

FAITH IN THE STORM

It's good to be back! If you didn't know Connie had a mild case of Covid, so Aaron and I were quarantined along with her. We had previously scheduled some vacation days for home repair projects this month, so we went ahead and kept that schedule. Thanks to Barry and to Curtis for the great messages they both brought while I was away.

When I looked at the plan for preaching through the life of Jesus this week and began to study **Matthew 14**, I was impressed with how timely it seems to look at a passage about faith in the midst of a storm. I did a couple of Google searches this week, knowing what I would find. I typed in "political storm" and "pandemic storm" just to see if anyone out there in the online world had used either of those phrases. Guess what? There were multiple articles on different platforms comparing the political turmoil and the Covid virus to a sort of storm that has hit us hard right now. I won't belabor that image but just put it out there that while this story of the fearful disciples in the midst of a storm at sea is a true story, it is no less a symbol and a metaphor for us all. When we are in a storm, we need faith. In this story, what is most important to see is that the storm is the setting, but Jesus is the focus, and faith in him is the point of it all.

Let's take a moment to locate this story in the life of Jesus. In the gospel of Matthew, after the opening events in the ministry of Jesus, you come to **Matthew 5-7** and have, in The Sermon on the Mount, three chapters of intense teaching emphasizing the words of Jesus. Then in **Matthew 8-9**, the deeds of Jesus become the emphasis as he carries forward his ministry of compassion and healing in Galilee. In **Matthew 10**, He trains his disciples. Then, beginning in **Matthew 11** all the way to **Matthew 16** we're shown the various ways different individuals and groups respond to Jesus. There is a lot of misunderstanding. In the midst of all that, in **Matthew 13** Jesus explains this in parables. That's what Curtis has addressed in the last two messages. In **Matthew 14-16** more and more examples of responses to Jesus are given. This story is one of them. You can clearly see that at the end of the Scripture reading. Look at **Matthew 14:31-33**, *Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"*³² *And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.*³³ *And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."*

These stories are not preserved in Scripture so we can know what happened long ago but so that we can know how to live in the here and now. The lesson here is this: ***Because Jesus truly is the Son of God, we can choose to live with great faith even in a bad storm.***

The question with which we need to wrestle is this: What does it mean to have faith in Jesus when you are in the storm? The story stresses two things. The first is that...

I. FAITH WILL TAKE HEART AND SHOW COURAGE.

Look at **verses 26 and 27** and notice how much these verses talk about fear. *But when the disciples saw him [Jesus] walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear.* ²⁷ *But immediately, Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.* **Verses 30-31** say of Peter: *But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me."*³¹ *Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"*

The fear we're shown here is not some kind of irrational or hysterical fear. It makes sense. And that serves to make the story all the more powerful. It shows us that *whenever* you are in a situation where there cause for fear, the response of faith will basically be what you find in **verse 27**: *"Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.* To take heart and be courageous doesn't mean you are free from *any* feelings of fear or any apprehension about what might happen in a situation. In **2 Corinthians 7:5** even the courageous apostle Paul talked about wrestling with fear on the inside while fighting for the cause of Christ on the outside. "Do not be afraid" means do not let fear define or control you.

Faith can give us two kinds of courage, and this story shows us both.

A. Faith will give you the courage to weather the storm.

By "courage to weather the storm," I mean the courage to face whatever difficulties come at you. The idea of a storm is one of the most ancient and familiar symbols for the struggles we face in life. **Psalm 69:1** *Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me.* Have you ever felt like that? If so, do you believe the same hand stretched out to save Peter will reach out to you? *That's an important question because the big issue, the thing that matters in your life, is not how strong you are.* No

one is ever really strong enough for some of the storms that can come in life. But the storms of life are not testing your strength. They are testing your faith. ***Because Jesus truly is the Son of God, we can choose to live with great faith even in bad storms.***

Faith will give you the courage to weather the storms.

B. Faith will also give you the courage to walk on the water.

By "courage to walk on the water," I mean the courage to do things you can only do if God enables you to do them!

