

Last week we took a moment to re-think the context of Jesus walking on the water and to realize that Peter's actions were impulsive and irrational. The fact that Jesus told them it was him and told them to take courage, to not be afraid; these statements should have been enough coupled with the fact that he was WALKING ON WATER! But, through doubt and fear, Peter needed extra affirmation and put himself in a position that only by Faith could he be saved. When Peter began walking on the water, faith guided his footsteps. As he drew nearer to Jesus, his faith wavered. And as he became overwhelmed by his surroundings (the sounds, the sights, the feelings) he began to sink. We need to draw a very real line between what was prompted by his doubt (to get out of the boat) and what he experienced because of his faith (walking on water too) and that his faith was not enough to sustain him in those FEW SECONDS of his life because he doubted again. The only thing that saved his life was when he drew close enough to the Savior and the Savior could grab his hand!

This cycle seems all too familiar. We are currently faced with an epidemic that we cannot see, hear, taste, or touch. It has rightly prompted our authorities to encourage measures to help save our lives and the lives of our neighbors. It raises interesting questions about civil liberties (our individual rights and freedoms) in the face of a public health crisis (things that will be talked about and considered at a later time). But more so - for a nation of people who are very accustomed to our freedom we have "in the blink of an eye" lost our ability to freely gather and freely associate. We are now in a cycle of doubt, faith, doubt, and..... It's this last part that will help define us through this moment in time. Has our doubt inspired our faith and has our doubt led us close enough to the Savior? But doesn't this end up doing the very thing that we touched on last week - does this not somehow lead us to think we need to get out of the boat? I hope not. It is worth repeating that none of the other disciples were reprimanded for not having faith. None of the ones in the boat were confronted for not believing. Only Peter, as he sank, was asked, "You of little faith. Why did you doubt?" THE ONLY ONE TO LEAVE THE BOAT was called out for having little faith and asked why he doubted. None of the other disciples were.

Which leads us to another moment in quite possibly the same boat.

Matthew 8:18-27 New International Version (NIV)

The Cost of Following Jesus

18 When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake.

19 Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go."

20 Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

21 Another disciple said to him, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."

22 But Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

Jesus Calms the Storm

23 Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. 24 Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. 25 The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!"

26 He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.

27 The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"

The context is not unlike what we are facing today: First, "Suddenly a furious storm came up"; Second, "the waves swept over the boat"; Third, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!". And then the response and the reality, "why are you so afraid?", "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and waves obey him!"

Life hits us out of nowhere. It appears as though one individual in a foreign country decided to buy some food in an illegal marketplace, then failed to prepare the food properly, became sick and that infection has now spread around the world. One person. Now 700,000 and counting. This has come out of nowhere. The screeching halt of our economy - out of nowhere. The efforts to preserve individual and group lives - out of nowhere. The loss of income and opportunity - out of nowhere. For sure - we could have that hind-sight conversation about warning signs, lack of preparedness, and so on. But the truth is, humanity will always act as it has acted in this situation. For instance, I ran out for some groceries yesterday and I witnessed a man with a blue surgical mask. That wasn't unusual - plenty of people have been wearing masks recently. But this individual was standing at his car with the mask pulled down and a cigarette hanging out of his mouth. From the Centers for Disease Control, "Cigarette smoking causes about one of every five deaths in the United States each year.^{1,6} Cigarette smoking is estimated to cause the following: 1. More than 480,000 deaths annually (including deaths from secondhand smoke)" This man is more likely to die from his habit than from this virus. In fact, "Exposure to secondhand smoke causes an estimated 41,000 deaths each year". This means that this man exposing others to second hand smoke is a far greater risk to the wellbeing of others. I mention this to point out that every day we have an opportunity to make choices that prepare us and everyday mankind, on the whole, consistently chooses not to prepare. So yes - we can hindsight so many things about this current epidemic -- but we could also hindsight things that happen on a daily basis including car accidents, boating accidents, smoking, accidents at home, etc. We were caught unaware by a sudden storm of illness and it has been shocking to say the least. Not unlike the moment the disciples - the experts in boating by the way - were caught unprepared and unaware by this sudden storm. This storm was so bad that the waves were sweeping over the boat. Out of the thirteen people on the boat, 12 feared for their lives. What did the other one do?

He slept.

