

Learning to Trust in the Storm

John 6:16-21

The reality of life this side of heaven is that there will be mountains of joy and valleys of trial and tribulation. There will be times in life when you feel like you are in the middle of the sea, lost in a storm, like the *disciples*. As we walk through life, we find ourselves in one of three places; on the shore before the storm, in the midst of the storm, or on the other shore after the storm.

When you find yourself in the middle of the sea with a storm whirling from every direction, Jesus is closer than you think. He meets you in the midst of it. You may feel as if the wind and the waves are all around you. The beautiful truth is that Jesus knows exactly where you are in that storm. More than that, Jesus wants to meet you where you are and get into the boat with you.

I am getting ahead of myself, let me explain why I know that Jesus wants to meet you where you are and get into the boat with you? Let's go back to *John 6*.

The disciples were overwhelmed and exhausted, and also amazed. Just a few hours before, they sat among thousands, listening to Jesus. Their personal time with their leader on a mountainside had been interrupted by a crowd of hungry people, curious to see a man who claimed to be the Son of God and who had a growing list of miracles to prove it. God's great miracles can, at first, appear as interruptions. Jesus didn't seem to mind the gathering and, in fact, He welcomed it. Beyond talking to the people, Jesus did something that stopped them in their tracks.

The people came hungry, but Jesus was more than prepared to fill them. It was overwhelming for the disciples to see Him produce food for well over 5,000 people out of a lunch fit for a small boy. It was exhausting to hand plentiful food to the crowd and then collect basketfuls of leftovers. The afternoon left the disciples amazed by their leader and perplexed by His ways. Surely a victorious ride on their shoulders would follow the feeding of the 5,000 feast. Instead, shortly after the crowd dispersed, they watched Jesus withdraw to a mountain by Himself. The people seemed eager to worship Him as king, but strangely, He wanted nothing to do with it yet.

The lake was nearby, and the disciples began to make their way there as evening set. As they walked, I imagine they were silent. After a crowd of 5,000-plus, silence was a welcome "noise." It's possible the disciples were unaware that God does great things in times of silence. Nighttime was quickly falling as they hopped in the boat. Jesus was nowhere near, and at His request, they decided to make for the other shore without Him. As the boat drifted out, they finally took a deep breath. A nice, calm ride to the other shore after the chaos of thousands sounded wonderful.

The disciples settled into their journey, their minds on thoughts of the larger journey they were on with Jesus. "Could He be the Messiah?" They had sipped miraculous wine, eaten "wonder bread" and witnessed healings, all dripping with divinity and compassion. They had never seen anything like it. Surely a quiet boat ride would give them time to process the joy and overwhelming experience of following Jesus. What He was doing was slowly changing who they were becoming, and they needed time to muse.

LEARNING TO TRUST WHEN THE UNEXPECTED HAPPENS

By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough (John 6:17-18).

Do you remember the first time you stood on the shore looking out at the ocean? My family could only

afford to take two vacations when I was growing up. One of them was to the Gulf of Mexico. We arrived after dark and I remember jumping out of our station wagon and running to the water's edge. The sounds of the waves were overwhelming. As a young boy it was the most amazing sight I had ever seen.

No matter how old you are or how much you grow up, looking out on a vast body of water, it is always bigger than you. I feel smaller when I stand at its shore today than I did as a child. Kathy and I enjoyed spending a week on the Gulf of Mexico each year before we moved here in 2018 enjoying its beauty and majesty. God displays His glory in all of creation. But when you consider the waters-the oceans, lakes and seas-they are an exhibit of power and sovereign control. You may harness it with a boat or surfboard, but you can't control it.

The disciples were experts of the sea. They made their livelihood in a boat, fishing and navigating through waters of all temperaments. Day in and day out, they were in their element on the sea. So you can imagine that when a storm blew over the water, they were unfazed. But this storm was different.

The Sea of Galilee-it's more like an enormous lake. But the topography lends itself to tremendous tempests. Visualize one biblical commentator's sketch:

The Sea of Galilee lies about six hundred feet below sea level. Cool air from the southeastern tablelands can rush in to displace the warm moist air over the lake, churning up the water in a violent squall. Even today, powerboats must remain docked as the winds buffet the water. How much more could violent storms have wreaked havoc on the wooden boats used in Jesus' time? After rowing about 3 or 3 1/2 miles, the disciples were driven off course and found themselves halfway toward Magdala, where the lake was the widest.