A friend told me that sometimes he doesn't pray as boldly as he might because he is afraid he will just be disappointed. I can relate to that. There is a temptation to pare down our prayers and make them more reasonable, which often means "less absolutely God-dependent." Let's be clear; sometimes, our prayers do need to be adjusted. The promises for prayer in the Bible have to do with our prayers lining up with God's purposes. We aren't encouraged to pray bold prayers to serve our own desires. But we should never think our prayers might be too big for God. God may have a higher wisdom and a mysterious purpose, but he never lacks power. We need the wisdom to work through the deeper issues of life and to help us pray not only boldly but wisely. The lesson of Peter walking on water is not that you can just dream up stunts of power for God to perform for you. But it is a picture that embodies a promise. There is nothing that God calls you to do that he cannot enable you to do as you rely on Him. What is it that Christ is calling you to do that scares you? Do it anyway, and let it build your faith in him.

Think of the excuses we entertain.

We think: "I am not able to do this." 2 Corinthians 3:4-5 says, *Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. ⁵ Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God.*

We say: "I don't have the strength to see it through." Zechariah 4:6 Then he said to me, *"This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.*

We feel too tired. Isaiah 40:29-31 *He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. ³⁰ Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; ³¹ but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength.*

We don't have the money, Philippians 4:19 *And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*

We don't know what to do. James 1:5 *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. I could go on!*

There are certain things that faith does and does not do.

1. Faith does not choose to look at human abilities only. If Peter only looked at himself, he never would have stepped out of the boat.

2. Faith does not look at the circumstances only. It was when Peter saw the wind that he began to sink. I have been there, haven't you? You see "the wind" the storm so clearly, and it seems too much. The danger you see can so mesmerize you, you get an obsessive focus on the thing you fear instead of the one who is moving toward you with his hand of grace and power reaching out to you. Faith doesn't pretend dangers do not exist. But faith doesn't focus on them.

3. Faith looks at the presence of Christ and the power of Christ. In **verse 27**, Jesus says, *"Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid."* This same Jesus promises to never leave you or forsake you, so if you want a super short memory verse – a word from Jesus for your heart in any and every storm take this one. Hear him say: *"Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid."*

Consider the stormy political situation and division in our country. **Psalm 146:3-6** speaks so clearly to us all. *Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.⁴ When his breath departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day, his plans perish.⁵ Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God,⁶ who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever.* In every situation, Scripture says do not put your trust in political powers that be (the princes) but in the LORD your God, who keeps faith forever. Do not be afraid.

Faith takes heart and shows courage. That's the first thing. Here's the second.

II. FAITH LISTENS TO JESUS AND OBEYS HIS VOICE.

The issue of obedience comes out in verses 28 and 29. *And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the*

water.” ²⁹ He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus.

There are two important sides to this. First,

A. Faith does not do crazy things without a clear command.

Scholars have pointed out that when Peter says: “*Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water.*” The issue is not that Peter isn't sure if it is Jesus. **Verse 27** says that Jesus had just said to them: “*Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.*” The real force of **verse 28** could be expressed like this: “*Lord, since it is you, command me to come to you on the water.*” Peter wants to attempt something that seems crazy, but even in His impulsive excitement, he knows he cannot step out of the boat unless Christ commands. That's important. *If I make up my own plans, act on my own initiative, and then expect God to champion my plans - that is not faith. That is presumption.* Faith does not act on its own initiative then ask God for a miraculous bailout! It is presumptuous to attempt brain surgery, claiming you can do all things through Christ, who strengthens you. The promise tells us that when there is something God wants us to do and is calling us to do, then all the excuses fall away, and faith takes heart and shows courage.

The other side of this is that. When Christ calls, faith comes.

B. Faith does what Christ says even when it seems a little crazy.

Verse 29, When Jesus said, “come,” *Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus.* This story is not an allegory. It happened to Peter, but it also teaches a lesson for us.

When Connie and I first started tithing – it scared me and felt a little crazy to just faithful give away of tenth of your income when money was already tight. Following Jesus can often look crazy. Telling the truth when you could cover up with a lie. Turning the other cheek when you know you were right. Serving sacrificially without recognition. What is it about following Jesus that seems a little crazy to you? Well, ask if it really is something that Jesus is calling you to do but if he is calling you to do that – obey him.

