

## God Is

Job 38:1-21, Mark 4:35-41

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My friend Kim lives far away, and so we make contact primarily on Facebook. She loves to post and she loves to respond to my posts, and about 90% of the time, her response is just two words: "God is!" It usually has an exclamation point attached. When I see her in person, she often begins a conversation with the same two words: God is!

Kim is a hospital administrator in a large city and the single mom of three amazing sons. I have experienced her as a fierce protector and encourager of those sons, challenging them into the world and making sure she can find whatever resources she needs so that they can succeed. Sometimes this work, on top of her full-time job, has been exhausting as any single parent can tell you. Obstacles arise when she least expects them. Yet at every point she keeps saying, out loud, and in comments on social media, "God is!"

Kim knows that Jesus is in the boat.

So, she keeps paddling.

God is. When Kim started responding that way all the time after I first met her, I thought it was kind of hokey. Over the years, she has been teaching me the same lesson those disciples in that storm-tossed boat needed to learn: God. **IS**. The stable center holding that boat on the waves was asleep in the stern, present in the storm, an even keel, if you will accept the mixed metaphor.

Jesus is already in the boat. God is.

I read an amazing book this week that I highly recommend to you. Kate Bowler is the author of *Everything Happens for a Reason and Other Lies I've Loved*. Shortly after the birth of her first child, Kate discovered she had advanced colon cancer. She entered that place that some of you know well, endless doctor visits, surgery, chemo and her body failing her.

The need to find care for their young son as she and her husband tried to work and do medical stuff overwhelmed her. The whole medical insurance nightmare rose up as she sought to enter a new drug trial. One day, she realizes that one of her points of stress comes from a part of herself she needs to let go. She explains it this way:

“It is an easy lie that has wormed its way into my mind: *I am the center that must hold*. It is a thought I picked up so early on in my life that I can't bring myself to question it. It is something closer to a reflex. Life is unstable because it is life. But I am steady.” (p. 80)

How many of us struggle under what she describes as this “easy lie?” That we are the centers that must hold in the midst of unstable LIFE. So that when the storms come in our personal lives or in the life of the world, we race around trying to trim the sails or bail out the water as if it all depends on us. We must be the even keel to hold things steady. That's kind of how Job thought and acted about his life as well, and therefore why he was angry and confused when he lost control.

And so, we walk right over Jesus lying in the boat we are trying to save. And sometimes our anxious yelling and screaming drowns out his clear words: “Peace, be still.” Or in another translation I particularly love, “Silence! Be calm!” So that I wonder whether Jesus was talking to the storm, or to the disciples in the boat. (repeat)

In both the scriptures we read today, God/Jesus seems kind of mean. Instead of comforting the afflicted ones, the frightened ones, they get a bit of a lecture about the nature of God and the shallowness of their faith. Didn't Jesus know those guys were afraid for their lives? Didn't God understand why Job was upset?

Of course. But in both cases, the word they wanted to communicate was “God is! Stop living your life and going through both joys and struggles as though I am not already in the boat with you! Stop thinking only you can and *have to* solve the problems. Stop forgetting that I am already at work! You are not the center that must hold: I am.”

Way back in the times of Moses, when Moses asked God for a name to use, God replied simply: “I am.”

All right, I know at this point some of you are thinking that this is way too simplistic. Just saying that “God is!” is not going to solve whatever big issue is before you or the country or the world. Fair enough. But here’s what that kind of faith does: ***it changes how you go through the struggle. It changes your level of stress and care. It changes YOU!***

The United Church of Canada has a beautiful statement of faith that ends like this: “In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us. We are not alone.” Inherent in saying that is the trust that God is actually already at work in whatever situation you find yourself, and if you shut up and calm down and access that presence, you can see it, feel it, know it, be strengthened by it. I have seen this in my life. I have seen it in the world around me; I am seeing it happen in the movement to get the children reunited with their parents at the border. When I understand, as a friend once told me, that “the title of Alpha and Omega is already taken,” and I stop trying to be the one who holds it all together alone, things change.

God is. Jesus is already in the boat. The final piece of this puzzle is that boat. About 40 years ago, a truly amazing Catholic theologian named Ernesto Cardenal went into a rural village named Solentiname on a lake in Nicaragua and held a weekly Bible Study with the villagers. He wrote a transcript of their conversations. As they discussed the story in Mark, a woman named Olivia said this: “Jesus travels with us in the community. The boat is the community.”

The disciples were not alone because Jesus was in the boat. They also had each other. People all the time will say that they don’t need the church to be a Christian; they can do good deeds and go pray to God in the park or at sunset. Indeed. But for me, that boat, that community, is where I am reminded that God is. It’s where, if I let myself be, I’m held in prayer, in support, and sometimes in appropriate challenge when I try to go it alone. I do not want to wade into the seas of my life, the seas of the troubles of the world, without the boat—the boat where Jesus is already present and at work, though sometimes seemingly asleep.

Silence. Be calm.

God is.