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"Learning about Immanuel"
Text: Mark 4:35-41

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Disciples are learners. So it was with the twelve. So it is with us. They were not disciples, and we are not disciples, because of what we know, but rather because we need to learn. And grow. And we have much to learn.

As did the twelve who were in the boat with Jesus that day, crossing the Sea of Galilee. They had learned a lot already; yet they still had a lot to learn.

So far they had heard Jesus teach in the synagogue with authority, and not how the scribes taught, relying on the authority of those who came before them. There was something different with Jesus and His teaching, that He didn't need to rely on someone else's authority - He was the authority! And then He demonstrated that authority that same day when He rebuked an unclean spirit and commanded it to come out of a man. And it did. Jesus was a man with authority (Mark 1:21-28).

Then they saw Jesus the healer. First healing Peter's mother-in-law from a fever, and then also healing the many who were brought to Him of many and various diseases and casting out demons. Jesus is the great physician of body and soul (Mark 1:29-34).

And no disease was too much for Him - not even dreaded leprosy. For that's who came next. And Jesus - unafraid of this man who everyone else was afraid of - touched him! And cleansed him (Mark 1:40-42).

The disciples were learning, who Jesus was. Teacher, healer, cleanser. And next: **forgiver**! For next came a man who was paralyzed, and to him Jesus said: *Son, your sins are forgiven.* That caused quite a stir! Only God can forgive sins! So Jesus then heals the man to show that His words are not empty but have such authority (Mark 2:1-12). Or as the psalmist said: *Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases* (Psalm 103:2-3). Certainly the Lord was with Jesus.

But even that wasn't saying enough, they would learn. Jesus claimed more than that - that He was Lord of the Sabbath; that the Sabbath wasn't over Him, He was over the Sabbath!

The Sabbath wasn't given to Him, He gave the Sabbath, for working good. And so He worked good on the Sabbath, healing a man with a withered hand, and not bowing to His opponents who demanded that He not do good on the Sabbath (Mark 2:23-3:6). No, this is exactly what the Sabbath was for. For God to give, for man to receive.

The disciples were learning. The demons and unclean spirits were crying out in fear of Him: *You are the Son of God!* (Mark 3:11) Others, though, began to question His sanity. They said: *He is out of his mind* (Mark 3:21). They knew <u>that</u> wasn't true! No one's mind was more right than His!

Then Jesus switched gears and began to teach about the kingdom of God in a series of parables (Mark 4:1-34). He talked of seeds growing - the parables we heard last week - and that we don't know how the seeds grow, and we can't make them grow, they just do. And that small seeds can even produce large plants. It is part of the mystery of nature. Nature, which so often seems to have a mind of its own. When it rains and when it is sunny. How things grow. And the storms that so often seem to pop up out of nowhere . . .

Like the storm that popped up that very evening when they took leave of the crowd and got into a boat to cross over the Sea of Galilee. One of those terrifying and out-of-nowhere Sea of Galilee storms began to swamp the boat - and so much so that sinking became a very real possibility. Nature was raging . . . *and Jesus was asleep*. And apparently <u>*very*</u> asleep to sleep through something like this!

So they wake Him up. ***Don't you care that we are perishing?*** And maybe, under those words, was an accusation. Don't you care about <u>us</u> like all those sick people you healed? Don't you care about <u>us</u> like all those people you cast out demons from? Don't you care about <u>us</u> like the lepers and the paralyzed? *What about <u>us</u>?*

The disciples still had much to learn. It is one thing to learn by watching Jesus provide for those in need; now <u>they</u> were the ones in need! Now they know something of the desperation of those who came to Jesus. **And Jesus does not fail them**. We're not even told He spoke to them or answered their question - He simply speaks *to the winds and waves*. Winds and waves that have no ears. Winds and waves that are part of wild and uncontrollable nature. But winds and waves that obey <u>*Him*</u>. ***Peace! Be still!*** And all at once, nature is still and at peace. *With Jesus*.

<u>Then</u> Jesus speaks to them. Not in the midst of their frenzied fear, but when they were filled with another kind of fear - fear of the one whose presence they were in. ***Who <u>is</u> this?*** Did they think they knew before? Did they think they had it figured out? But there is only one who the winds and waves obey . . . who told the waters in creation here and no farther . . . who commands floods to come and go . . . who orders the Red Sea to divide and it does . . . who causes plagues of locusts, flies, gnats, and darkness . . . who stops the Jordan from flowing . . .

Who is this? He was a man. He was tired, asleep. He got hungry, ate, and prayed. God was with Him, to be sure. *But to command winds and waves?*

Well, why did they wake Him, if they didn't expect that?
And if they did, why were they surprised and in fear afterward?