In the middle of a storm which ravaged the boat so fiercely that 12 men - some of whom were fishermen and familiar with the weather and water - 12 men were afraid for their lives, the last man slept soundly. How tired do you have to be to sleep through a storm that is so fearsome that every other man on the boat is afraid for their lives? The implication seems to be that there is no storm that will ever rattle our Savior. There is no situation that can pop up that will ever cause him to worry. There is nothing in all creation that can set the Creator on edge. To be fair to the disciples, this event happened before the time that Jesus walked on the water. This was at a time that they were still learning about who He really is. They had little reason to think He was anything more than a teacher, rabbi just a man.

So the situation becomes so grim that they wake Jesus up and yell, "Lord save us! We're going to drown!" Now - if any one of us were in Jesus position, we would be tempted to make a grand display of our ability and do so in a way that would comfort those around us -- because on some level by being the one who brings comfort we are somehow more appreciated or needed.

Jesus does none of this. And I think this is important as we look to see how our Lord responds in our midst during this epidemic.

First of all -- we have to keep this in context. Jesus is sleeping. And he is sleeping so soundly that a life-threatening storm is swamping the boat. Put yourself in his position. How would you feel if someone woke you up? Honestly - if we allow the text to speak it displays a grumpy Jesus. In Verse 26 He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. He doesn't hug them. He doesn't give a grand speech about needing to find shelter in a storm. He questions their faith. All of them. Those who are there in the boat, the very presence of the Lord, who have already seen him perform miracles (which is why they wake him up -- because he's still a bit more of a 'magician' than a Savior to them at this point). This doesn't mean that Jesus doesn't care, it means that we need to rethink how we look at moments that we feel he's "sleeping". No matter how choppy the sea gets, no matter how mean the storm looks, no matter how dark the skies -- if we are in his presence we have all we need. Bearing in mind this is the same Savior who says, "Come to me all who are weary and I will give you rest" -- it would appear that this offer extends into times of extreme storm.

His presence extends to us today through His Holy Spirit - and we continue to find comfort and faith in the face of situations that come up out of nowhere. This should not be confused with storms we cause through our poor choices or irresponsible decision making. Growing, learning, changing our behavior through changing our language, actions, and thoughts to honor God are different than these unexpected storms. Let's not conflate the two. None of the disciples caused the storm to come. All of them were afraid.

Once Jesus is awoken and has challenged them on their faith/fear -- he then turns his attention to the storm. Throughout his earthly ministry there were many literal storms that came up out of nowhere. The fact that he calms this storm is not an opportunity for us to say that he will calm Every storm. In fact - his initial question of their faith is more instructive than his ensuing actions. Their faith should have sufficiently seen them through the storm. So he proceeds to show them why their faith alone would have been enough. He rebukes the wind and the water. Faith is not the free exercise of power. Faith is the knowledge that something can be done even if it is not done. Faith in this moment would have been the disciples knowing that Jesus could calm the storm but regardless of him calming it or not they would all make it through. This is reminiscent of the time Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were faced with the fiery furnace and their response was they knew God could save them BUT if he did not choose to it didn't change who He is. Faith is the recognition that God can and that the choice is His, not mine. But the disciples - and we - needed a moment to see who Jesus is and what can be done at his choosing.

So Jesus got up and rebuked the wind and waves.

In this moment Jesus is no longer just a "man". He is now Emmanuel, God with Us. He has done what no other man has done - he gets results from Creation by speaking! The only other individual to see results from Creation by speaking is God. In fact - the implication that Jesus can speak the wind and water into submission is to undeniably establish him as the Messiah, the God Man. In the account of Creation we are told that "His Spirit hovered over the face of the waters". And from those waters (chaos) He brought order and Creation.

And here is where we find ourselves. We are surrounded by a rather chaotic time. We are faced with a storm that came upon us. And we will - by faith - weather the storm. And He will, by his choice, weather it with us or speak it into submission. Our faith doesn't force one thing or the other to happen - but our faith is sufficient to recognize His goodness and His presence even in such a time as this.

Let's pray,

Father - we know that our faith is so small compared to your faithfulness. We ask that as we step day - by - day that you continue to comfort, care, and guide us in our thoughts, words, and deeds -- And that you help us to see every opportunity to be a source of comfort and calm to our families, friends, and communities in the face of this storm. We know what you are capable of - and we accept faithfully whatever You choose to do in your power and wisdom. Help us to reflect this truth in how we think, speak, and act. God - we thank you and love you.

Amen