Text: Mark 4:35-41, Job 38:1-11

**Introduction**

I want to meditate this morning on something that usually gets termed “free will”. Yes, I realize it is the middle of summer and ice cream and bomb pops would be a better subject. But there is also the fact that preaching to the summer congregation is preaching to the stalwarts – the mature. And this general topic is the beating heart of the gospel, even if it is rarely found.

**Trouble in the World**

Let me start with a couple of assertions or definitions of what we – meaning I, and Augustine and Luther and the vast majority of theologians of all times and place – mean by free will. The first radical assertion is that none of us have free will in the way we normally think about that. And that is not to say that we are robots or meat puppets or anything like that. Sure, you are completely free to choose JIF or Skippy, Tide or Gain. But if your conception of free will is based on consumer choice, that is a pretty weak form. But even here the specter of the bound will raises up. Just how much does advertising control our decisions? But walking past that suspicion quickly, even Luther who thought his one full length treatise worthy of being kept around was Bondage of the Will had a more expansive understanding of free will. We can certainly choose to do the right thing. All society would fall apart if the civil use of the law, that curb, didn’t work. If we didn’t realize that our lives will be better doing the right thing. And fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. But fear is not the fulfillment of the law. I buried the money in the ground because I knew you were a harsh master reaping where you did not plant. Here is your talent back. You wicked servant. No, we always will want we want. And we’ve got a broken want-er. Because want we want is always turned inward toward ourselves. The perfect want-er is turned outward toward God and toward our neighbor. Free Will worthy of the name would choose perfect love.

Now preaching to this mature summer audience we also have to realize that the Holy Spirit does work. Sanctification is a real thing. That is why I have no problem encouraging or exhorting toward good works. Those works are there for us to do laid out in advance for us to walk in. But they are also a bit like what Jesus said about the poor. You can always do them. But nowhere else are you really going to hear the gospel. The way the Augsburg Confession puts it is this: “Of Free Will they teach that man’s will has some liberty to choose civil righteousness, and to work things subject to reason. But it has no power, without the Holy Ghost, to work the righteousness of God, that is, spiritual righteousness; since the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God, but this righteousness is wrought in the heart when the Holy Ghost is received through the Word.”

Natural Man receives not the things of the Spirit…our will is bound. The things I know I should do, I do not; while I keep doing the things I hate. O wretch man am I, who will free me from this body of death. We are all addicts in some one. Some of us are just have more public forms of addiction. We are all sin addicts. And our lives become unmanageable.

**Text**

Now let me ground this in our texts today. Let’s give the first two sentences of the Gospel passage a close read. When evening comes Jesus says, “let’s go across to the other side.” It’s a statement of desire, but there is no indication of how it should be done. And the disciples do not stop to ask. These are strong men. Many of them fishermen. Skilled at sailing. So those disciples “took him with them in their boat, just as he was.” They are setting off under their own powers. They are doing what they want to do. It might even be the right thing, but is it the right reason?

This is how we approach the Spiritual life. We think we can do this. That we can take God along for our ride. That it is our life. And that God owes us something for doing His will.

And the more we follow the thinking of that natural man, the more trouble we get into. It comes from another such boat story, but it is a little detail that I love. It’s a couple of chapters later when Jesus comes walking on the water, but prior the disciples are “straining against the wind.” They are furiously rowing, and going nowhere. Here, the don’t even get that far. If you are setting out for spiritual things under the natural man’s power, “the boat was already filling up.”

And what is our typically response when we find our lives unmanageable? When we find our little life boats filling up with water because of our own choices? “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” God, why the hell did you do this? If you are who you say your are, why did you allow this to happen?

**Christology**

The bible has a couple of responses when we get to that stage. The first is our Old Testament reading. “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?...Were you there when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me if you have understanding”

And that is basically the law speaking. Maybe the problem of our broken want-er is just a problem of knowledge and understanding. Maybe if we just knew more and better we would make better choices. Now I’m going to get a little dig in here, this is exactly what a whole lot of church, and the entire self-help section of the book store, preach and teach. Your problem is just one of knowledge and technique. But they you find yourself with your boat filling up again. You find yourself in the middle of another whirlwind of life. Hard core Atheist determinist behavioral psychologist B.F. Skinner – most famous for rat mazes with food pellets - put it this way, “the only difference between men and rats is that rats learn from their mistakes.”

The problem of our broken want-er, our bound will, is not solved by knowledge or technique. It goes right to core or who we are. We are broken and lost and thrashing out at whoever. It is so deep and hopeless that the creator himself – the one who laid the foundations and stretched the line upon it. Who sunk the bases and prescribed its limits. Who said to the proud ways be stayed. That one entered his own creation and remade human nature on the fly. The problem of our broken want-er required a savior.

And we have one. We have a savior who satisfied the knowledge and skill and performance problems. We have a savior who knows who and what we are – including our broken will. We have a savior who has revealed to us the will of our creator. Not that we should die. Not that he is uncaring or worse cruel. We have a savior who comes into our lives and says “peace! Be still. Why are you so afraid.” The Father knows our plight and gives us the only thing that solves it. His grace through his son.

No longer does the law of knowledge or power or technique or any of those things of natural man have any claim on us. No longer does our broken want-er doom us forever. Because we have a savior who has made faith the rule. All who believe shall be saved. And that faith itself is a gift of God in the Holy Spirit.

We proclaim Christ crucified. A stumbling block and foolishness to the natural man still striving on his own. But the power of God to remake us who have reached the end of that road.

**Moral /Eschatological**

The question then is always “how then do we live?”

Sanctification is real, but like all addicts, relapse is just around the corner. If we go back to relying on our own power, the boat starts filling back up fast. We still have this fundamentally cracked want-er. Even if God has jury-rigged a new mast for the rest of this voyage.

Evening and morning, Sunset and dawning, we sail by the grace of Christ. We trust His mercies to shine upon us. We live by faith. We might not know. But it is not about knowing. It’s about believing. Believe in the love of Christ. Fear not, he’s a good pilot. We will reach the harbor.