

WHERE IS YOUR FAITH?

Matthew 14:22-33 Text vs. 30 *“When he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”*”

Did you ever have one of those days when everything just seems to fall apart? You get up late. The alarm didn't go off. Your head's pounding because you have a bad cold. You cut yourself shaving. The coffeemaker's broken. Your car won't start because the battery's dead. You go to the mailbox and then remember - it's a holiday! Have you ever had one of those days when nothing seemed to go right? Well, Steve had one of those days. He went to sleep with gum in his mouth and woke up with it in his hair. When he got out of bed he tripped over the cat, fell, and cut his lip. His new Miami Dolphins T-shirt fell into the bathroom sink while he was putting it on - - the water was running! For dinner, his wife cooked lima beans. He hates lima beans!

- - - In our Scripture lesson this morning the disciples were having one of those days. It had been a long, tiring day. Lots of ministry. Lots of miracles. Jesus had just fed 5000 men, women, and children with five barley loaves of bread and two fish with the disciples' help and then *“made the disciples get into a boat and go on ahead of Him to the other side while He dismissed the crowd. ²³ After He had dismissed them, He went up on a mountainside by Himself to pray. Later that night, He was there alone, ²⁴ and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.”* Jesus knew a storm was coming. Yet, He sent His disciples out into it! But you know, they were a lot safer out in that storm on the water in the Will of God, than they would have been on dry ground with the crowd out of God's Will. Why would Jesus send them out into a storm, anyway? Do storms come into your life? You know, those situations that make it seem like you're *coming apart at the seams*? If so, think about this!

There are three kinds of storms in life. And they all come from God. He uses *Storms of Correction* to awaken you or discipline you. Or to get your attention. His *Storms of Correction* are to get you back on the right path in your life.

Then, there are *Storms of Perfection* to help you have a love that expects nothing back. A *Storm of Perfection* builds character. It can deepen your faith. It can make you more sensitive to the suffering of others, if you let it! We learned about that last week when Jesus had *“compassion”* on the people around Him. So, what is compassion? Compassion is what you *must have* to understand and be concerned for the sufferings and misfortunes of others. Are you concerned about those poor people in Maui who lost everything in that horrible fire last week? As of Friday, 76 lost their lives! Just as Jesus was concerned for others, you should be concerned for others! God can help a difficult marriage. God can help a rebellious child. God can help you deal with a difficult neighbor. Giving you unconditional love for the most unpleasant person you know is the result of a *Storm of Perfection*.

Then, God has *Storms of Reproduction*. Those will cause others to want to copy how you respond to your suffering. When golf balls were first manufactured their covers were smooth. But it was soon discovered that after a golf ball had been roughed up, hit a lot, abused, and bounced around, it could go farther! All that abuse helped it get more distance. Go farther! So, they started making golf balls with dimples on the covers to go farther. And that's the way it is with life! The rough spots in your life may help make you go farther. And when others see how well you're doing with all the rough places in your life, they will want to follow your example. When others see how well you respond to your own suffering, they will want to copy you. That's the *Storm of Reproduction*.

Now, if you are in a storm-tossed life, be assured the Lord doesn't leave you in it alone. *He will always come to His own!* Verses 24-27 tell about the presence of God: *“When the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the winds were against it. During the fourth watch of the night* (The Fourth Watch back then, was the end of the night. Between three and six in the morning. The Fourth Watch is when you wake up, and it's so dark you can't see your hand even if you hold it out in front of your face. In the Bible, unexpected events took place during the night, in the early morning hours. Joshua rose early on the day the walls of Jericho came falling down. King Darius rose early to see Daniel in the lion's den being spared from lions. Three faithful women rose early to visit Jesus' tomb—only to find it was empty.) *And this was one of those occasions. Jesus went out to them, walking on the water. When the disciples saw Him walking on the water, they were terrified. ‘It's a ghost,’ they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: ‘Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.’”*

Isn't that wonderful? You have to admire those disciples who could have just turned the boat around and headed back to shore. But after being out on the water for nine hours they were tired, wet, and cold, just trying to hang on, when suddenly they saw Jesus — walking toward them — *walking on the water!* When Peter saw it was Jesus, he jumped out of the boat! And then he looked down and realized where he was and what he was doing - - - he was walking on the water toward Jesus - - - he began to sink and cried out, *“Lord, save me!”* Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. *“You of little faith,” He said, “why did you doubt?”* After they both climbed into the boat the wind died down, and those disciples in the boat worshiped Jesus saying, *“Truly You are the Son of God!”* At first, they hadn't recognized Jesus.

