

Storms That Bring You Peace
Lake County Fair Worship Service
August 10, 2008

Gospel Reading:

⁽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!**

Matthew 14:22-33

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.” (NIV)**

Focus: **And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped Him saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.” (Matthew 14:32-33)**

Dear Friends in Christ,

It was quite a storm. This past Monday evening a powerful wind with accompanying rain came through our area causing significant destruction. The local newspaper headline on Tuesday morning stated, “Violent Storms Hammer Region.” Even as late as Thursday morning, the paper was still reporting, “Picking Up The Pieces.” One article mentioned a young man who was in his living room and who heard the roar of the tornado. He ran for a safe place, and barely escaped serious injury as the room he left was destroyed by the wind. After the storm ceased, there was undoubtedly a strange peacefulness. But we know that this was only short-lived as the people would come out and look at the destruction and face terrible fears and storms in their lives as they wondered about what they would do for a place to live.

The peace that follows the storm is significant in today's Gospel reading. Jesus had been through a personal storm in His ministry. John had been beheaded and Jesus needed time to mourn and pray. But the people continued to come to Him for healing, so He set aside His personal needs to touch and heal them. Then they needed food to eat, and He took a few fish and loaves and multiplied them to feed 5000 men and their families. Finally, He was able to get away, and to be alone to deal with the storm in His life. He dealt with this storm by going away from the crowds to pray to the Father. One of the Scripture references cross referenced to this account comes from Luke 3,

When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. (Verses 21-22a)

Jesus needed that time alone for the Holy Spirit to grant Him peace in a time of storm.

This was a wonderful time of peace for Jesus. But the disciples did not have peace in their lives. They were on their way across the Sea of Galilee by boat. They were in the middle of a body of water that was no more than 10 miles across at its widest. They were encountering a sudden storm. They literally faced a "contrary wind," one perhaps like the wind experienced in our area on Monday. The disciples were harassed, tortured, and tormented during this storm.

Undoubtedly they were crying out to God, perhaps even with the words of Psalm 69,

⁽¹⁾ Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. ⁽²⁾ I sink in the miry depths, where there is no foothold. I have come into the deep waters; the floods engulf me. ⁽³⁾ I am worn out calling for help; my throat is parched. My eyes fail, looking for my God. (Verses 1-3)

During this time, as they face the contrary wind, they saw a man walking toward them. The man was Jesus. He was walking on top of the water! Job makes an interesting statement about something like this.

He (God) alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea. (Job 9:8)

In a great display of His power, Jesus came walking on top of the things that caused the storm for the disciples, a sign of His great power and might. As you can imagine, the disciples were afraid. They cried out in great terror. Then Peter, who had more bravery than faith, asked for proof that this was Jesus. He asked to walk on the water. All was well at first, until Peter looked away from Jesus. Then he began to sink, and with great love, Jesus reached out to him and rescued him. Now we encounter the great blessing in all of this, for as soon as they entered the boat, the storm grew weary, and now there was peace on the Sea of Galilee, and peace within the souls of the men. This was the peace after the storm.

We see a strong connection with this account and with our life events. Many of the difficulties in life are described in ways similar to storms. There are times of ill winds. There are times when there are clouds in our lives. We see the connection because we live these situations every day. But we encounter some real troubles when we become like Peter. We can become very demanding in our relationship with God, demanding that God fix our problems! There are a significant number of times when God chooses to leave our problems as they are without fixing them. Then we become angry at God and question God's goodness and graciousness toward us.

Now we truly enter a stormy situation, for we have now looked away from God in our time of need. As we turn from God, either in anger or in lost faith, we begin to sink like Peter. Now it is no longer the stormy life issue that has power over us. Now it is the broken relationship with God that ultimately works to destroy us. The Prophet Isaiah reminds us,

- (1) Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear.**
(2) But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. (Isaiah 59:1-2)

The issue isn't that God does not care about us. The issue is that we do not care about God. We have separated ourselves from his love. We have become demanding at the expense of being dependent upon him.

The storm is very real when we are demanding rather than dependent on God. Yet, this does not stop Jesus from coming into our lives. He tramples those terrible storms of sin and of life's troubles. He reaches out to us to pull us from the waves. Ultimately, He gives us strength to bear up until the storms grow weary! In walking upon the waves that would destroy Peter and the others, Jesus has demonstrated His great power. This is the only account of Jesus walking on water. But one account is enough to establish the power that Jesus has over our sin and our troubles. With this simple act, we can now be very confident that He has the power to do other things. When He declares that we are forgiven, we can be assured that He has power over sin. When He calls the dead to life, we can be assured that He has power over death. In all of this, Jesus gives us peace after the storms of life.

This peace given to us would come at a great cost. Jesus would not face peace, but the sword of judgment for our sinfulness. There would be no treading on the water, but instead He would be overcome by the storms of God's wrath for our demanding relationship with him. The winds would blow that day at Calvary. The earth would shake as punishment was cast upon Jesus. The only acceptable sacrifice was the sacrifice of the One who could have calmed the storm of Calvary, and instead allowed Himself to be overcome by it. Although His death ultimately brings us great peace, it is something even better that gives us peace after the storm. It happened three days after Jesus died for us on that cross. God raised Jesus from the dead and now there is a great and wonderful peace after the storms of life because Jesus is alive. Jesus has trampled Satan. He has walked above the power of the grave. Now He continues to be with us. He continues to use His great power on our behalf, to save us for all eternity.

God knows something about us that we sometimes find hard to face. He knows that without storms, we become weak. He knows that without storms, we turn away from God. He knows that without storms, we will perish eternally. So there are times when by God's great plan and his great love, he allows the storms to come upon us so that we may be blessed with greater dependence on him. Job is one of the finest examples of God working this way for us. In one single day, Job lost everything! His earthly goods were taken. His family was destroyed. He faced one of the greatest storms any of us could face, and yet in all of this, God gave Job a great awareness of his dependence on God alone. This is what Job said.

“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.” (Job 1:21)

This storm initially showed him his total dependence on God alone in all things, both good and bad. God continues to work through these storms in life, that He may rescue us and save us.

As you face storms in life, consider the greatest storm of all, the storm of sinful brokenness in your relationship with God. As you do, take comfort in his ongoing promise to you,

⁽⁵⁵⁾ I called on your name, O LORD, from the depths of the pit. ⁽⁵⁶⁾ You heard my plea: “Do not close your ears to my cry for relief.” ⁽⁵⁷⁾ You came near when I called you, and you said, “Do not fear.” (Lamentations 3:55-57)

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