

Well, it's been over a month since the storm of the century hit us. Have you ever been through a storm like this? I never have and I hope I never will again; once in a lifetime is enough. The number of people worldwide who have been inflicted and the number of those who have lost their lives to this coronavirus are staggering. And then there's the economic impact. Think about it; life was going merrily along; it was smooth sailing without any problems. Then all of a sudden out of nowhere, this virus hits us and our world and our lives are turned upside down. During these past few weeks have you felt like you were adrift alone in a boat on the sea of trouble? Were there times when you felt like your boat was going to be capsized by all the restrictions and negative news being thrown at you? If so, then Jesus' disciples can sympathize with you; they had such an experience one day on the Sea of Galilee. This story made such an impression on the disciples that it is recorded in three of the four gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke. This morning, let's look at Matthew's account in the eighth chapter, verses 23 through 27.

Read Matthew 8:23-27

Have any of you ever been to the Sea of Galilee? I have not, but according to some references that I read, it is small, only 13 miles north to south and 8 miles east to west. It is 680 feet below sea level making it the lowest freshwater lake in the world. This gives it a climate that is warm and pleasant, but also one that creates some dangers. It is surrounded by hills with valleys and gullies. When a cold wind comes from the west, these valleys and gullies act like gigantic funnels. The wind becomes compressed in them and rushes down onto the lake and clashes with hot, humid air hanging over the lake with a sudden violence. So it can be calm one moment and then become a raging storm the next. The storms come from all directions at the same time. The waves are so high that they can overturn a boat.

Maybe some of you have experienced storms like this when boating and fishing. I got some first-hand experience one summer when Judy and I were vacationing in South Carolina. For about twenty years we have rented a cabin on a lake in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Lake Jocassee is about 7500 acres surrounded by hills. We rented a pontoon boat one day. We were warned by the locals that storms can come up suddenly, and if so we needed to quickly head for the shore. Sure enough, it was a beautiful day and we decided to go to the far end of the lake into North Carolina to see a waterfall and a swinging bridge. As we got halfway up the lake, all of a sudden the sky got dark and the winds started to pick up, and fortunately, I heeded the warning and headed back to the docks.

In our text for this morning, a storm comes up suddenly. The disciples were probably in a small open fishing boat when they encountered this large storm. They were scared. Have you ever

noticed that at least four of the disciples, Peter, James, John and Andrew, made their living as professional fishermen on this very same lake? They should have been used to the weather; thus, this must have been quite a storm!

And where was Jesus, the carpenter, the land-lover? He was asleep in the rear of the boat. This is the only place that I have found in the Bible where Jesus is sleeping. It shows how much in control He was; He was at peace. How many of us can sleep soundly during the storms of life as we toss and turn worrying about what to do? You know those nights when we wrestle with the Lord like Jacob did in the Old Testament.

With the waves mounting in intensity and the boat beginning to take on water, the disciples panicked and cried out for help. But Jesus continued to sleep and in desperation, the disciples woke Him up, and cried: "Lord, save us, we're going to drown!" This was their 911 call. Now Jesus was not upset at them for waking Him, but He was disappointed at their lack of faith. They had the Lord with them in the boat and yet they were still afraid. Faith is being able to see the shore through the storm. Jesus calmed the storm and the disciples were at peace. Their voyage with Jesus was a voyage of peace in the midst of a storm. Now this gift of peace is not restricted to the Sea of Galilee or a one-time occurrence. We can also find this very same peace even in the roughest storms in life like right now when the Lord is our companion; when He is in the boat with us.

Let's face it; we are all searching for peace in our life. Take for example the story of a British cavalry officer who had taken part in the "Charge of the Light Brigade." He was so traumatized by his experience that after the war he resigned his commission. He tried to find peace back home in England, but finally decided to immigrate to America in search of the quiet life. Finally, in the late 1850s, he found the perfect place. He purchased a small farm and retired to a peaceful area in northern Virginia just outside Washington, D.C., called Bull Run or known to the locals as Manassas. Less than a decade later this would be the site of the first major battle of the Civil War. Peace does not come from a certain location. No matter how hard or how far we search, the only true peace comes from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

There is a painting entitled "Peace." It depicts waves crashing against jagged rocks. It portrays the violence of a major storm. It seems anything but peaceful. But down in a small corner of the painting tucked away in the rocks is a little bird sitting on her nest totally unaware of the storm raging around her. That is the peace that Jesus brings into our lives. This is the peace that the Apostle Paul described in Philippians 4:7 where he wrote: "And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Now out here in New Mexico, we don't have to worry about the threat of a hurricane. But a hurricane is an awesome sight and some of you may have had the unfortunate experience of

being in one. On the surface of the sea, the violent winds whip the water into great waves and create a scene of chaos. Rain, thunder, and lightning usually accompany the pounding winds. But the fascinating thing about a hurricane is its “eye;” a place of perfect calm in its center. Though the winds blow and rage all around it, there is none in the eye. So it is in the storms of our lives if we let the Lord be our center; there is peace and calm, even in the darkest hours of the storms of life.

