

Mark 4.35-41  
Asleep in the Storm  
WRCoB 1.19.20

This past summer,  
    When Zherina and I flew to Prague  
        We had two of the three middle seats.

She wanted me to take the middle seat  
    Due to the fact the far aisle seat  
        Was occupied by a stranger.

But since she was the smaller of us  
    I told her she had to sit in the middle.

She leaned far away from his side  
    During the beginning of the flight.

But when she fell asleep something interesting happened  
    She no longer had control over her actions.

She kept on resting her head  
    Against the stranger's shoulder.

I repeatedly moved her away  
    Despite his, "No, it's all right."

Because I knew she would have been mortified  
    Knowing she was sleeping against him.

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Frederick Buechner says that sleep is surrender, *a laying down of arms. Whatever plans you're making, whatever work you're up to your ears in, whatever pleasures you're enjoying, whatever sorrows or anxieties or problems you're in the midst of, you set them aside, find a place to stretch out somewhere, close your eyes, and wait for sleep.*

We all need it.

Everyday!

Sleep . . . wonderful, beautiful, restful sleep.

The storms of life can rage around you  
But if you can just close your eyes and sleep  
For the moment, all troubles subside.

~~

Jesus slept.

The late-preacher Fred B. Craddock  
Says it's hard to imagine Jesus asleep.

Sleep is a very private thing.

Because it involves all kinds of unbecoming things  
A gaping mouth, snoring, drooling  
And all the rest.

We don't need to see this.

Particularly with someone as important as Jesus.

I mean, can you imagine?

Jesus, head tilted back, mouth open, snoring?

No, I can't either.

And not only that . . . Jesus being the Son of God  
You certainly want him awake  
And in control 24/7. Right?

But Jesus was human  
And we often fail to understand what that means.

Our passage today, then, is quite revealing.

Because it shows both, Jesus fully-human and fully-divine.

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Let's begin by looking at the human side of Jesus.

1

### **Mark 4:35-36 (NIV)**

**<sup>35</sup> That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side."<sup>36</sup> Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat.**

Now there's a curious phrase, "just as he was".

What does that mean?

Reading from the biblical commentaries isn't much help.

In fact, the New Living Translation  
And the Contemporary English Version  
Omit the phrase.

But Craddock is willing to wrestle with Mark's phrase.

*What does it mean, "just as he was"? Whipped down, bedraggled, hungry, bent over already half asleep, in pain?*

*What does it mean, "just as he was"? No time to clean up, freshen up, dress up, change clothes?*

I might add, "just as he was"  
No overnight bag carrying a toothbrush  
And change of underwear.

His disciples grabbed him just as he was  
Got him in the boat and left the crowd behind.

Sounds to me the disciples sensed for Jesus' sake  
It was important to move fast.

Jesus must have been beat.

He had been, as my grandfather used to say  
Right out straight  
Teaching and preaching  
And healing and exorcising

Traveling around the countryside  
For weeks on end  
Living on the generosity of others.

He's plum tuckered out.

The truth is Jesus is so tired  
That when the storm came up  
And tossed the boat back and forth

Jesus slept through it  
Like it was the gentle rocking of a cradle.

Like Zherina sleeping with her head against a total stranger.

Jesus would have slept through it all  
Had it not been for the disciples.

It's interesting how descriptive the verse is  
As if the disciples remember the incident all too well.

**2**

**Mark 4:37-38 (NIV)**

**<sup>37</sup> A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. <sup>38</sup> Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion.**

It reminds me of the Bible character Jonah.

He's on a boat to Tarshish  
Running from the call of God.

God sends a terrible storm  
That threatens to sink the ship.

The sailors all cry out in desperation  
Throwing cargo overboard to lighten the ship.

Meanwhile, where was Jonah?

Jonah was below in a deep sleep!

If someone is tired enough  
They can sleep through anything, anything!

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For example, Douglas Spedden, a young boy  
Slept through the sinking of the Titanic.

Yes, he was on board with his family!

He awakened briefly when his nanny  
Told him he would see the stars  
As they climbed into a lifeboat.

He fell back to sleep  
And slept through until morning.

Napoleon Bonaparte would power nap  
Right in the middle of a battle  
Oblivious to the roar of the cannons.

Or how about Terry Pierce of Florida?

He fell asleep in a small commuter plane.

The plane crashed.

He woke up lying in the woods  
A distance from the crash  
    Seriously injured but alive

With absolutely no memory of anything  
    But peaceful sleep.

