

OUT OF THE STORM
Matthew 14:22-33
Worship Moment Message
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SCRIPTURE

Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. ²⁵And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. ²⁶But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. ²⁷But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." ²⁸Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ²⁹He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. ³⁰But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³²When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God" (Matthew 14:22-33 NRSV).

INTRODUCTION

Some time ago, before I came to Battle Creek, I was looking through Church Information Forms of congregations looking for a new pastor. I recall one congregation in particular that had been through some tough times, and consequently they had high expectations of what they thought their new pastor should do. At the bottom of a long list of qualifications I read this line, "The ability to walk on water considered a real plus." Of course, they were kidding (or at least I hope they were.)

I cannot walk on water (except maybe Goguac in February). Nobody here can walk on water. But Jesus walked on water. The Bible does not simply tell us that Jesus walked on water. It tells us that Jesus walked on water during a storm. This is significant. If we forget about the storm we will miss the point of the story. Jesus comes to us in unexpected ways during the storms of life.

1. OUT OF THE STORM: PRIORITIES

Out of the storms of life come priorities.

One night, the disciples found themselves in the midst of a raging storm. Jesus was not with them and they were anxious and afraid. How did they get in that mess?

On the previous day, they had been in a remote place where a large crowd had gathered to hear Jesus teach. After awhile it became obvious that they were unprepared to be in that place as they had very little food. But Jesus was able to multiply what little food was available. Everybody had enough to eat and then some. As you can imagine this made Jesus quite popular with the crowd. According to the account in John's Gospel, the crowd then tried to force Jesus to become their king. In those days, their king was the Roman Emperor but they did not want him to be their king. They wanted a Jewish king. So when Jesus showed such promise they thought maybe he could be the king they always wanted, a king who had the power to raise up an army and overthrow the Romans. Some of Jesus' own disciples even held to this opinion at this particular time. But they were mistaken. That is not why Jesus came. He was not interested in establishing a political kingdom. His concern was for the kingdom of God and the salvation of the human race. So what did Jesus do? He made his disciples get in a boat and sail off without him and he dismissed the crowd. He did not ask them to leave. He made them leave. (The Greek is far more harsh than the English translation suggests.)

We do not know how the disciples reacted to this but it is likely they were shocked, hurt, even confused by Jesus' behavior. "Why did he do this to us?"

They had misplaced their priorities. They had attached the wrong importance to Jesus. They, like the crowd, saw Jesus in terms of their wants and not in terms of their needs. They wanted him to fit their expectations rather than try to understand what God expected of them.

So that is why they were out in the boat when a storm struck. There is nothing like a storm to help sort out your priorities.

Some years ago I was taking a youth group to a major conference in Colorado. Along the way we stopped in Lincoln, Nebraska. We went into a very busy McDonald's and I waited in line a long time for a fish sandwich. I finally got my fish sandwich. I found a seat, sat down, unwrapped my sandwich and was about to put it up to my mouth when a tornado touched down. The manager ran out yelling at the top of his lungs, "There's a tornado. Drop everything and go down into the basement now!" For a split second I hesitated. I had waited so long for this fish sandwich. I had to decide: fish sandwich or my life. I decided my life was more important and I dropped the sandwich and ran down into the basement with everyone else. The storm hit and caused quite a bit of damage but we survived. There is nothing like a storm to help sort out your priorities.

When times are tough that is when you sort out what is really important. When the storms of life hit that is when you need to decide on what really matters. The superficial must give way to the deep and abiding. The temporary must give way to the eternal.

2. OUT OF THE STORM: INVITATIONS

Out of the storms of life come invitations.

It was 3:00 a.m., the storm was raging and things were bad enough when suddenly, the disciples saw a ghost. They were terrified and they cried out. But it was not a ghost. It was Jesus coming to them on the water.

Simon Peter sized up the situation. What he did next was nothing short of remarkable. He said, “Lord, if it is you, invite me to come to you on the water.” (The original is in the form of a real conditional and so) A more accurate way to translate it would be to say, “Lord, because it is you, invite me to come to you on the water.” Jesus did. I don’t think it was inane. I think it was a sincere invitation. “Come.” This invitation, I want you to note, took place during a raging storm. Indeed, one could say that many if not most invitations from God come to us during the storms of life, that is, during tough or difficult times.

Over the years I have heard many people tell me words to this effect, “Pastor, some day I want to get active in church, some day I want to grow in my faith but right now my life is a mess. When I get my life together then I’ll become active.” I have heard that so many times. Now you can fool your friends with that maybe even your family with that but you cannot fool God with that. If you say to God, “God, wait until I get my life together.” You have to understand that God knows better. You are never going to get your life together without God. So in the midst of your chaos, confusion and hurting he says, “Come. Do not be afraid. Step out of the boat and come.” God is saying to you and me, “Do not be afraid, trust me and step out.”

Peter stepped out of the boat. Unfortunately, they did not have camcorders in those days. Wouldn’t you have just loved to have seen the expressions on the faces of the eleven other disciples? – Their eyes popping out and mouths wide open as they watched Peter walk on the water to Jesus who was also on the water!

3. OUT OF THE STORM: FAITH

Out of the storms of life comes faith.

Some critics look at this passage and they say, “there is an easy explanation for this. It was dark. They had been fighting against the wind and eventually the wind just drove

them up on shore. What they saw was not Jesus walking on the water but Jesus walking on the shoreline. Because it was dark and they were afraid they just got confused.” Even if that were true, and it is not, it still does not explain how Peter walked on water.