You know the question: “*What would Jesus do?*” A friend of mine once told me that he was finding it helpful to ask himself the question, “*What would faith do?*” I asked him to explain, and he said: The Bible says when we are tested in life, it is a test of faith. But he said he had noticed when he is tested, he usually responds as if the test were a

test of his abilities, his courage, a test of obedience, or a test of character. He said that now he was learning to see these tests in life, not first of all as a test of ability, courage, obedience, or character, but as a test of faith. So he is asking this question: *“What would faith do?”* It's a way of asking: “What does it mean to face this situation and to respond to it out of faith in God and his word?” The Bible teaches us that often what may *seem* to be an issue of courage, or obedience, or character, is in reality, an issue of faith. So it doesn't matter whether it's a car breaking down on a busy day, a particular child that you don't seem to be able to help, a crisis in your marriage, or a cancer in your body. *“What would faith do in this place, with this situation, with this issue at this time?”*

People with faith, people like you, are needed – needed every day. Connie sent me an article this week in which the author was saying, you know we may not know how all these political issues will play out, but right now, there are hurting people all around us, and faith empowers us to show the love of Christ to them. **Galatians 5:6** says *faith works through love*. Somewhere someone is in an abusive marriage. Someone is on the way to the emergency room. Someone lost their job, had a relapse, a breakup, a breakdown. People are struggling with depression and anxiety. They wonder if their life is worth living and if there is hope for the future. Whatever President is in office, whatever party is in power, they cannot fix all of that. We are all needed. The church of Jesus is needed. Christian people who are willing to pray, to listen, to help, to give, to share Christ and the gospel, and serve others all because of faith in Jesus! Your faith should affect your vote, and your votes matter, but your faith should affect a lot of other things – and you don't have to wait four years to let faith have its way – do it today.

CONCLUSION

What a picture of hope this story gives us. It begins with a storm, and then it resolves into worship. The disciples worship Jesus as the Son of God in the powerful peace that follows the storm. ***Because Jesus truly is the Son of God, we can choose to live with great faith in the storm. Take heart, have courage, and obey his call.***

Think of the faith-filled obedience of Jesus himself. Jesus obeyed God by going to the cross. That did not make sense to anyone on any terms they understood at the time. It looked like total defeat and unmitigated evil. But in the plan of God, the death of Jesus proved to be a love-

sent, predestined sacrifice that paid for the sins of all of his people. Out of death came life. He rose again. He is such a powerful Savior that if you trust in him, he can lift you up out of the sin and emptiness and even the God-ordained righteous judgment that threatens to overwhelm us all in the end apart from him. If you are here and you are not a Christian – you have to get this. You cannot make yourself a Christian. You can't save your own soul. We can no more earn or deserve his love by our performance than we can walk on water by just trying harder.

This story really pictures how salvation comes for everyone. Peter, in **verse 30**, cried out: *“Lord, save me.”* What happened? **Verse 31**, *Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him.* When you cry out for salvation in dependence on Jesus, you find that he has already been moving toward you, and he is right there to take hold of you. He lifts us and saves us by his grace through faith when we trust in him. Take that step, trust in Him. Then answer his call to live by faith in him. We won't do it perfectly. We're very much like Peter on our best days. We often take our eyes off Jesus, and we start to sink. But he is there to catch us and lift us up again and again and again. *“O you of little faith,”* he says. *“Why did you doubt?”*

Amen

Prayer of Response:

Father, you are the sovereign creator and lord over all. Holy spirit you give life and light and faith. Lord Jesus, truly you are the son of God! The wind and waves obey you and we worship you. And yet, we confess what you already know namely that we are too often disciples of little faith. Forgive us when we are so mesmerized by the problems and focused on the wind and waves we forget the friendship and favor you offer us in mercy and in power. Help us to perceive your presence and to trust in your promises. Grant us the faith to take heart, and the focus to never take our eyes off of you. We ask with grateful hearts, in Jesus name, Amen.