

God goes on to make clear that actually, he is an architect - laying foundations, determining measurements, stretching the line, sinking bases into bedrock. And oh what an architect! At God's creation, the morning stars sang together, and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy.

Who else but an architect of incomprehensible skill could have created the sweetly scented rose? The caressing breeze of an early summer day? Who else could

wonderfully knit us together together in our mother's womb? (*Psalm 139:13*) Yes, we can trust the truth bred into the very DNA of our being: God is the Divine Architect.

Ah, but what about that pipe bomb? Though it may indeed be ready to blow, God is not the explosion. God is the one who contains the storm. God *"shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb."* God *"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, 10-11*) Our pride makes it hard to see that sometimes. Though everything I built that's all for show may go up in flames, God will preserve my soul.

God tells Job that he has laid creation a cornerstone. The Gospel shows us that that cornerstone is Jesus Christ. *"Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"* (*Mark 4:41*) It is Jesus Christ, the Divine Architect made flesh, who rebukes the wind and says to the sea *"Peace! Be still!"* (*Mark 4:39*) Jesus contains the storm, offering us salvation, including from the tempests of our own making.

God did not let Job perish. Indeed, when the blinding scales of pride fell from Job's eyes, God restored him in abundance. We could say that the story of Job is a harbinger of all things being made new in Christ.

Jesus will not let us perish. We may ride the seas in fragile boats, but he is there with us, always ready to still the wind and waves when we call to him for help. Amidst the turmoil, what remains constant is the truth of Jesus Christ. We know the song and the song is true: *"Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come. Tis' grace has brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home."* Jesus is our amazing grace.

While it is good for us to call out to Christ when the going gets rough, St. Paul counsels us that it is even better to not wait for the storms of life. Paul's apostleship was full of dangers, toils and snares. He was often imprisoned and called out for his evangelism. He was beset with problems from his beloved Corinthians. He was even shipwrecked.

Wizened by his own stormy seas, Paul invites us into the power of now. He takes Isaiah's words promising salvation, *"At an acceptable time I have listened to you"* and remakes them in Christ: *"See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation."* (*2 Corinthians 6:2*). In the power of an immediate relationship with Christ, we realize he is our constant trust, his amazing grace our constant companion, in stormy seas and fair ones. I find myself surprised at how much calmer the seas become when I realize Jesus is in the boat.

*"He said to them, 'Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?'"* (*Mark 4:41*) Friends, Christ is in the boat. And he is not asleep on the cushion. He is risen. May our eyes be opened to see the grace of the risen Christ at work in and among us now and always.

Amen.