

Faith in the Storms of Life

Matthew 14:22-33

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Rev. Laurie Crelly, East Church

Grand Rapids MI

Today's sermon will be more like a group discovery. This story in Matthew's Gospel is very familiar and has many points of comparison that we can all learn from each other in relation to the reading. I want you to pair up, if needed three people, preferably someone outside of your immediate family, so if you need to move around please do so. Be sure to exchange names if you don't know your partner. Ok everyone ready?

Life is bound to bring storms; it is part of life and as believers we turn to our faith to help us through those storms. That is why this story in Matthew is so loved. Through the ages believers have looked to this story to give us faith so I want us to hear from one another ways that we have experienced elements of this story in our own lives.

Take a minute to think of a situation you have experienced and give a brief description of a time in your life that life felt like a tempest storm. Just 1-3 sentences to give a little sense of the situation. Don't tell the whole story just set the scene. To help you start finish this sentence – One of the worst life storms I experienced was when . . .

In the Gospel reading we know that many of the disciples are experienced sailors and know not only how to read the clouds and the sea conditions they know what to do when conditions change. As the storm or the winds get worse, they begin to bring in the sails, they tie loose objects down. And they hunker down as we call it. They take action to brace themselves and survive. Sure they may be a bit anxious about what is coming in, but they know if they hold on and stay with the boat their likelihood of surviving is pretty high. They worked together to get through the storm.

Going back to your story, can you think of how you weathered this storm in your life? What did you do for yourself that helped you survive? Who came to your aid? Who helped you in the midst of it.

Share with each other and keep it brief – You have three minutes.

Up until now this is a standard story, right? In life we all face storms, and we all learn from our experiences and from others how to get through them. We learn to rely on each other for help and we get stronger for it. It is part of our human existence, no one is an island, we all need one another to survive.

Now fear of the unknown comes into play. The people in the boat experience something they do not understand, and they are filled with fear. Fear can be a paralyzing emotion. It keeps us from thinking rationally, it can keep us from moving or acting. Sometimes our fears can cause us to do really stupid things.

I am going to ask you to try and name a fear deep seated you have. It may be related to the story you have been sharing, or if you want, you can share a fear you struggle with today. They may even be the same. But at whatever level you are comfortable to share, name that fear to one another.

Share now – Three minutes

Here is the powerful moment in the story. Jesus says, “Take heart, It is I. Do not be afraid.” Here is when the disciples realize that God is with them. When Jesus says “It is I”, he is saying “I am who am” is here. Yahweh is here. This is the name that Moses hears from God in the burning bush story. For the disciples, realizing it is Jesus changed their hearts. Not the circumstance, but their hearts.

Back to your experience. In your storm can you recall if you sensed God’s presence? Describe that if you can. What brought you peace during everything?

Share

What is most fascinating here is that Jesus didn’t stop the wind, Jesus didn’t even get into the boat yet, and still Jesus calls to the disciples and assures them that he, God, is there.

Here is your next question - Why did Peter ask to be with Jesus in the midst of the storm?

This story is a story about the salvation message. It shows us the storms of life come and we can get through it with our own knowledge, the help of others and even knowing that God is with us. But our reliance on our own resources is not enough. We cannot rely on the relative security of the boat, or on the faith and experience of others. We need to step out and seek Jesus in the midst of life's storms. We may hesitate, our faith may not be quite there, but Jesus is there to save us. Jesus lifts us up and restores us to the community. It is when they come back into the community that the storm ceases. It is then that others realize that Jesus is truly the son of God.

Even though Peter was the only one out of the boat all of them gained faith in who Jesus is. The storms of life and how God meets us in those storms are not just for ourselves, but they help others grow in their own faith.

Today your story of faith was the sermon. You looked at Peter and his story of salvation in the reading and found yourself in it. You shared that experience with another person or two and in so doing built up their faith also.

This image of the boat is often used in church history to represent the church. Matthew was writing to a struggling, persecuted church and maybe, just maybe he included this story of Peter, the leader of the church as a symbol of bold faith and trust in Jesus. This story endures today to remind us of the power of testimony and living our faith out loud. Let us build up other people's faith by living our faith out loud and sharing stories of God walking in the midst of our stormy lives also.