Something was different that night in the boat. The waters, once calm, took on characteristics that were overpowering and terrifying. As the wind picked up and the storm blew in, the disciples' boat was tossed back and forth. The commotion of the storm held their attention until something, or Someone, in the distance caught their eye. It was Jesus. The one who created the seas and commanded the tides was walking on water toward their boat. Panic ensued as the disciples wrestled against practical thinking that no man could walk on water. It didn't make sense.

This storm was different. The essence was not wind and rain, but the voice of God once again affirming the declarations of Jesus. The purpose of this storm was to "whitecap" the disciples' hearts for worship of the Savior who was about to sit in their boat after walking on the waves unassisted. The disciples looked through the storm and saw Him coming.

In a squall, we are pleading for the wind and waves to cease. Instead, we should embrace the rise of water as an opportunity to see Jesus on the horizon. We don't have to like it, but the value of knowing more of Him trumps the pain of the storm, ***"Consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. Rom. 8:18).***

This miracle on the Sea of Galilee is a switching point. In all of the other miracles thus far, the disciples have watched Jesus rescue someone else. Now it is personal. Will the cumulative effect of their faith move from God's rescue of others to their personal situation? That's Christ's goal.

You can believe for others all day long, but He is asking you to believe for yourself. It is now *their* storm, *their* boat and *their* faith. The first three miracles add up to this application. God's faithfulness in the past is to result in their (and our) trust in the present.

Jesus, standing on the water, speaks to calm their fears. Realizing that it was their beloved Friend and

Teacher, they bring Him into the boat. Suddenly, the waters fall silent and their boat hits shore safely on the other side. They passed the test; fear, yes, but also trust.

Let me repeat. The reality of life this side of heaven is that there will be mountains of joy and valleys of trial and tribulation. There will be times in life when you feel like you are in the middle of the sea, lost in a storm, like the *disciples*.

When you find yourself in the middle of the sea with a storm whirling from every direction, Jesus is closer than you think.

I am speaking from personal experience:

I have experienced personal failure and broken the hearts of those who loved me and trusted me but I found Jesus in the midst of my personal failure. I have experienced financial failure but I found Jesus in the midst of my financial failure.

I have experienced sitting across the desk from my boss three weeks before Christmas and was told that my services were no longer needed and have to go home and tell my wife that I had lost my job but I found Jesus in the midst of this crisis. On February 28th of this year, I experienced the loss of a beautiful loving wife and best friend but I found Jesus in the midst of the loss of Kathy.

He meets you in the midst of it. You may feel as if the wind and the waves are all around you. The beautiful truth is that Jesus knows exactly where you are in that storm. More than that, Jesus wants to meet you where you are and get into the boat with you.

LEARNING TO TRUST IN THIS SITUATION

Though they had just witnessed something extraordinary on the mountainside in the feeding of the thousands, they have moved on to the next thought.

We are often just like the disciples. Even though we have seen the Lord do incredible things in our lives, we are prone to forget. We are amazed by all the Lord is doing, and then we immediately get anxious again. This is evident by our apprehensive hearts.

We have a lack of deep, heart-level understanding that God is good and worthy of our complete trust. As if He has not given us every reason to trust Him through the cross, we constantly ask God to prove His goodness yet again. Our sinful nature asserts that the grace of God is insufficient. Trust that He is up to something deeper than sinking your boat. He didn't lead you to the middle of the sea to drown you.

The right perspective on trials will free you up to endure even the toughest of storms. Trials purposefully shape us. They build us up to face the next trial with renewed faith and greater trust in the Lord. The disciples have just seen Jesus feed more than 5,000 people with only a sack lunch.

And now they are heading to the sea, needing to trust that God will meet them there as well. When trials come, we are faced with two options: We can anxiously bury our heads in the sand and wait for the storm to pass, or we can stand in the Lord, enduring the wind and rain, convinced that He is with us.

