

Sermon: Who Puts the Calm in Your Storm?
Text: Matthew 8:23-27 NLT
God's Word: James 1:2-4 NLT
Date: Sunday, April 3, 2022
Preacher: Rev. Becky Stephens

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead who struggled here have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us--that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion--that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth. (Gettysburg Address, given by Abraham Lincoln, 11-19-1863)

A few years ago during a family vacation, I stood on the spot where Abraham Lincoln spoke these immortal words, I was overwhelmed with a sense of his reaction to a storm. It was not a storm of thunder and lightning or snow. Rather it was a storm of political and moral implications. However, it was the greatest storm that this nation had ever faced. And it was his reaction to that storm that saved our nation.

In our text this morning, we learn a lot about the storms of life. We learn that there will be storms and that our reaction is everything. And more than that, we learn that realization is the key. No matter what the storms may be, Jesus will always be there to see us through. Here these words from Matthew 8:23-27 NLT.

²³ *Then Jesus got into the boat and started across the lake with his disciples.*

²⁴ *Suddenly, a fierce storm struck the lake, with waves breaking into the boat. But*

Jesus was sleeping. ²⁵ The disciples went and woke him up, shouting, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" ²⁶ Jesus responded, "Why are you afraid? You have so little faith!" Then he got up and rebuked the wind and waves, and suddenly there was a great calm. ²⁷ The disciples were amazed. "Who is this man?" they asked. "Even the winds and waves obey him!"

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The first thing we need to recognize is there will be storms!

This narrative begins with *"Then Jesus got into the boat and started across the lake with his disciples."* Literally, the disciples followed him. This goes to show that following Jesus does not make us immune to storms. They weren't being disobedient, back-sliding, or going astray. They were doing what they are supposed to do. Yet they are still walking into a storm.

These are men who were accustomed to dealing with storms. These disciples, only four of whom have been named (Peter, Andrew, James, and John), have probably crossed the sea many times, being professional fishermen. But they are in for a trip that will mark them forever. This shows that experience and preparedness also do not make us immune to the storms. Preparation is good; experience is wonderful; but storms will still come our way.

Another thing that we learn about storms is they hit unexpectedly. Matthew tells us, *"Suddenly, a fierce storm struck the lake, with waves breaking into the boat."* Ancient writers all acclaim the Sea of Galilee for its fresh waters and pleasant temperatures, unlike the Dead Sea. It had clear sandy beaches along the seashore and was well stocked with fish. The lake's low elevation (636 feet below sea level) provided it with mild year-round temperatures, permitting sleeping outdoors as a common practice.

However, surrounded by mountain ranges to the east and west that rise over 2,650 feet from the level of the lake, especially infamous was an east wind that blew in over the mountains, particularly during the spring and fall. The lake's low-lying setting resulted in sudden violent downdrafts and storms that produced waves seven feet and more, easily able to swamp a boat. Storms in life will hit us when we least expect it, and often when things seem to be going well.

I had the good pleasure of being in a boat on the Sea of Galilee enjoying our 3 hour tour when suddenly one of those storms came out of nowhere. We immediately turned back and made it to shore. I can attest, it got scary fast!

Moreover, we learn that storms in life can be "fierce." Matthew uses the Greek word *seismos* to describe the storm. This is an unusual nuance for a word that generally refers to the shaking of earthquakes. It was severe enough that these experienced fishermen were terrified. Storms of life will shake us to our core. They will challenge us to the limit. However, they are inevitable.

Storms are just a part of life. Thankfully, God gives us a miracle like Jericho from time to time, but far more often, he asks us to strap on our swords, pick up our shields, and courageously enter the battle...When this happens we see a miracle there too—the miracle of men and women staying faithful to God in the midst of conflict in their lives.

There will be storms in life. You can't avoid them. You can't run from them. You can't hide from them. So you might as well get used to them.

Storms will be sudden. They will come from out of nowhere. They will come when you least expect them. They will take you by surprise.

At times, storms will be severe. They will shake you to your core. They will challenge your faith. They will test your resolve. They will check your character.

However, they will not overwhelm you. Here these words from 1 Corinthians 10:13 (NLT). *The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure.*

God did not call you to abandon you in the wilderness. He will not leave or forsake you. He will always be there to help. You serve an all-powerful God who is able to do more than you can ask, think, or imagine.

One of the most important things to remember, however, is that reaction is everything!

There are two completely different reactions to this storm. There is a reaction of fear or a reaction of faith.

