



# COVID-19 – A TIME FOR PEACE AND REST

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## Introduction

In our unease and our inability to give ourselves rest, we have also damaged the environment because by not resting and resetting ourselves, we have also denied the environment, the factor upon which our work is acted, the opportunity to rest and reset itself. In a bid to increase productivity and increase wealth, people have devised ways and means of working 24/7 but have not considered the effects of these actions on the natural order of things – that is, humanity's natural need for rest, and the environment's natural need of following. This paper draws on Mark 4:35-41 to propose that the COVID-19 pandemic is like a storm raging that invites us to learn from Jesus who takes a rest in the midst of the storm. It argues that Mark 4:35-41 gives a rare moment of quiet which Jesus had with his disciples, a time of rest for the action that follows. Considering that the whole gospel of Mark is one of the swiftest, moving along with speed gospels, it is refreshing to note that we encounter Jesus sleeping.

## COVID-19, the Environment and Human Response

COVID-19 has ravaged the world's economy in recent times. The information has it that it began in China and with time has spread over the entire world. Its effect has been gargantuan as it has brought the economies of many nations including great nations and developing nations alike to a standstill. It has greatly interrupted regular life as we know it. The expressions 'lockdown', 'quarantine' and 'isolation' have suddenly become commonplace and the resultant effect of this is that people's schedules have had to change. People have to stay at home, stay away from work, stay indoors if there is nothing urgent or essential that would take them outdoors. In short, people have been instructed to rest. The church has had its fair share of this instruction to rest, to rest from its activity-laden and driven church organisation. This has become a source of worry for

many people. Mostly, we are not used to this level of losing control. The number of days to stay at home and ‘rest’ is bound to ruin our well-laid down targets. If the disciples had seen the storm as an instrument in the hands of the Lord for which he was using to help them rest and prepare for the work of the next day, perhaps, they could have rested in the Lord. Instead, they were restless and continued to work until they were frantic with panic. Suffice it to say, they did not just get any rest, their exhaustion levels were probably higher. COVID-19 is the storm we face today. There is no denying that it is frightful, each day we hear of infection rates climbing higher on a global scale, death rates moving steadily, alongside people of some societal prominence succumbing to this infection, and it does not seem to be a respecter of race, tribe, sex, age, or economic status. A storm is raging, but if you and I will rest with Jesus and in Jesus, if we can trust Jesus to get us to the other side, we can avoid all the anxieties that accompany such a pandemic. If we can believe that Jesus cares about us and has the power to control the elements in his creation at will, and this includes COVID-19, we can appreciate that this is only an instrument in the hands of the Lord.

## **The Call to Row to the Other Side: A Call to Rest**

In Mark 4:1, we see Jesus get into a boat at the edge of the lake to teach a crowd of people who had flooded him at the shore. He needed to do this because the people were so many and he needed a vantage point, preferably, a higher point to stand to serve as some kind of stage so that he will be seen and heard by all. I can imagine what this would have meant for his disciples with him, who would then have to organise the crowds to sit down or stand as the case may have been and ensure that everyone was comfortable, to go to the aid of those that needed any assistance and to ensure silence and minimal distractions so that the work that Jesus was doing would go on smoothly. They went at this all day until the evening came and when evening had come, Jesus called them to go to the other side of the lake to continue the work there. He would not let them wait and go in the morning. It was as if it was a very urgent business and needed to be done right away without any delay or preparation. As we are told, Jesus was already in the boat and so they joined him to go to the other side. Many of the disciples were fisher folks, so their natural instinct would tell them to get to work by rowing the boat. They went to work.

However, we see Jesus go to sleep, and rightly so on a cushion! Comfortably. The contrast is that we see Jesus recognise a time of rest, while the disciples continue to work because they probably assumed that it depends on them to get to the other side. A tempest came at this time of all times when the disciples were exhausted from working all day and probably not having any sleep. It is like trouble comes at the worst possible hour, the time when we feel least prepared to face it. They may obviously have needed to work harder to try to keep the boat from been battered, yet we hear the tempest was so strong that water was coming into the boat and it was about to sink. How can we ignore the opinion of the disciples about the fact that the boat was going to sink? They were the experts and they could not have been exaggerating the problem, they went into a panic and to the point of giving up because they were surely going to die under those circumstances. Where was Jesus in all this? The one who had issued the instruction for them to go over to the other side urgently was asleep and remained asleep throughout the episode.

