

## Sailing Through Storms With Jesus

I invite you to a voyage this morning, actually an evening cruise. Everything starts out just fine. There is a warm gentle breeze and the waters of the lake are calm. We are all relaxed and enjoying the ride. As the evening sky turns darker we can see heavens above us. The stars and planets seem so large and near that we feel like we ought to be able to reach up and touch them. We are tired from a very busy day with Jesus, watching Him interact with the crowd, listening to Him teach, trying to wrap our minds around His perplexing stories.

It's good to be out on the lake, good to soak up some silence, good to feel the massaging action of the waves rocking our boat, rocking like the hand of our mothers rocked our cradles. In fact, Jesus has given in to the comfort of the voyage. He has fallen asleep in the back of the ship, His head on a cushion. He certainly needs and deserves the rest.

We are nearly half way across the lake. But what is this? The sails have suddenly snapped to attention. A sudden gale is blowing, the wind is howling, the gentle sea has become an angry giant taking out his frustration on a toy boat, our boat. I invite you to feel it: Hear the wind screaming in your ears, feel the spray on your face, taste the water, experience the violent rocking of the boat beneath your feet. Do you see or rather feel the liquid rising inside the boat--it's up to your knees? Do you feel your stomach twist and tighten? Understand that if this goes on much longer we are all going to drown.

Jesus! Where's Jesus? There He is! I can't believe He's still sleeping. Master, Master, what's wrong with You? Don't you care that we are all about to go down with the ship? Master wake up and do something!

And then we hear His voice. The voice is magnificent and strong. We can hear the voice even above the howl of the wind and the crashing waves. The voice says, "Peace, be still." He is talking to the sea and what is this? The sea is listening! The wind is calming down, no it is calm! The waves are settling down, no they are still! O, what manner of man is this? Even the wind and the waves obey Him!

I'm shivering, but it has nothing to do with being cold. I shiver for my weakness in the presence of such power. I shiver for my sins in the presence of His Holiness. I shiver to think of the times

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I questioned His authority. I shiver with excitement; I wonder what awaits us on the other side of this lake.

It seems to me that this Scripture passage this morning is talking about change and that it has something to do with helping us navigate the important transitions in our lives.

Look at the setting for today's Scripture: Jesus has been teaching on the West or Northwest side of the Sea of Galilee, teaching people of Jewish descent and of Jewish belief. He has faced some opposition from the Jewish teachers of the Law, Pharisees, who saw Jesus as a threat to their authority and to their fragile arrangement with the Romans. Jesus was angry at their hardness of heart but Jesus continued to teach what His Father had told Him to teach. He also continued to bring forth signs of the kingdom: He cleansed the leper, restored a withered hand, healed the sick, and delivered the possessed. Life wasn't easy for Jesus and His disciples on the Jewish side of the lake, but the difficulties notwithstanding, it was manageable and Jesus was succeeding.

In our Scripture passage for this morning, Jesus and His disciples and the others who traveled with them, are heading to the other side of the Lake, they are heading for the East and Southeast side of the Sea of Galilee. They are headed for what was known as the "Ten Towns" region, which is Gentile territory. There they will find more opportunities to demonstrate the glory of God and there they will also encounter additional opposition. But the point I would have us to understand this morning is that they are in a period of transition. They are sailing from one place to another, from one ministry to another, to one set of problems to another. They are leaving the familiar for the unknown. They are in the midst of change.

And guess what happens in the midst of change? It's a fact of life isn't it? Times of change can be quite stormy. Think of the change from early childhood to puberty. Think of the turmoil many parents face with their teens and teens with their parents as the teens move from teenagers to adults. There is the turbulence of moving from singleness to marriage or of moving back to singleness again through divorce or the death of a spouse. Think of the adjustments that need to be made when previously childless couples birth or adopt children. There are all kinds of changes we have to deal with. There are health changes, job changes, insurance changes, tax changes, and a

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host of mind-boggling changes in the culture around us. Sometimes we can't help feeling that our personal boats are bogged down between one change and another. Sometimes we feel swamped. Sometimes we may even feel that we are about to drown. What can we do when we know we are bound to encounter the storms of change?

The first thing that our Scripture passage would suggest to us this morning is that we need to travel with Jesus and under His direction. There are a lot of people in our world today who attempt to journey through life without God, and sometimes they seem to be doing pretty well. Some of them certainly make more money, have bigger houses, newer cars, and a host of fancier toys and friends than I do. You could say the same thing. But what happens to these people when the storms come? If they don't know the Lord or have a family of God to care for them and pray for them, what do they do when their health or finances fail? Where do they find hope when a loved one dies? Where do they find happiness when their toys lose their luster? Where can they find comfort when their doctor says that there is nothing else he or she can do for them?