In the midst of this violent storm, the disciples reacted in fear. Matthew tells us, *"The disciples went and woke him up, shouting, 'Lord, save us! We're going to drown!'"*

This must have been a most powerful storm for these disciples to be afraid and to cry out, *"Lord, save us!"* The disciples woke Jesus up and pleaded with him to save them from certain death by drowning. The force of the storm was so strong that it even terrified the four commercial fishermen. They over-reacted to the situation and allowed their fear to consume them.

On the other hand, Jesus' reaction is very different. Matthew tells us, *"But Jesus was sleeping."* Instead of worry and fear, Jesus responded by taking a nap. The ability to sleep during trouble was often a sign of faith in God. Just look at Psalm 4:8, *"In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, O Lord, will keep me safe."* The Greeks also praised philosophers who demonstrated consistency with their teaching by maintaining a serene attitude during a storm.

When Jesus woke up, he was more concerned about their lack of faith than he was the storm. He said, *"Why are you afraid? You have so little faith!"* Instead of reacting to the storm, Jesus reacted to them and their lack of faith. The disciples have faith, but it is not functioning properly. Jesus calls them to understand more clearly who he is and then act on it. True faith will enable them to trust in God's care even when the circumstances do not look promising. Just as Jesus demands that we express our love for God by trusting him for material provision, he demands that we trust him for safety.

After dealing with their weak faith, he deals with the storm. Matthew tells us, *"Then he got up and rebuked the wind and waves, and suddenly all was calm."* Matthew tells us that Jesus "rebuked" the storm. This is the kind of language that is normally used in dealing with demon possession. This shows us that this was actually a victory over satanic forces. Notice also that this is an obvious miracle, because if a storm suddenly stopped naturally, the wind might cease but the waves would be disturbed for quite some time. Whether we are dealing with the forces of nature or the forces of evil, when Jesus deals with the storm it disappears.

So which is it, faith or fear? It has been said that faith enables us to move through the storms carrying our calm with us.

Here these words from 1 Peter 4:12-13 (NLT). *Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. Instead, be very glad—for these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world.*

Reacting by fear will only bring us more trouble. It will not lessen the storm. It will not increase our faith. It will not bring us closer to God. It will not solve anything.

However, reacting by faith will cause the storm to work in our favor. It will cause our faith to be strengthened. It will cause our character to grow. It will cause others to grow. It will enable us to deal with the storm.

The most important thing to remember in the storm is realization is key!

Now we see the result of Jesus reaction to the storm. Matthew tells us, "*The disciples were amazed.*" These men had been called by Jesus, and left everything to follow him. They had seen him heal lepers. They had heard him teach like no one they had ever heard before. Yet they still had not truly come to grips with his true identity.

They asked themselves, "*Who is this man? Even the winds and waves obey him!*" If the disciples thought the boat might sink with Jesus aboard, it was because they did not understand Jesus' identity—who this man really was. His power over the sea forces them to grapple again with that question. Faith in Jesus' authority flows from conviction concerning his true identity.

We need to ask ourselves, in the midst of our storm, "do we really believe that Jesus is who he claimed to be?" If we truly believe that he is the Son of the Living God, why do we fear when storms come our way? If we truly believe that he is the Great I am, why do we doubt and over react when storms come against us? If we truly believe that Jesus is in control, why do we worry when the storms of life come crashing in on us?

When Super Man is disguised as Clark Kent, his friends and co-workers do not realize who he really is without the big "S" on his chest. At times he even indicates that he needs to do something about a dangerous criminal, they laugh at him and ask him, "Who do you think you are - Superman?" If they only knew!

Matthew 28:18 (NLT) tells us that "*Jesus came and told his disciples, 'I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth.'*"

Understanding Jesus identity helps us to deal with the storms of life. If we realize the he has all authority in heaven and on earth. If we realize that he is in control of all things. If we realize that he has given authority to us as his disciples. This affects how we deal with the storms of this life.

Understanding Jesus identity helps us live by faith and not by sight. We know that whatever life throws at us Jesus will see us through. We know that Jesus will give us the strength to endure. We know that Jesus will always make a way where there is no way. We know that he has promised to be with us always - even in the midst of a storm.

I don't know what storm you're facing today, however, this is what I know: Jesus is bigger than your storm. Jesus will never allow your storm to destroy you. Jesus gives you the faith to endure the storm. Jesus gives you the authority to overcome your storm.

What are you going to do in the midst of the storm?