They were still learning, and had much to learn. Yes, there is God and man [*hands apart*] and there is certainly a great distance between them. But here, in Jesus, the distance is not so great [*hands closer*]. He's a man who also acts like God, speaks like God, does what only God can do. *Is this God Himself? God in human flesh? God and man as one?* [*hands together*]

They were learning, growing. Did they have faith? Of course they had faith! They had faith in God, and they had faith in Jesus [*hands apart*]. But they were learning to bring those two together. **To have faith in Jesus <u>as</u> God** [*hands together*]. God in the flesh, come into His creation, to save it. To save them. To save us. To save all.

Which we, too, are still learning.

Oh, we <u>know</u>, right? <u>We</u> know who Jesus is. We know how He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament and all God's promises. We know what He did. We know He died on the cross and rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. We know. We confess it in the Creed. And you believe that. That's why you are here.

And yet . . . we have our moments.

Like the disciples in that boat that night, we, too, have our "what about me" moments. You healed that person, what about <u>me</u>? You provided for that person, what about <u>me</u>? You answered that prayer, what about <u>mine</u>? Don't you care? Don't you care about <u>me</u>? About <u>my</u> family? About <u>my</u> prayers? About <u>my</u> troubles? Wake up! What about <u>me</u>?

And like the disciples, maybe we, too, wonder what God will do, if some problems just too big, some people too far gone. Some waves too big, some winds too strong. Some sins too deep, some troubles gone on too long, some grudges too hard. Yeah, we've seen God do a lot, and we know, our head knows God can do anything, BUT . . . but this? And will He even be willing? For someone like me? Whose faith is so weak. Whose life is so bad. Whose prayers falter and fail. Whose life isn't what it should be.

Like the disciples, we, too, are still learning. Growing.

Learning to trust that Jesus does care, even when He seems not to; even when He seems asleep. Even when others - even other Christians! - tell us differently.

Learning to trust every word and promise of God, that if He speaks it, it is true. That if He promises, it will come to pass.

Learning to trust our baptism, that those waters combined with the word of God really did make us His children, really did forgive our sins, and really did make us heirs of eternal life. We can rely on that! And that God is not going to renege on that promise.

Learning to trust the forgiveness of our Lord, that we really are cleansed, that God is not punishing us for our sins, that He doesn't look at us as others do, or even as we look at ourselves; that God really is pleased with us.

Learning to trust the cross of Jesus. For that's what all of this really is. Learning to trust that all our sins were put there on Jesus - there are none for us to still make up for. Learning to trust that all the wrath and punishment of God was poured out on Jesus - He is not now punishing you for those same sins Jesus already atoned for. Learning to trust that Jesus has traded places with us - that He took our rightful place there, and gave us His rightful place as sons and daughters of God. Learning to trust that as sons and daughters of God, He disciplines us *in love*, for our good. Learning that He is for us in all things, and not against us in *anything*.

Learning not to believe the lies and lures of satan, who wants you to think otherwise. That there is still something you must do. That you have to make yourself pleasing to God. That all God's words and promises are not certain and sure, but dependent on you, how well you do and how strongly you believe.

No. Like in the boat that day, Jesus is here, among us in this boat, standing here and saying to you: ***Peace! Be still!*** The **peace** that comes with His forgiveness that calms our doubts and fears, and the **stillness** that comes with His love. *Stillness*. That it's not what you do, your activity; but what He did, His activity. What He gives and you receive. What He did in His life, in His death, and in His resurrection. And what He is giving to you here, in His Word, in His water, and at His altar. That here, there is not God and man [*hands apart*], but God and man [*hands together*]. The Body and Blood of the one who was both God and man in one flesh, that we be one with Him and live in Him and He in us.

So each week we come here and learn and receive. And then Jesus says to us, *let's go across to the other side*. We go out in faith, and He goes out with us. And we get knocked down and tossed about. Things happen we didn't expect and come out of the blue. BIG things, satan trying to sink our faith. And then, as we sang in the Introit: *Then we cry to the LORD in our trouble, and he delivers us from our distress*. Maybe by ending the trouble. Maybe by strengthening our faith in it. Maybe not as quickly as we like. Maybe not the way we thought. W*e're learning*. That our Lord is with us, and He is faithful. And

one day, when we die, when the storms of sin and death overtake us, even then - *especially* then! - His care will not cease. He will be with us then, too, and take us safely to the other side. To life eternal.

Who is this? the disciples wondered. And they learned who this is: The one who does care. The one who saves. Yes, the one true God. The promised one. Immanuel. God with us.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.