

A Powerful Jesus

Luke 8:26-39

The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, June 19, 2016

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

This year for Vacation Bible School the Board of Education of Immanuel selected a VBS curriculum written by an organization called "Answers in Genesis." We studied about the great flood and Noah's ark. On one of the days of Vacation Bible School the lesson focused on dissuaded the children from what the curriculum feared was a common misconception about Noah. The curriculum feared that the children viewed Noah as a cartoon figure floating on a bathroom toy with some cute animals on board.

I have to say that I sympathize with the concern that the curriculum showed toward this portrayal of Noah. Even our own preschool Sunday School classroom shows Noah as a nice old man with some nice animals and a small looking ark in the background with a rainbow. Many children's books picture Noah in this fashion.

There two things wrong with this portrayal. First, it makes Noah look like a myth or a nice story and not a piece of history. When it does that it makes the account of the great flood in Genesis look unbelievable. It undermines a child's faith even while they are being instructed in the faith.

The second thing wrong with this is that it dismisses the wrath of God. When Noah is portrayed as a nice old man coming out of the ark with some nice animals and the wrath of God has been entirely removed from the account and yet the wrath of God is the reason why the flood took place at all.

I remember doing custodial duty at the seminary and I was required to enter the study room of some second career guys and clean it. While I was in their room I noticed that one of them had a portrait of the earth as Noah would have seen it after he came out of the ark. It showed a blighted earth with bloated bodies lying everywhere on the ground. It was gruesome, but when I saw it I better understood the wrath of God against sin.

The "Answers in Genesis" Vacation Bible School curriculum answered the problem of Noah by explaining that the ark was 510 feet long and 85 feet wide and 50 feet high. It explained that the ark could hold 483 semi truck trailers worth of animals and supplies. With an ark that size and assuming that Noah took juvenile animals rather than full grown ones and that some hibernated, suddenly the ark becomes plausible. It is not as easy to dismiss. Animals and Noah and his family really were saved from a real flood and the wrath of God is real. God has real power to destroy all of us. We must come to terms with this power or we will never come to terms with God.

The "Answers in Genesis" curriculum made sure that you understood that Noah had 120 years to build the ark and that at the age of 600 he would have had the necessary experience and knowledge to build such a vessel.

Thus not only should you trust in God above all things, you shall also fear Him above all things.

Jesus has the same problem that Noah has.

Jesus is often portrayed as a man with no power. We have so emphasized the Jesus who exhorts us to have the faith of children and who welcomes the little children to come to Him that we find it surprising when Jesus curses fig trees and rebukes people for giving answers that seem ok to us. We have so emphasized the Jesus who takes the children up into his arms and blesses them and tells us that the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these that we are surprised at the Jesus who pronounces woes on the

Pharisees and rebukes a man who calls Him "Good Teacher." We are so accustomed to the Jesus who holds the children in His arms that we have not come to terms with His power.

Let us correct this oversimplification of Jesus. Let us consider that He rebukes the wind and the waves.

Christy and I were in the parsonage on the night that the Greensburg tornado formed. Perhaps some of you have heard of the Greensburg tornado. It leveled the town of Greensburg so that there was virtually nothing left of the place. It cut a path to the northeast and was headed right toward the house where Christy and I were living at the time.

That night is the only night where I can remember watching three hours of television straight while being riveted to the screen the whole time. I have watched three hour movies before. Those Lord of the Rings movies are three hours. I have watched them and I get bored about half way through and pause it to go do something else. The night of the Greensburg tornado Christy and I watched three hours of nonstop weather coverage. We were riveted to the screen like we had never been before.

Finally the tornado siren went off and we went to the basement with the cat. We sat there for a long time in the dark with only the lightning outside providing light to see. We turned on a battery powered radio and listened to a storm chaser report what he could see to the station so that they could tell us. I remember thinking that the storm chaser was crazy while at the same time thanking God that he was out there to see what I could not see.

Christy sent me upstairs to check the weather to see whether or not anything dangerous was coming toward the house. I spent so much time upstairs checking windows that she called up the steps to see what was taking me so long. The weather looked really dangerous. I did not want Christy coming upstairs if it was still dangerous.

Now I have to say through all of this it never once occurred to me to go out onto the front porch and rebuke the storm and tell it in the name of Jesus to be still. I the theologian was not going out there to rebuke the storm. But Jesus would have and the storm would have listened.