There are so many comforts available to believers. Jesus says, "I will never leave you or forsake you." Peter tells us to cast all our cares on the Lord because He cares for us. Jesus says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls," (Matt. 11:28-29). Jesus says in Matthew 28:19-20: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Sometimes I'm up and sometimes I'm down, but whether I'm feeling up or down I know I am not alone. Sometimes things come pretty easy and sometimes life is hard but I can say with Paul in Philippians 4:13, and so can you, "**I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.**"

I think it was an old MasterCard commercial that said, "Don't leave home without it." I would say "Don't leave home without Him;" whatever you do, wherever you go, make sure Jesus is with you and that you know Him and are following His lead.

A second thing we need to do to position ourselves to deal with the storms of change that swirl around us is to call upon Jesus. To some this may sound dumb; I mean why should I have to tell any believer to call upon the Lord in time of need? Don't we all know how to do that? Doesn't it come naturally? Apparently not.

If we take for example the disciples we meet in our Scripture passage this morning, apparently not. When the storm broke out around their fishing boat, they did everything they knew to do to save themselves. They worked the ropes and trimmed the sails. They rowed. They "ruddered." They bailed water. They shouted instructions and ideas to each other. They did everything they knew to do until it became perfectly clear that everything they knew how to do wasn't enough. Then they panicked! Then they finally got around to calling out to Jesus. Only when they found themselves at the end of their ropes did they reach out for their lifeline.

I like the line in the Hymn we sang earlier: "O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, All because we do not carry Everything to God in prayer!" It is almost comical if it weren't so sad. It's like the wealthy miser who lived in a shack and starved himself to death because he was afraid to spend any money. Don't we know that all the riches and power in heaven and on earth belong to us in Jesus Christ? Do we imagine that there is anything we are going through that He isn't interested in, especially since He said "even the hairs on your head are numbered?" Do we imagine that there is anything we can ask for that is too difficult for Him to accomplish? Do we not understand that it is God's will for us to ask and to receive that our joy may be filled and that He can reveal His glory through our asking and receiving?

It seems to me that we are so richly blessed that it makes the angels jealous. God loves us, Christ died for us. The Holy Spirit has been given to us. But more often than not we live like spiritual paupers. Our faith is so weak that we are afraid to ask for what we need. We think so little of God's love for us that we think He would be annoyed if we bothered Him. As a result we live in fear and in want. But this is not what our Father expects of us. Look with me at John 16:22-24: Jesus says, "So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy. In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will

give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete."

In other words God wants us to enlist His help sooner rather than later. He wants us to think of Him first, not second, third, or 44th. **God is pleased to hear from His children.**

In order to deal well with the storms of change that buffet our lives, we need first of all to make sure that Jesus is with us and that we are on board with Him. Secondly, we need to be bold and confident when we call upon Him; He wants to hear from His children. The third and final thing I see in our Scripture passage this morning is that we need to discover, truly discover, who Jesus is.

On the verge of panic, the disciples see Jesus sleeping in the back of the boat. Perturbed with His seeming indifference, they wake Him up and ask Him if He doesn't care about their lives. Jesus gets up and speaks to the wind and waves and calms the angry sea. Then He asks the disciples about their lack of faith. Jesus' mighty act of calming the sea, is more frightening to the disciples than the storm they have been battling. They ask each other, "What manner of man is this that even the wind and waves obey Him?" Good question!

The calming of the sea brings the disciples of Jesus face to face with the divine origin, identity, and power of their Master. It sends the holy shivers up and down their spines. They recognize that with Jesus they are on holy ground. If we will learn to look to this same Jesus, who "is the same yesterday, today, and forever," with faith that He will hear and help us, we can see equally impressive miracles. In fact, I believe God allows the storms to come so we can discover how easily He can calm them. Would you pray after me? **"Father, forgive me for thinking so little of You that I have been afraid to ask You for my needs. Teach me to pray the prayer of faith that will give You the chance to reveal Your glory. In Jesus' name, Amen."**

## The Fourth Street Church of God

2001 Fourth Street  
Altoona, PA 16601

942-1007/946-4110

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Mark 4:35-41

Jon R. Neely, Pastor