

Saved from the Storm

Grace and peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ...

I have always enjoyed the story of the pastor who was on a long flight home after attending a Church conference...

The first warning of trouble on that flight came when the '*Fasten Your Seat Belts*' sign flashed on...

After a while, a calm voice said, "*Beverages will not be served at this time as we are expecting a little turbulence. Please make sure your seat belt is fastened.*"

The pastor looked around the aircraft and saw that many of the passengers were becoming apprehensive... Later, the voice on the intercom said, "*We are so sorry that we are unable to serve meals at this time... The turbulence is still ahead of us.*"

And then the storm broke...

The ominous cracks of thunder could be heard (even above the roar of the engines)... Lightning lit up the darkening skies, and within moments that great plane was tossed around (like a cork in a celestial ocean)... One moment it was lifted on terrific currents of air, the next it seemed as if it was about to crash...

As the pastor looked around, he could see that nearly all the passengers were in panic mode – except one little girl!

In fact, she sat calmly, feet tucked under her, enjoying a book that she was reading, and seemingly oblivious to the turbulence around her... Sometimes she would close her eyes, and then she'd go right back to her book...

Well, to keep a long story short - the storm blew over.... When the plane landed and the passengers were disembarking, the pastor approached the little girl and asked her how she was able to remain so calm and so focused....

The little girl replied, "**Cause my Daddy's the pilot - and he's taking me home.**"

I've always liked that story because I think it serves to remind us that when storms arrive in our own lives – storms that cause us grief, or worry, or even panic that cause us turbulence – we also have a Father in Heaven (who's not only taking us to our spiritual home) but who can be trusted to see us through the storms of life (especially the one we're all going through together - right now)...

2

But the question is – do you believe?... and do you see?...

Many of you are probably familiar with our Gospel reading this morning... it also tells a story about a storm (that threatened the life of the disciples who were making their way across the Sea of Galilee)... and, just like it can be in life, (all seemed calm and normal one moment – and then very turbulent and frightening the next)...

In fact, the waves and the winds were so strong that the disciples believed that they were going to die... they saw the storm (and the Bible tells us that they were afraid)... and like it would be for us (they cried out for help – in hopes of being rescued from the storm)...

Now I will admit that I have never been *caught in a storm (out at sea)* ... yet, I have experienced many storms in my own life (that have felt threatening)...

In fact, like some of you I have received suspicious medical reports through the years (that anxiously kept me waiting for an answer) – I have encountered the loss of loved ones that have ushered in the dark clouds of grief, broken relationships littered with drama, the loss of a job, the loss of possessions, and I even served this church through Super Storm Sandy (that turned the lives of people who live in this area – upside down and all around)...

And so, I can relate to the fear of the disciples – the panic in their hearts – and the worry that can be all consuming (and that can weigh a person down)... and I know that you have experienced that as well...

But here's the beautiful part of the story – Jesus comes to them in their darkest hour... and reveals to them that – he alone – can calm the storms that come... and when he does calm the storm (he invites Peter to step out of the boat and walk on water) and to trust in his promises... and for a brief moment (Peter does just that)... Peter gets out of the boat and trusts Jesus...

So what does this story really mean for us (Today – in the 21st Century?)...

Well, the boat is the place where we think that we're safe...

And I know this to be true because, like you, sometimes when I am feeling unsure of myself (I find it so much more tempting to stay under the covers than face the world)... it's easier to stay in a lousy job (than work at doing what makes your heart happy)... it's easier to stay in a bad relationship (than either work on it) or find a new

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one... but what I am trying to say is that too often we allow ourselves to get more comfortable being in the boat – rather than stepping out in faith...

And by Jesus inviting Peter to step out of the boat in faith (he's also inviting Peter to take his eyes off of what the storm can do – so that he can see what God can do...

And finally, I imagine with his eyes closed (Peter steps out of the boat) one foot at a time... and feeling the cold water he wants to retreat, he wants to stay where he falsely believes there is safety – but Jesus takes him by the hand (and for the first time) Peter is doing what he never thought possible... he's walking on water...

But we all know the story very well... it tells us that he doesn't stay there for long... because although he has faith (he continues still to let fear back into his heart)... to let the problem seem bigger than God... to focus only on the storm and not the true shelter for the soul... and when he does – the Bible tells us – he falls...

We do that as well, don't we?... and no – we may not walk on water (but when we take our eyes off of Jesus (and focus on the problem – or the medical report – or the setback – or the pandemic – or whatever the circumstances may be) rather than put our faith in (God to see us through) – we, too, find ourselves sinking, going under, and drowning once again in fear...

You know, I don't have to tell you that we are living in very strange times... very difficult times... and even though I do believe that life has always been uncertain (it can be hard to look into the future with an awful lot of hope right now)... and I only say that because of all that the world has been going through with the pandemic – and the constant fighting with our political leaders (both at home and abroad) – the high unemployment rate – the social distancing – the protests and riots – (need I continue?)...

And I think that if we were to only focus on these problems (just as Peter went back to focusing on the storm) we, too, can so easily sink into fear and worry (and possibly find ourselves drowning in despair or depression) especially if you sit all day in front of the television watching the news... and I say that with love (and not judgement)...

But as Christians (this story of Peter walking on water) also serves to remind us that we are not to keep our focus (solely on our circumstances) - but to believe that Jesus will keep his promises (not only to save us – as he saved Peter) but that he will see us through the storm... which is why we are blessed and wise – to keep our eyes on the Lord (and do not take them off)... Because Jesus saves those who call out to him (just as he saved Peter from the storm)...

Let me close with another one of my favorite stories... it takes place in a church basement somewhere in Milwaukee and says this, " During a Sunday evening adult Bible study the question was asked, *"In your time of discouragement, what is your favorite Scripture?"*...

A young man said, *"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want"* Psalm 23:1...

A middle age woman said, *"God is my refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble"* Psalm 46:1...

Another woman said, *"In this world you shall have tribulations, but be of good cheer, I have overcome this world"* John 16:33-35.

Then old Mr. Rufus who was 80 years old, with head of white hair and dark black skin, stood up and said with as much strength as he could muster, "It says, 'And it came to pass...' 85 times in the Bible." ...The class started to laugh a little, thinking that old Mr. Rufus's lack of memory was getting the best of him...

When the snickering stopped, he said, **"At 30, I lost my job with six hungry mouths and a wife to feed... I didn't know how I would make it... At 40, my eldest son was killed overseas in the war... It knocked me down... At 50, my house burned to the ground... Nothing was saved out of the house. At 60, my wife of 40 years got cancer. It slowly ate away at her. We cried together many a night on our knees in prayer. At 65, she died. I still miss her today.**

He continued - *"The agony I went through in each of these situations was unbelievable. I wondered where was God in each of those storms of my life... But each time I looked in the bible I saw one of those 85 verses that said, 'And it came to pass' I felt that God was telling me, my pain and my circumstances were also going to pass - and that God would get me through it... and I can tell you – as one who kept that Bible verse close to my heart – He did...*

"Oh you of little faith – why do you doubt?" Don't you know that the Lord is good?...

May the peace of God be with you in this very moment – May you know of our Lord's great love for you – and may you always remember (that if you want to walk on water – first you must get out of the boat)...
In Jesus' name we pray... **Amen!**