

Fix Your Eyes on Jesus through the Storms

Matthew 14:22-33 (NIV84)

²² Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. ²³ After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴ but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. ²⁵ During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. ²⁶ When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. ²⁷ But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." ²⁸ "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." ²⁹ "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹ Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" ³² And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. ³³ Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Today's Bible reading from Matthew picks up immediately where we left off last week with Jesus feeding the 5000+ people. After the meal, Jesus sent his disciples on ahead of him while he dispersed the crowd because he knows that the people will try to make him their bread king - a ruler to give them free food. While the disciples went on ahead, Jesus stayed behind by himself, going up on a mountainside, and prayed. Hours pass - somewhere between six to nine hours. Although experienced fishermen, the disciples had to fight the wind and the waves which cropped up on the sea of Galilee, rowing for hours. They're tired and worn out. Then they see a figure in the distance. It looks like a man. It looks like a man walking on the water - not wading, not swimming, not floating, but walking. What on earth could this be? They were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. (verse 26)

But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." (verse 27) Jesus immediately tried to comfort them and stop their fears. It's an immediate action of care without any hesitation on Jesus' part. He did not walk out on the water to scare them, but to be with them.

We don't know how all of the disciples responded to Jesus' words of comfort, but we know how Peter responded. "Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water." (verse 28) Lord, since that's you out there, let me come out to you. Let me do what you are doing because I believe you can make that happen. Let me walk on the water to you. Such a bold and awesome request.

Jesus again did not hesitate. He told Peter, "Come." And Peter walked out on water... that is, until he saw the wind and the waves. Maybe an eight-foot tall breaker was heading towards him, one that would surely encompass him and drag him under water. Maybe he felt the wind lifting him slightly off of his feet. Whatever he saw and felt made Peter afraid. He took his eyes off of Jesus and began to sink - not slow like quick sand, but probably an immediate plunging into the water that would certainly end in his drowning given the wavy, windy, stormy sea. So fast he sank that all he could get out was, "Lord, save me!" (verse 30)

If you were Peter, would you have done any better? If you were standing on a lake (crazy, right) and saw waves taller than you forming and heading in your direction and felt the wind actively trying to force you off your feet, would you take your eyes off of Jesus? Would you have begun to immediately sink?

You don't even need to put yourself on the Sea of Galilee to answer this question. Storms have come into your life. You've experienced violent and scary situations that felt as if life would sweep you away, drown you in worries. I'm not talking about surviving a hurricane like people in Texas are going through right now. Nor am I even talking about coming out unscathed from violent winds like the ones that ripped a good chunk of our roof down last year. What scary situations in life have threatened to drag you under, threatened to take your life down to watery depths?

Have you faced or are you facing a time in life when you can't afford something that you know you need: retirement, car repairs, mortgage, rent, hospital bills, utility bills, groceries? How about an illness or disease that you don't know if you will recover from? Are you steeped in sorrow and grief to the point where you feel like you are drowning in sadness and depression? Are you looking at a job change, of quitting, of unemployment? Are you facing a move? Are you fighting with your spouse or a family member, a fight which has turned your home life upside down? These are the storms we experience all too often.

Storms are mesmerizing. We stare and can't seemingly turn away. So it is with the storms of life. Pain, finances, medical treatments, job change, moves, relationship drama – these vie for our attention, want to soak us in completely to where we can't turn away from them. They try to consume us. We drown in them. They take our eyes off of Jesus and instead fill our hearts with fear. We need to refocus.

There was a wood carving that I received as a gift. It was a cut out of a Bible with the words written around it, "When all else fails, read the instructions." One day, someone put a post-it note over the word "when" with the word "before." Now it read "Before all else fails, read the instructions." **Before** all else fails, read the instructions, read God's Word, read the Bible. In other words, keep your eyes focused on Jesus through the storms of life.

This feels like such a "duh!" moment. We should know this. Keep our eyes fixed on Jesus through the storms of life - certainly, but we find ourselves often wrapped up in the storms of life, finding it hard to stay focused on Jesus. We can hear Jesus' words said to us just as he said to Peter: "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" (verse 31) Why did you doubt that Jesus was going to see you through the storms in your life? Why did you ever take your eyes off of him?

I mean, just look at what Jesus had already done. Focus on him. He just feed 5000+ people with two fish and five small loaves of bread with twelve basketfuls of leftovers. He literally walked on water to meet up with his disciples on the boat. Peter cried out, "Save me!" and Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him. They had seen Jesus rebuke the wind and the waves on an entirely separate occasion and his voice immediately calmed the sea. Even when Jesus rescued Peter and climbed into the boat with the rest of the disciples, the wind that day died down immediately.

Who is this Jesus? Those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." (verse 33) This Jesus is not just some great man. He did the impossible. He walked on water. He fed the 5000. He controlled the wind and the waves. He controlled what we can only hope to predict when it comes to nature. And so he is in control when we go through storms in our lives.

Who is this Jesus? He is not just this omnipotent, holier than thou, creator of the universe, an untouchable God. He is a personal God, a God who reaches out his own hand to save Peter. He could have willed Peter to safety, made a life preserver appear on him, or had the wind carry him back into the boat. Instead, he reached out his hand and took hold of him. He didn't just offer it out there as if he was beckoning Peter to save himself by grabbing Jesus' hand. No, Jesus actively reached out and grabbed Peter and pulled him from the water. Jesus did this immediately, without hesitation. How fitting it is that his name literally means, "He saves."

Jesus does the impossible. Not only did he do miracles and walked on water, but he caused Peter to walk on water. Jesus did something impossible for Peter. He caused Peter to walk on water through the storm, and Jesus saved him immediately when he began to sink. That means Jesus can and does get you through the impossible situations of life: through that disease and pain that never seems to end and the treatments just aren't cutting it, through that job change that is rocking your world, through that drowning depression, through that fight that left you wounded and defensive and angry, through that financial struggle that never lets your head get above water. Even while it looks like there is no way to get through these storms, your God, your Jesus, does the impossible. That means that when you begin to sink and drown in the storms of your life, God is right there to save you. He does not hesitate or wait until you are desperate enough to call for help. He saves immediately. He is not slow to save as some understand slowness. He reaches out and grabs us. He pulls us from those storms. Trust him. Don't take your eyes off of him. He makes the winds die down. He tells us not to worry when that seemingly is all we can do as another bill comes due, when the prognosis has not improved, when the depression gets darker, when no one calls for an interview. Jesus says to us immediately, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." (verse 27) Jesus gets us through the impossible, even when the storms in life worsen and prolong.

While the storms of this life rage, keep your eyes on Jesus. Don't focus on all the things wrong, on all the pain, on all the problems, on all the uncertainties, all the drama, all the depression, etc. Instead, keep these words of verse 27 right in front of you. Jesus says, your God says, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." Go to your other favorite parts of the Bible. Read Romans 8 where we are told that God works all things for our good and that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Read Psalm 23 to be reminded that God is your Good Shepherd who leads you to all good things, even though you pass through the valley of the shadow of death. Make a prayer request. Call on your pastor, on a fellow Christian, on someone to share this burden with you and who helps you keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, the one who saves. God will save us from the storms of our lives because he truly is the Son of God. He does the impossible and gets us through the impossible. He is quick to save. So, keep your eyes fixed on Jesus through the storms of your life. Amen.