The instruction Jesus had issued was, “let us go over to the other side”. They were to go with Jesus to the other side, not to take Jesus along to the other side. It reminds us of the call to discipleship where Jesus tells us to follow him. If they had considered the instruction this way, they may have seen it as a call to rest for the work they had the next day, to rest in God’s rest which meant a Sabbath, a leaving of everything in the hands of God, a complete trust that God can carry them over to the other side if they let go and let him. Noah sailed in a boat in a flood that destroyed the whole world, the Lord God had himself shut him in such a way that he and all those who were with him were unharmed. The disciples in our story also sailed in a boat in which Jesus himself was present, they acted out of the instruction of Jesus, but they were unable to follow it fully. Following Jesus would have meant to rest with him by his side, and trust him even if they had to go without him to the other side. They could have trusted in him enough to leave everything in his hands and trusted even in his ability to use the storm to accomplish his purpose. Jesus obviously knew that a storm will arise yet he asked the disciples to go at that time, he did not avoid it. He knew there was a storm, yet he slept on. He knew there was going to be a storm, yet he called the disciples to go with him to the other side. He knew the storm would be beyond their control, yet he asked them to go with him. It was beyond the disciples, but it was not beyond him. They had lost control but he had not. He did not call them to come and

put the storm under control, he called them to go with him. From his query to the disciples later, we realise that it was a question of the test of their faith and not their skills or ability to control the situation, a question of their ability to come into God's rest by trusting him completely to handle it and when we cannot literally see him handling it. In the midst of the storm, can we rest in Jesus?

## **The Unease of the Disciples, our Current Unease and Environmental Hazards**

The disciples clearly could not rest in Jesus, they felt a need to work, to take control, to be the determinants of their own circumstances and future. Their expert opinion determined what the situation required and they had probably done all they could, and now their expert opinion told them again that it was all over, death was staring them right in the face. Their expert opinions had turned them over to panic and forgetfulness of who Jesus was. Jesus was no longer Lord but Teacher, also Jesus was no longer caring, but one who did not care. Perhaps the disciples would have perceived Jesus as caring, if they had seen him with them in their attempts to work hard to beat the storm and keep the boat adrift, that is, if Jesus had kotowed to their standard of how things should be managed. This is because in their panic they could no longer recognise Jesus as Lord, they had forgotten that the standards of human beings did not apply to him and that he operated by a higher, more authoritative standard. They wanted Jesus to begin to act according to their understanding and knowledge rather than his own. They had forgotten that Jesus their Lord, who had instructed them to go over to the other side was wholly capable of accomplishing that even through a storm. They had forgotten that they had opted to follow him and in applying their standards to Jesus, he was not acting logically.

Human beings today are no different. We have developed a feeling of control and a sense of work which make it nearly impossible to stop and take a rest. We have come to a place where Sabbath no longer has any meaning for us. We have surrounded ourselves with 'wise' sayings and habits that imply that hard work means nonstop work habits, where a person takes no rest because any form of rest is losing control which would make things go out of control. We just keep going though we have been working all day, we want to also work all night, we give ourselves no rest, we give

our working implements and instruments no rest. In a world like the one we live in, true rest is only found in Jesus. Today if we can find any rest or alternative lifestyle, we can only find it in submitting to the Lordship of Jesus through acknowledging that he has the authority and ability to make the earth, and his creation go round and also cater for the needs of his people. We have to be able to accept and trust in the rest he gives us from the toils of the day, in the natural order of night and rest. Again, we have to accept that, in his supernatural knowledge, all the ways things are ordered is superior to our wisdom and expert opinions.

Many of the challenges we have now stem from our inability to rest in this sure confidence. The world is in a panic because the things we trust in, our expertise, our wisdom, our work, and our busyness are failing us. We have flown into panic, and out of our panic we have simply refused to 'stay at home', because we feel we must go out there, to our usual life to make it to tomorrow. We fear that we may not make it if we stay put and at rest. Yet we can agree that this is the night and a time for rest and in a storm like this, we can find rest in nothing else, not in our expertise, not in our knowledge or abilities but in Jesus only. Jesus is the only one that can give us peace in the midst of the storm. It is heart-warming to note the testimonies that came along about some environmental 'repairs' as people took to their homes and we trust that for the sake of our environment some lessons will be learned.

## Conclusion

Jesus invites us just as he invites the disciples to follow him to the other side. He has never promised a smooth route but a sure destination. If we learn to keep our trust in Jesus, we may be able to follow him completely and find rest even in the midst of our storms. The COVID-19 pandemic is like a storm raging in our world today. It has interrupted our schedules and called us to an unexpected yet needed rest, if we can trust our Lord in this storm also, we may be able to find peace in the midst of it and perhaps even count our blessings when the storm is over.