

## **Sermon – August 13, 2023**

### **Calming the Storm**

So, timing is everything. Just days after a mighty storm covered this area in wind and hail and rain that left devastation in its wake, we hear of another mighty storm. A storm that put fear in the hearts of Jesus' followers, as they drifted in the middle of a lake.

It began like any other day – at least any other day with Jesus. For hours, Jesus had stood before the crowds, teaching them. Stories about sowers and seeds... stories that taught the people what God's Kingdom would be like. The hours ticked by and the crowds grew... it was very exciting to see how quickly the gospel spread through the countryside, but... The disciples longed to have some time with Jesus. To be alone, to ask questions about what they've seen and heard... to just be with him. And finally, Jesus was ready to go. He wanted to go up to a mountain to pray alone but he suggested that they take a boat across the river to find a quiet place too. They knew he would meet them as soon as possible.

As soon as they were in the boat, they began to relax. The sound of the water lapping against the boat, the calm movement as they slowly drifted across, lulled them all to sleep. It was so peaceful to be there, in that quiet place.

It must have been so nice to let go after seeing so much. The disciples were constantly seeing the world in new ways and having their faith tested. No matter what happened before their eyes, they struggled to understand. More often than not, they just didn't get it.

And so, Jesus sends them across the river in a boat, as he stays behind to pray. He must have had confidence in their ability to get to the other side, safe and sound. After all, they were experienced fishermen.

But as they slept, that mighty storm swept in. The boat bounced, the waves bellowed, the boat began to fill with water... and the disciples were jolted

awake. These experienced fishermen were terrified. They, more than most people, knew the deadly power of a storm. They tried everything they knew, but the water kept pouring into the boat. Desperate, they looked for Jesus, but he was not there. They had to face this storm alone.

*"Jesus, where are you? We are going to die! Don't you even care?"*

Sometimes when the storms of life swirl around us, it is easy to feel like Jesus doesn't even care. Sometimes the storms of life are really storms... hurricanes, tornados, floods... that tear through our towns. Or horrendous wildfires destroying entire communities in Hawaii. Sometimes the storms blow in as unexpected acts of violence in places from Charlottesville to Beirut.

As the storm winds blow, people gather together and pick up the wreckage of their lives and their communities... and they look desperately for Jesus... for a glimpse of someone gliding over the rubble, extending a hand of welcome and sanctuary.

Sometimes the things that batter us are closer to home. Events of lives break in upon us. Out of work, faced with an unexpected illness, struggling with financial pressures, caught in a deteriorating relationship, or a phone call that comes, and all of a sudden our hearts leap in pain and anguish.

Do you feel it? It is as if the waves are threatening to swamp our boat... that God is nowhere to be seen, nowhere to be found. Like the disciples, we wonder if Jesus has left us to die alone.

*"Where are you Jesus? Don't you even care?"*

The disciples are facing a crisis of faith. No matter what they have seen or what they know about Jesus, in the face of this storm they see only the potential disaster, *not the transformative power of God.*

**And yet, when they cry out, they do exactly the right thing.**

They know where to cry out, they know who to cry out to. They know where to turn. And the person they cry out to is the Savior. In the midst of their cries and fears, they discover more and more about Jesus' love.

Over and over, Jesus tells us that it is alright to cry out to God. In fact, God invites us to cry. We are told to ask, to seek, to knock, and to pound on the door of heaven. As the waves break in and the storm blows, the disciples do the one thing that is left to do. They've used everything in their toolbox, and it didn't work – so now they cry out in their need to Jesus.

And Jesus hears and responds to that cry. Our fears are so strong when the storms threaten to overwhelm us, but we can still cry to Jesus and know that he hears and that he will respond to the cry of our hearts. No matter how bitter our words might be, Jesus always responds in love.

They look up and, in the distance, through the rain and the wind, they see something amazing. Jesus is walking towards them. Jesus is literally walking on the water towards their boat... coming to save them. They cannot believe their eyes. Maybe the storm has already killed their beloved teacher and now they are seeing their ghost. They rub their eyes and look again.

And then they hear that beloved voice call out to them: 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.'

Peter looked at Jesus with amazement. Overcome with the emotions of the moment, he got up... stepped out of the boat... and walked straight towards Jesus. The fear was gone and he trusted in the one who saves... until he realized where he was and what he was doing. Standing on the water in the center of the storm of the century, he remembered what risks faced him. As the realization hit him deep in the heart, he started to sink into the waves.

"Lord, save me!" he cried.

Jesus reached out and gently steadied his friend. "Oh you of little faith," he said with the shake of his head. "Why did you doubt me?"

And with that, they stepped back into the boat just as suddenly as it began, the wind died down. The air was completely still, and there was calm.

During the storms of our lives, much of the chaos is not from the waves outside; it's the chaos that churns within us, tearing us apart. It's the moment in the dark of night when we wake up in a panic, cold sweat covering our bodies. We cry out to God and when we do, we will find to our surprise that God is not absent. God comes to us. God speaks to the storm that is within our turbulent and tossed souls.

Have faith, God tells us. In Jesus, anything and everything is possible.

Have faith. And look again... somewhere in the fog and wind, there is a figure moving steadily towards us. Hands outstretched and a welcoming smile. Have faith because Jesus is here with us – and wherever Jesus is, anything and everything is possible.

Have faith, my siblings, and do not be afraid! Have faith and we can see the Beloved Community break forth right before our eyes. A community defined by love and justice and peace.

Our loving Savior knows our cry, knows what it means to be in a boat swamped by the storm. Our loving Savior who has the power to give peace and strength and help to all of us in the midst of spiritual storms. The disciples called out for peace and God met them. We can have the confidence that God will meet us too. May the peace of God and the Love of Christ be yours today and everyday. Amen.