When we head into a storm with our eyes on the Lord, a cumulative effect takes place. As we remember the Lord's faithfulness in past storms, we find strength to face the new ones. So when

you are standing on the shore, before the storm, let God's past faithfulness remind you to trust as the rain rolls in. He is worthy of our trust and gracious enough to remind us frequently that He is sufficient, even as a storm is brewing.

God is interested in so much more than our comfort. He is interested in our devotion as well. On the front edge of the storm, there is much uncertainty. But we can be sure that Jesus will meet us in the storm, using every moment to draw us to Him. Tragically, we live with the forgetfulness that God is good. When we remember, we can stand on the shore of a storm with our feet planted securely. The miracle is not a life without storms; the miracle is a Water Walker who is able to use the storms to strengthen our character.

LEARNING TO TRUST DOESN'T MEAN "UNDERSTANDING."

When we are in the middle of life's storms, we are prone to look around for help. Our hearts are acutely awakened because we are desperate for reprieve. In those moments, the Lord steps in and offers a sure foundation for our unstable stance. Our human tendency is to search for understanding in the middle of a trial. Things seem more certain when we can unpack the details and find clarity in the unknown. A trial is more comforting when there are no hidden enemies. However, in many of life's trials the Lord is asking for something other than understanding.

Obedience is the goal of a trial, not understanding. Let me repeat. Obedience is the goal of a trial, not understanding. If you are like me, you want understanding. Just a small piece of "Why?" or a taste of knowledge to "Where is this heading?"

But following the Lord does not always mean understanding His leading. Journeying into the middle of the sea, believing that He is right there in the midst of the storm, is different from understanding. Knowing that God is close by is aimed to be infinitely more comforting than having clear understanding.

Needless fears beset the disciples because they did not trust Jesus' words. If they had just thought for a moment, they would have remembered that He had said, "**Let's go to the other side**" (**Matt. 14:22**). He didn't say, "Let's go to the middle of the lake, become engulfed by a storm and then drown." The disciples should have said to the raging waves, "You can do us no harm, for Christ has declared that we are going to the other side!"

With the focus of obedience, we trust that Jesus will carry us to the other side. Though we might not have any idea where the other side is, we can know for certain that Jesus will pave the way. In **John 6**, the disciples had to realize that they didn't know much about the journey ahead.

Jesus only told them to get into the boat and cross the water. He did not offer details about what the ride would be like or what part of the distant shore was their destination. Life is often like that for believers in Christ. We sense the Lord leading us in a certain direction, but the details of the journey are strategically unclear. The miracle is in God offering us Himself instead of details. Peace is found in listening for His voice, not in looking for His hand. ***Awakened seas create awakened hearts.***

LEARNING TO TRUST JESUS!

When Jesus, walking on the water, arrived at the disciples' boat, they quickly arrived on the other side of the storm. The Greek word used in this passage for walking (*peripatounta*) describes an effortless walk over the sea. Their efforts were fruitless until Jesus effortlessly arrived. His presence, not their efforts, carried them across the sea. When I am faced with trial, my innate reaction is to fight harder. But at the end of it all, I

find my-self exhausted.

Arrival at the destination has nothing to do with how much or how little I strain against the oars; on the contrary, it has everything to do with Jesus. Surrender to God's presence results in the crossing of the sea to solid shore. In your business, in your marriage, in your parenting and in your life, it is His presence, not your effort, that matters.

And it's not just a "God is everywhere" kind of presence, but a "God is active in me" presence. This is also important in salvation; His forgiveness, not our efforts, opens the gates of heaven. But in our sin, we often forget what we know to be true. Despite our understanding that Jesus can carry us through a storm, we battle the waves as if it all depends on our strength.

So where are you today?

- 1. On the shore before the storm**
- 2. In the midst of a storm**
- 3. On the other shore after the storm**

Remember when you find yourself in the middle of the sea with a storm whirling from every direction, Jesus is closer than you think. He meets you in the midst of it. You may feel as if the wind and the waves are all around you. The beautiful truth is that Jesus knows exactly where you are in that storm. More than that, Jesus wants to meet you where you are and get into the boat with you.