

On my vacation to Louisiana last week I discovered that one my friends who made the trip doesn't like grits. Now, you can eat other things for breakfast in the South, but if you want to taste grits the way grits should taste, the South is where you want to go. Joe and I were singing the praises of grits, but Stephen was having none of it. One morning in Mississippi, our host prepared breakfast for us. And – you guessed it – she fixed grits. Stephen tried them just to be sociable, but you could tell, this was not his idea of breakfast. He said privately afterwards, "It's not just grits – I don't eat hot cereal of any kind." I found this hard to believe. I said, "Not even oatmeal?" He just shook his head and said, "The only thing oatmeal is good for is cookies."

Above all, we were just grateful that after traveling 2400 miles by car, we got back safely, facing only one serious storm along the way. For all the traveling Jesus did in his short career, you can imagine he faced his storms as well. Mark's gospel tells us about one of them. This storm almost serves as a commentary on the journey Jesus is making. He is passing from the Jewish side of the lake to the Gentile side of the lake. His ministry ultimately will reconcile people from both sides, but in the middle he faces a storm.

Sure doesn't seem to bother him. Mark says a violent squall, a kind of tornado drops from the sky, stirs up the water, fills the boat, and nearly capsizes the whole bunch of them. Jesus, who must be the patron saint of narcolepsy, sleeps through the entire episode. To restore order, he rebukes the wind and the sea. He talks to the elements. He treats them as he treats unclean spirits in exorcisms. "Quiet! Be still!" And it works. I know parents who say these very words to their kids every day, and they cannot get the same results.

But Jesus can. He still can. He tells the disciples, though, that the way to peace and order, the way to reconciliation, is not through an ability to command the forces of nature, but along the way of faith. We cannot always command the world around us, but through faith we can command the world within us.

At the end of this gospel, the terrified disciples look kind of stupid, but at the beginning of this gospel they did something very wise. They took Jesus with them into the boat. Normally in that group when someone takes someone, it is Jesus who takes the disciples, but in this one instance, Mark says very clearly the disciples take Jesus. That's all we have to do. Jesus is the one who provides stability. He does not calm every storm we face; he did not calm every storm he faced – at the end of his life he could have stopped the crucifixion, but he did not. He did not always bring peace around him, but he did bring peace within.

Whenever we face opposition from the weather, from other people, or from just bad luck, the real opposition is always inside us – how are we going to handle this? According to Jesus, there is only one way: the way of faith.