They were too busy fighting their storm. They weren't looking for Jesus in their storm. But after He got into the boat with them and rode out the storm with them, things changed!

And isn't that the way it is with you? Sometimes you are so busy with a storm in your own life you don't realize Jesus is right there wanting to get into your boat of suffering with you and help you! Which gives rise to a most important truth: *THE LORD ALWAYS COMES TO YOU IN YOUR DARKEST HOUR*. For example, someone knocks on your door saying they knew you weren't feeling well and thought you might just like to have a good, hot meal! A note, or card comes in the mail, or it's an email or a text message at just the right time, encouraging you to keep on. A friend calls to say that you are being prayed for. A sermon or hymn touches you and you feel strengthened. See, in every case, it's Jesus coming to you. *THE LORD ALWAYS COMES TO YOU IN YOUR DARKEST HOUR*. So, **WHERE IS YOUR FAITH?**

An army officer was sent out on a dangerous mission. He had two things that gave him courage. First, he had the knowledge that he hadn't gone out on the mission all on his own. He had been sent for a good reason. And second, if he got into a tight place, all resources would be used to get him back safely. Those are the same assurances God gives you. He has placed you here for a reason. And He promises to use all His resources to help you out of any "tight spots" that may arise so you can finish your mission in life, safely. *"Jesus immediately said to them: 'Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.'"*

Charles Swindoll in his book *Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back* tells the story of a farmer who wanted to impress his hunting buddies. So, he bought the smartest, most expensive hunting dog he could find. He trained his dog to do things no other dog on earth could do. Impossible feats! Things that would amaze anyone. Then he invited his hunting buddies to go duck hunting with him. After a while, a flock of ducks flew over and the hunters took a few shots. Several ducks fell into the water. "Go get 'em!" shouted the proud owner to his magnificent dog. The dog jumped out of the boat, and began walking out over the water to pick up a duck. Then, he walked back to the boat, dropped the duck in the boat and trotted off again, walking out across the water. He grabbed another duck and brought it back to the boat, still walking on the water. The owner beamed with pride after his wonderful dog had walked across the water and retrieved all the ducks, one by one. "Do you notice anything unusual about my dog?" he asked. One of the men rubbed his chin and said thoughtfully, "No." Then he said. "Come to think of it, I do! . . . Your dog doesn't know how to swim, does he?"

. . . A lot of folks would have the same reaction to Peter walking out on the water. Instead of recognizing he was the only disciple to have enough faith to step out of that boat in a storm and go walking out on the water toward Jesus, the disciples sat in the boat content in their own safety. Peter was criticized for his lack of faith! As he drew closer to Jesus, Peter looked down and realized what was happening and he started to sink *"Jesus immediately said to them: 'Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.'"*

So, the next time you have one of those sinking feelings when the bottom is dropping out of everything you say or do, just remember to turn to Matthew 14! Read it until it helps you realize, sometimes you must go through a storm in your life to find Jesus. Face your fears with courage. Never hold back! You may think you have lost your ability to hear God. You may think you are in a dark place where God can't find you. But it's in those moments that God is there, ready to help you. You may think He is far away from you. But that couldn't be further from the Truth.

Remember, *THE LORD ALWAYS COMES TO YOU IN YOUR DARKEST HOUR*. God will hear you clearly when you call out to Him and say His Name. He will guide you and direct you by His will and give purpose for your life when you call out to Him and say His Name. He will lead you and teach you by His Spirit and His word when you call out to Him and say His Name (Psalm 32:8; John 16:13). He's the One who can give you courage. and strength to follow Him, even if it means suffering or persecution for His sake (Matthew 10:28; Philippians 4:13). Always remember, when the tough times come, the tough get going, and that's the time to turn to the Lord! He will help you get through your storm, no matter what it is. He will be with you to the end, so *"Take courage! Don't be afraid."* Call out to Him and say His Name! He will be there! AMEN