~~

Sleep, whether it is Jesus or Jonah  
    Napoleon or Terry Pierce  
        Brings to us all a common denominator.

All of who we are  
    Good or evil  
        Loud or quiet  
            Kind or mean  
                Dissipates in sleep.

Even the vilest of people on earth  
    Become innocent and vulnerable in sleep.

Frederick Buechner,

*Whether you're just or unjust, you have the innocence of a cat dozing under the stove. Whether you're old or young, homely or fair, you take on the serenity of marble. You have given up being in charge of your life. You have put yourself into the hands of the night.*

Sleep . . . wonderful, inviting sleep.

Jesus, with his head on a pillow  
    In the stern of the boat  
        Slept soundly and undisturbed  
            While the waves tossed the boat.

~~

Meanwhile, the disciples were beside themselves.

How in the world could Jesus  
Sleep through such a storm?

You would think  
Jesus, asleep, might be reassuring.

If Jesus, the Son of God, wasn't worried, why were they?

But that's not human nature.

However reassuring it might be  
To have the Son of God in your boat

Knowing the overwhelming power of sleep  
And how tired Jesus was  
The disciples couldn't help themselves.

**3**

**Mark 4:37-38 (NLT)**

**<sup>37</sup> But soon a fierce storm came up. High waves were breaking into the boat, and it began to fill with water.**

**<sup>38</sup> Jesus was sleeping at the back of the boat with his head on a cushion. The disciples woke him up, shouting, "Teacher, don't you care that we're going to drown?"**

~~

And with that, we see the fully-divine Jesus  
Wake up from his fully-human sleep  
And rebuke the storm  
**Peace! Be still!**

He, then, rebuked the disciples for waking him.

**4**

**Mark 4:40 (NIV) "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"**

And they looked at one another

**5**

**Mark 4:41 NRSV “who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”**

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This, then, is a story about trust.

Trusting Jesus through the storms in our lives.

Trusting that, whether Jesus is asleep or awake  
He will see us through.

Amen?

Yes, he is in the stern of our boat  
With his arm draped across the rudder

And despite being asleep  
And being tossed about by the storms raging  
Trusting in Jesus  
That our boat will find its way to harbor.

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Sleep and rest are so important.

God designed rest as part of our life's cycles.

In the Creation account in Genesis 1  
God specifically set aside the seventh day  
As a day of rest.

Did God need the day to rest?

No! We do.

Every seventh day we are to set aside time for rest.

That's a good thing.

God also designed our bodies for sleep.

God created sleep to take up to one third of our lives.

Eight hours every twenty-four.

Seems excessive, doesn't it?

Thomas Edison thought it a waste of time  
*A heritage from our cave days.*

He slept less than four hours per day.

On the other hand, Albert Einstein  
Slept ten hours a day  
And took a nap besides.

Based on optimal health benefits  
Sleep experts recommend 7 to 9 hours of sleep  
And more for children.

God created sleep for our benefit.

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Jesus was human.

He, like us, needed sleep.

Conversely, our Creator God is not human.  
His eyes never close.

6

**Psalm 121:3-4 (NLT)**

**<sup>3</sup> He will not let you stumble;  
the one who watches over you will not slumber.**

**<sup>4</sup> Indeed, he who watches over Israel  
never slumbers or sleeps.**

God remains active in our lives  
Whether we're asleep or awake.

From a Biblical perspective  
Sleep is the surrender of heart, soul, and mind  
Into the care of our Creator.

In our passage today  
Jesus models a balance between activity and rest.

Jesus trusts in the protection and provision  
Of his heavenly Father.

He slept the deepest of sleeps  
In the stern of a boat  
While life's storms raged about him.

And so should we.

Like Jesus, we should never let the storms of life  
Prevent us from much-needed sleep  
To restore and give strength to body and soul.

Even in our sleep  
God can do for us  
What we can't do for ourselves

He can restore strength and healing  
Hope and vision during our sleeping hours.

It's really about surrendering.

The ability to surrender ourselves  
To the abiding presence of God.

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And so, as we engage in our various endeavors  
I pray, we find, at the end of the day  
Full, undisturbed, and peace-filled sleep

Trusting our Maker to watch over us.

Jesus slept the sleep of a babe  
In the middle of a storm

You can too!

Surrender to God and to God's design for rest.

Now, let's all go take a nap for Jesus sake!