There were three religious leaders from the same town who liked to fish: a Roman Catholic Priest, a Jewish Rabbi and a Protestant Minister. One day they were out in a boat fishing and it was about noon. The priest put down his pole, stepped out of the boat, walked to shore, got his lunch and returned. The rabbi saw this and he went, “Hmm.” A few minutes later the minister put down his pole, stepped out of the boat, walked to shore, got his lunch and returned. The rabbi saw this and he went, “Hmm.” After a few apprehensive moments, the rabbi put down his pole, stepped out of the boat and went “Kersplash!” He was immersed in the water. The priest leaned over to the minister and said, “Do you suppose we should have told him where the stones are?”

That’s the way those guys walked on the water. But that is not the way Jesus or Peter walked on the water.

Peter made a response of faith. He heard the invitation from Christ and he stepped out. This is the biblical meaning of faith. Faith is not a religious affiliation or membership in a certain denomination or church. It is not an opinion about God or some vague notion of spirituality. It is a trusting and personal response to the invitation of Christ. Christ says, “Come.” And you step out.

Of course, I don’t necessarily mean this in a literal sense. Many of you, especially if you are in a vulnerable population group, are sheltering in place and taking precautions in dealing with our current pandemic. I am not suggesting you stop taking these precautions. When I say, “step out,” I am talking about a spiritual exercise where you deliberately and unreservedly place your trust in the Lord.

4. OUT OF THE STORM: PEACE

Out of the storms of life comes peace.

Peter stepped out of the boat. But after a few steps he felt the wind. He heard the storm and it distracted him. He became afraid. When he became afraid he began to sink. So he cried out, ‘Lord, help me!’ Jesus reached out his arm and rescued him but said to him, “Why did you doubt?”

Most people who read this passage and read that line assume that Jesus is criticizing Peter – scolding him for doubting. It is possible that is what Jesus meant but I do not think that is what he meant. There is more than one way you can say, “Why did you doubt?” Jesus

could have been asking Peter, “What is the cause of your doubt?” Well, that was obvious. He was afraid of the storm. Or Jesus could have been asking Peter, “What purpose does it serve to doubt?” In other words, “Why doubt now? You see me standing here. You have already taken several steps. What is the point of doubting now?” I think Jesus asked the question in this second way. Jesus was not criticizing Peter. He was trying to help him. He was not trying to increase his anxiety but calm him down. For a brief moment Peter thought the storm was greater than the Master. You and I do this all the time. When the storms of life hit, we are prone to think that the storm is stronger than the Master. We think the problem is bigger than God. It is not a rational thought but we still think it. So what Jesus says to us is, “Why do you doubt?” He is not criticizing us. He is not scolding us. He is trying to help us come to our senses. “Think - duh!” The storm cannot possibly be stronger than the Master. The problem cannot possibly be bigger than God!

Jesus stepped on board the boat and the storm ceased. The wind and the waves became still. There was peace. Oceanographers tell us that 25 feet below the surface the ocean is tranquil. Regardless of what may be happening on the surface, a storm may be raging, 25 feet below it is calm. Depth means calm. If you and I have a shallow faith then when the storms of life hit we will be anxious. But if we have a deep and abiding faith in the Lord then if the storms rage, within us there is peace knowing that God is with us and will not forsake us. God does not promise to remove all difficulties but to see us through them. Come what may, even death itself, we need not fear. The Apostle Paul declares, “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:38-39 NRSV).

5. OUT OF THE STORM: WORSHIP

Out of the storms of life comes worship.

The disciples were awestruck at this Jesus, which is the real meaning of the word “worship” in this passage. They recognized that somehow God was in their midst but we know from the parallel accounts in the Gospels that they were in fact terrified. “Who is this man that even the wind and the waves obey him?”

Some anthropologists teach that primitive people invented religion in order to cope with their fears. If you were a seafaring people afraid of a storm at sea you would invent a god to help you deal with your fears. This theory is taught in campuses all across America. But this theory does not fit the account in Matthew 14. It doesn’t make any sense. Consider this. Here is exhibit A: the storm on Galilee. Here is exhibit B: the guy who calmed the storm, Jesus of Nazareth. The disciples became more afraid of Jesus, the guy who calmed the storm, than they were of the storm that originally frightened them. My

question is this. Why would you invent a god more terrifying than the original thing that scared you? The answer is, you would not do that. Because this is not made up. This is not invention. This is real. Jesus is Lord. And he is awesome and mighty and powerful and holy and majestic and imposing and wondrous and exalted and grand and magnificent and overwhelming and if we were not so spiritually blind and dull of wit we would fall down in terror before him. But Jesus is not our enemy. He seeks our friendship. He wants to rescue us from the storms of sin and death. He wants to restore us to our Creator. He wants us to gain everlasting life. Such a person is worthy of our highest worship.

CONCLUSION

What good can come out of a storm? Priorities, Invitations, Faith, Peace, Worship. What storms are you going through right now? Many would consider the COVID-19 pandemic to be a kind of storm. But there are many other kinds of problems one could face in life. In any case, I want you to know that Jesus is with you – perhaps in ways you did not expect. Listen to his voice as he invites you to come to him. Do not be afraid. Trust God and step out.