

Whenever somebody new to the Bible asks me where's the best place to start reading, I always recommend the Gospel of John. It was the last gospel written and, in a way, fills in the blanks of the previous three gospels. The Apostle John, the author, was very close to Jesus. In his gospel, he shares his previous memories of his time with Jesus. I love studying John because of all the great stories that it contains. One of these is Jesus walking on the water. Now this story of Jesus taking a stroll on the Sea of Galilee is recorded in three of the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark and John. In each of these Gospels, this event follows the miracle of Jesus feeding the 5,000 with five loaves of bread and two small fish. This morning, I will be using the text from the Gospel of John as our baseline and at times will compare it with what Matthew and Mark have to say about this miracle. Listen to how the Apostle John records this event in the sixth chapter, verses 16-21.

Read John 6:16-21

A Scotsman visited the Holy Land and wanted to rent a boat to sail across the Sea of Galilee. When he was told the price, he thought it was too high, and told the clerk that he could rent a boat back in Scotland for half that price. The clerk responded by saying: "But this is the sea on which the Good Lord walked." To which the Scotsman replied: "At these prices, it's no wonder that He walked."

Following the feeding of the 5000, the people were so impressed by this miracle that they wanted to make Jesus king. But as we have discussed before, the time was not right yet, and more importantly, this was not the reason that God sent Jesus to live among us. Remember John 3:16-17 – "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." Jesus was headed for the cross; He still had a lot of work to do to get His disciples ready to carry on His ministry following His death and resurrection.

The Apostle John tells us that the disciples got into the boat on their own initiative and headed across the lake. However, both Matthew and Mark tell us that right after Jesus fed the crowd, He made His disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of Him across the lake, probably because He didn't want them to get caught up in all the enthusiasm and desire of the crowd to make Him king.

After Jesus had sent the disciples away, He dismissed the crowd and went up on the mountain to pray, as was His custom. Night comes and the disciples are out in the middle of the lake. Then a storm suddenly comes up, for which the Sea of Galilee is famous, and the boat is struggling against the waves and wind. About three o'clock in the morning, Jesus comes

walking across the water to their boat, using the whitecaps as if they were stepping stones. When the disciples see the figure of a man coming toward them in the fog, walking on the water, they are scared thinking that it is a ghost. Jesus calls out to them: "It is I, don't be afraid."

At some time or another, we have all heard it said about a certain person that they are so good that they could probably walk on water. It reminds me of a story about three famous Southern football coaches: Bear Bryant of Alabama, Shug Jordan of Auburn, and Frank Howard of Clemson. They were fishing one day on a lake when Bear says that he needs to go to the restroom. So he gets out of the boat and walks across the water to the shore. When he gets back, Shug says that he is going to get something to drink and gets out of the boat and walks to the shore and comes back with three Pepsis. Now Frank being from Clemson is totally amazed and decides that if these two guys can walk on water so can he. So, he steps out of the boat and goes right under. Now Frank was a big man and also not a very good swimmer; so, there he is in the water flapping his arms trying to stay afloat and every now and then going under. Bear leans over to Shug and says: "Don't you think that we ought to tell Frank where the stumps are before he drowns, and they finally get a good football coach at Clemson?"

There are several key points in this text that gives us hope and assurance when facing the problems and troubles that come our way in everyday life. First, in the midst of the storm, Jesus came to the rescue of His friends and followers. In the hour of the disciples' greatest need Jesus came to them. When the wind was blowing against them and life was a struggle, Jesus was there to help. No sooner had a need arisen, than Jesus was there to help and to save. Out of the chaos and in the midst of their fear, Jesus appeared as a sign of hope. He came to them, walking on the water. And He said to them: "Don't be afraid." Do not be afraid; from the mouths of the prophets and angels these words constitute a constant refrain found throughout the Bible from God to His children. "Do not be afraid, I am with you." What better words to hear in the midst of a storm-tossed sea or the problems of life?

Have you ever noticed that while the disciples were on land and with Jesus they were not afraid? But in this instance Jesus had sent them ahead in a boat. Then the disciples who had walked with Jesus, listened to Him, and depended on Him, now find themselves alone in the perfect storm and afraid for their lives. And remember that most of these guys were formerly fishermen and knew this sea like the back of their hands. But when Jesus does come walking on the water, His beloved crew initially don't recognize Him and believe that He is a ghost. Sometimes during the storms of life it is difficult to see God or His hands at work.

Let's be honest; all of us at times have found ourselves in this same boat with the disciples. We walk with Jesus and then without warning storms come up. And then for some reason, the same Lord with whom we have traveled on land becomes unrecognizable to us in the eye of the

storm. Perhaps it is easier for us to trust God on solid ground when everything is going well in our life than when life comes crashing down around us.

Have you ever been in a storm, when your life seemed like a small boat being tossed about by the waves and wind? Are you currently frightened by the storms in your life? Is the wind blowing against you, do you feel like you are paddling upstream all the time? There are times when we are up against it and life is a desperate struggle with ourselves, with our circumstances, with our relationships, with our temptations, with our sorrows, and with our decisions. In such times, no one needs to struggle alone, for Jesus comes to us across the storms of life, with a hand stretched out to save, and with His calm clear voice bidding us to take heart and have no fear.