Let’s be honest, we can all relate to the disciples in this story. There are times in our lives when we have panicked and didn’t understand what was happening and why. Just look around us right now. Who of us have not gotten a little fearful and concerned about our current situation? Every day and throughout the day we are bombarded with bad news; every week they say that the next week is going to be the worst. We are afraid to go out of our homes, go to the grocery store or get close to anyone. We don’t know what will happen tomorrow.

However, as Christians we are called to a life of trust, free from fear. We each have a choice as to how we will react to the dangers of life; both actual and imagined. We can either fear all unknowns or we can react with a calm awareness. David exemplifies this calmness in his classic battle with the giant Goliath in Chapter 17 of First Samuel. If you remember the story, the Israelites and Philistines are entrenched in a battle. Each day Goliath, the champion of the Philistines, comes out and challenges the Israelites to send out a warrior to fight him. The outcome of the war would be decided by which warrior wins the fight. But the size of Goliath strikes fear into the hearts of the Israelites. David comes to the battle site bringing food for his brothers. He hears the taunting of Goliath and out of his faith in God he volunteers to fight the giant.

David relies on God’s strength for the battle. In the past, he had put his trust in God as he faced lions and bears while guarding his father’s sheep, and each time he had been victorious. David’s experience gave him the courage and confidence in the Lord that he needed to face Goliath. David knew his own weakness, but he trusted the Lord. He went out to face the giant with no armor, no spear, no sword, just a sling and five smooth stones. David approached the danger head-on, and by the grace of God prevailed.

In the same manner we can face the Goliaths in our life because we can count on the Lord being with us. In times of trial and danger, we must remember that we fight with the Lord at our side; the battle is the Lord’s. The Lord has been with us in the past and will continue to be with us. We must not fear tomorrow, for God is already there. Someone once said: “never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.”

Life is like the Sea of Galilee. Sometimes it is calm, still and peaceful. Then all of a sudden, the storms come up. As Christians, we often unexpectedly find ourselves getting caught up in the

storms of life: a loved one dies; we lose our job; our family is falling apart; the debts keep mounting up; we are depressed and stressed out by all that life throws at us. And then there are times like right now when a virus inflicts our lives causing worldwide illnesses and deaths, isolation, loss of jobs and complete upheaval of our normal routines. These are times when our lives are filled with uncertainty and fear, and we like the disciples cry out in panic: “Lord, save us; we are going to drown.”

Have you ever noticed that the stories about acts of mercy in the Bible often involved people being in a boat caught in a storm at sea like Jonah, the Apostle Paul and the disciples? There’s a good reason. There is nothing more out of our control than a storm at sea; and likewise, there is nothing more helpless than a boat being tossed around by the waves of a storm. It’s a vivid picture of being completely subject to grave circumstances that are utterly outside our control.

It is times like these that remind us of our helplessness and our need for God. In the sunshine times of life, we tend to trust in our own ability to handle things, but when the storms come up we need help; the kind of help that only God can provide. We forget those words of wisdom in Proverbs 3:5-6 – “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths.” We are neither able nor created to live on our own resources. Like the disciples, we must look to Jesus as our deliverer. Where Jesus is, the storms of life become calm. In the presence of Jesus, the fiercest storms turn to peace.

However, we must recognize that storms will still come into our lives even when Jesus is there. This shouldn’t surprise us; in John 16:33 Jesus told us that there would be troubles, but that He had overcome them. Just because we follow Jesus, we must not think that we are exempt from the storms of life, because they will come. Unfortunately we often wait until we come to the end of our rope before we cry out to the Lord. The disciples were expert sailors, but they couldn’t handle this storm. They finally went to Jesus for help, seemingly as a last resort. In a crisis our natural response is to cry out: “Calm the storm!” However, sometimes Jesus calms the storm as He did for the disciples, and sometimes He lets the storm rage and calms us. But we can rest on the assurance that with Jesus as our constant companion, we will make it safely to the other shore.

Our story this morning speaks to those of us who are being swept away by the currents of life and are beaten down by the pounding waves of the storms of life. Jesus also speaks to those of us who, for whatever reason lack faith. As we travel on this boat called life, the question for each of us is – do we trust Jesus to see us through the storms of life, through this current crisis? Is our faith grounded in the knowledge that God does care for us and that He is always seeking the best for us? Is our faith strong enough to count on God for our every need? Can we

experience the peace that passes all understanding that the Apostle Paul was writing about in the fourth chapter of Philippians?

Let me conclude with this statement: “No (n-o) Jesus, no peace; know (k-n-ow) Jesus, know Peace!” Peace comes only from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Peace rules the day when Jesus Christ rules the heart. Wherever Jesus is, the storms of life become calm. In His presence, the most terrible tempest turns to peace. As we travel the seas of life, we are not alone, our Lord and Savior is at the helm of our boat and He will lead us safely to the shore. During this difficult time, let the peace of Jesus Christ calm your fears and give you hope for tomorrow. To know Jesus is to know peace. May the peace of God be with you until we meet again. Amen