When Jesus rebuked the storm He and the disciples are in a far more precarious position that Christy and I were on the night of the Greensburg tornado. Jesus and the disciples are in a boat in the middle of the Sea of Galilee. They are in one of these ancient fishing boats. It is not the biggest or the sturdiest of vessels. It is not like they are on a Roman galley ship or something. I have been told that squalls come up on the Sea of Galilee unexpectedly. They are swift and they are deadly. Many fishermen had lost their lives to this kind of disaster. Some of the apostles had been to funerals of those who had died from a storm in which they now found themselves.

Jesus is asleep on a cushion in the stern of the boat. The disciples wake Him not because they think He can save them. If they thought He could save them, they would have asked Him to do so. They wake Him because He is asleep and therefore gives the appearance that He does not care about their plight. Some have suggested that they wanted Jesus to help bail water out of the boat.

Jesus wakes up and does not bother to bail water. He goes to the bow of the boat and rebukes the wind and the sea.

He rebukes the wind and the sea. He tells them, "Quiet! Be still!" By telling us that He rebukes the wind and the sea the Gospel indicates to us that He is correcting them. He is telling them that they are out of line! He is telling them that they had better behave themselves. The wind and the sea heed Him.

The disciples are afraid. They should be afraid. If He can rebuke the wind and the sea, what else can He do? If He can rebuke the wind and the sea and the wind and the sea obey Him what would happen if He were to rebuke us? Who is this who even commands the wind and the sea and they obey Him?

In fact Jesus rebukes all kinds of things that one would not think should be rebuked. When He meets Simon's mother-in-law she has a fever. Jesus rebukes the fever and it leaves her. One would not think of rebuking a fever, but Jesus does. Jesus is telling the fever itself that the fever is out of line. You don't belong here. Be gone with you! And the fever leaves her. She gets up and returns to her duties.

And so it is not surprising that Jesus rebukes demons and they leave people. Even when this Jesus faces supernatural opposition He still is in charge of the situation. You can tell Jesus is encountering a supernatural situation because the demons and Jesus have a supernatural conversation. The demons already know who Jesus is. They already know that He is the Son of the Most High God. They already know that He has the power to cast them into the abyss. They are terrified of Him. They beseech Him to allow them to enter into a herd of pigs. Jesus allows them to do so. Unless Jesus allows the demons to do something, they are unable to do anything. Jesus allows them to enter the pigs and they do so. The pigs rush down a steep bank and perish by drowning. The man from whom the demons came is suddenly in his right mind. He gets dressed and has conversation with Jesus.

That is the power of your Lord. He has the power to command and it happens. He commands even violent weather and it obeys Him. He has the power over the demons and they obey Him. He has power over diseases. Yes, He even has power over life and death itself.

It is no wonder that the people feared Him. Even though He had performed a benevolent miracle by restoring the man who had been possessed by demons, they still begged Him to leave them. They begged Him to leave them because they had seen His great power and they feared having someone in their communities who had such great power.

Just watch the movie "Man of Steel" and you will see how people react to individuals who have great power.

This is your Jesus. He is terrifying. He is holy. He is the Son of God. He has the power of life and of death over you. Fear Him. Fear Him because if He is not worth fearing, He is not worth being your God. If He is not worth fearing, He is not worth trusting either.

That is the problem with people who have a Jesus who merely welcomes the little children and does not rebuke the Pharisees. They have a Jesus who will love them no matter what they do. They have a Jesus whom they do not fear. And because they have a Jesus whom they do not fear, they have a Jesus who has no power. A Jesus with no power cannot save. The warm and fluffy Jesus cannot help you when you are dying, when you face the enemy. The warm and fluffy Jesus cannot save the nation when it wanders from justice and righteousness and has no idea what to do in the face of the wrath of God. If you have a Jesus who merely welcomes little children, how will you ever know whether or not He will welcome you and what you will do when the fever comes, when the storm comes, when the demons come?

The fever will come or some other illness. Do you want the Jesus who can heal you and save you? The storms will come or the terrorist attacks or the flooding or the fire. Do you want the Jesus who can rebuke these forces of evil in the world and overcome them? The demons will come and they will possess you. They will overwhelm you with an evil in your life over which you will have no power. In that moment when you are faced with the terrors of your conscience and the wrath of God, do you want the Jesus who has the power to command the evil spirits and they leave you? And when you die and your death is coming, do you want the Jesus who raises the dead?

If you do, then you are going to need the Jesus who is also to be feared.

And here He is. He is the crucified One. He is the One from Nazareth.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.