We need to remember that Jesus is always just a prayer away. All the self-help books and TV talk shows don't mean anything when life hits you square in the face; they won't calm your storms. The only words we need to hear are: "Take courage, it is I, your Lord and Savior." He will walk into the storm and get into the boat with you and calm the winds and the waves that surround you. We need not fear about being overwhelmed by the storms of life; Jesus is the only calming force that we need.

Our text tells us that when evening came, the disciples got into the boat and headed across the lake. It was already dark and Jesus was not with them. Where was He? He was up on the mountainside praying. What an example for each of us to follow. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, took time out each and every day to pray to His Father. He always found time to spend alone with His Father; His life was as busy or even busier as ours, remember He just got through catering a picnic for 5,000 men, and many more women and children. If the Son of God needed time alone in prayer with His Father, how much more do we need to make this a daily habit in our life?

Now if we focus entirely on Jesus walking on the waves, we might miss the fact that this miracle has less to do with a Jesus who comes by impossible **means** than with a Jesus who comes at impossible **times**. The disciples are in the midst of a storm that threatens their very lives; it's dark and the Lord Jesus is nowhere to be found. But that does not mean that He was not aware of what was going on. When it is the darkest, He comes. When we are weary, He comes. When the sea is so wide and our boat so small; when we are a day late and a dollar short; when the storms of life are raging; when we are up the creek without a paddle and our arms are too tired to even hold a paddle if we had one; when it's too dark to see or worse yet too dark to hope, Jesus comes.

Now while John does not mention it in this morning's text, the Gospel of Mark tells us that from the mountainside Jesus was watching the boat. Mark 6:48 says that when Jesus saw the

disciples straining at the oars against the adverse wind, He went to them. Up on the mountain, Jesus had been watching them. He had not forgotten them. He was not too busy to think about them. As they were straining over the oars and with the storm, Jesus was watching over them. Likewise, when we are up against it, Jesus is also watching over us. Now He does not always make things easy for us; at times, He lets us fight our own battles, like a parent watching their children grow up. The point is that our life is lived with the loving eyes of the Lord upon us.

Jesus watches; He comes where we are; and He helps us through the storms of life. It is the assurance of the Christian life that there is nothing that we are left to do alone. A teacher in a small country school shared the story about Jesus walking on the water with her students. Of course, this was long ago; you can't do this today in our public schools. Sometime later there was a blizzard. When school was over, the teacher was helping the students get home safely. The snow was so deep that she had to actually drag them through the drifts. One little boy was overheard to say to himself: "We sure could use that guy Jesus right now!" Let's admit it, there have been times in our lives when we have thought the very same thing. And the good news is that we never need to be without Jesus; He is always here for us. Remember His promise at the end of the Gospel of Matthew: "And, lo I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Now Jesus walking on the water is considered a miracle because it defies gravity. But did you know that there is a second miracle in this story? Look at verse 21 again: "Then they were willing to take Him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading." When the disciples realized that it was the Lord Jesus, they welcomed Him into their boat. Immediately they found themselves at their destination. They did not have to row any further. I saw a poster once with a caption that read: "When you have gone as far as you can, Christ takes you the rest of the way." This is what the disciples experienced, and this is also what we can experience when we are overwhelmed by life.

Not only does Jesus calm the storms of our lives, but He helps us arrive safely home. It was dark when a lady was on a boat crossing Lake Michigan during a storm. The lightning, thunder, and rain made her very nervous. She saw the jagged rocks jutting above the surface of the lake. In fear, she asked the captain: "Do you know where all the rocks are out there in the lake?" "No," the captain replied, "I don't, but I do know where it's safe."

As you "sail" through life, you are going to see lots of rocks out there. Some you will know how to avoid; others will come up suddenly and surprise you. The important thing is to know "where it is safe." Jesus knows the waters of life, and He knows where it is safe, if we only follow Him.

There is a key phrase in verse 21 that we must not overlook: "They were willing to take Him into the boat." This is very similar to the passage in Revelation 3:20 – "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them." This of course is the door of our heart. The point is that when we are in a crisis, when the storms of life are beating down on us, when the winds of adversity are blowing against us, Jesus is there watching over us, ready to come and calm the storm, but we must first invite Him in, ask for His help. Remember He is only a prayer away.

In a way, we can all relate to the disciples in this story. We are always rowing, sometimes against the wind and waves, at work, at home, in relationships, balancing our time and resources. The lesson is very simple; don't bail out; don't give up. Don't lay down the oars! Jesus is the Master of the waves. He will bring us safely to the shore.

God comes in the time of crisis, when our resources are exhausted, as Jesus came walking on the water to the disciples in the storm-tossed boat. God comes at the darkest moments as Jesus came in the darkness of the night. Sometimes God calms the storm, and sometimes He lets the storm rage and calms His child. Faith may not enable us to actually walk on the water, but it does enable us to believe, against all odds, that God is with us in the midst of any storm life may throw our way.

Are you going through a storm right now; does your life feel like it is being tossed about like a row boat in the open sea? Then invite Jesus into your boat and let Him calm the storms around you and bring you safely to the other shore. Whatever your storm, whatever your struggle, the grace of our Lord and Savior is available to you right now. With Jesus as the Captain of your boat, you can safely sail through the storms of life. Don't be afraid, it is Jesus and He is here for you. Amen