Finding Jesus in the Storm

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Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. [23]And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, [24]but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them.[25]And early in the morning he came walking towards them on the lake.[26]But when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified, saying, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out in fear. [27]But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.' 28 Peter answered him, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.' [29]He said, 'Come.' So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came towards Jesus. [30]But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!' [31]Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?'[32]When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. [33]And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'
(Matthew 14:22-33)

1. Facing the Future

A month ago, I attended a conference called "Facing the Future, sponsored by the General Commission on Religion and Race of the UMC. This conference was offered for the pastors who serve cross-racial and cross-cultural churches. The theme was "in the storm." Many pastors shared their personal stories. We learned that many pastors who serve cross-racial and cross-cultural churches are "in the storm."

An extreme case I heard about was shared by a pastor who served a congregation in Chicago. While serving a church, the pastor's father became seriously ill and the pastor and his family returned to their home country to be with the father. The pastor and his family weren't American citizens and had a religious visa while in the US.

As part of their return process, the pastor went to the US consulate for an interview but was denied a visa to return. The pastor called his church, district superintendent, bishop, and their senator, but even their supporting letters did not help the pastor get a visa. The pastor and his family would end up waiting six months to return to Chicago.

During that time, a church member became ill in Chicago. The pastor called and prayed for the member over the phone. But when the pastor and his family returned, the member was upset because the pastor was not there in his time of need. The member called the District Superintendent and asked for a

replacement of the pastor. Because of the member's influence, the DS went to the extreme of replacing the pastor in the middle of the year. We can imagine how painful the pastor, his family, and the congregation would be when they went through this process.

Although this is the story of one pastor, the story highlights the storms that not only pastors but all of us experience in this life. I'm sure all of us would be able to share at least one story of a strange situation or a time of deep trouble that makes up a violent storm.

2. The Disciples in the Storm

Matthew 14:22 and the following tells us what happened after Jesus feeds over five thousand men with five loaves of bread and two fish. Jesus asks his disciples to return by boat to the other side without him. The other side means Capernaum on the west shore of the sea of Galilee. After dismissing the crowd Jesus goes up the mountain alone to pray. Here I have two questions: 1) What does Jesus want to pray for? 2) Why does Jesus send his disciples without him?

After Jesus feeds five thousand people with five loaves of bread and two fish, people realize that Jesus is not an ordinary person. They believe that Jesus must be the one God has sent as the Messiah and that Jesus must become king. Jesus knows that he does not come to the world to be king. John 6:15 says, *"**When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.***" Jesus isolates himself from the crowds and his disciples and prays to confirm what God wants him to do. Jesus would also pray for his disciples who would be in the storm soon.

Why does Jesus send his disciples without him? It is because Jesus wants to give them an opportunity to learn who Jesus is. While Jesus is alone in the mountain, the boat is a long way from the shore. It is against the wind and is being tossed around by the waves. They are in a storm. Between three and six o'clock in the morning Jesus joins them, walking on the lake to their boat-a distance of "three or three and a half miles" (John 6:19).

When the disciples see Jesus, they think he is a ghost. They are terrified and screaming. Jesus speaks to them, "don't worry! I am Jesus. Don't be afraid." Peter says, "Lord, if it is really you, tell me to come to you on the water." Jesus says, "Come!" Peter then gets out of the boat and starts walking on the water toward him. But when he sees how strong the wind is, he is afraid and starts sinking. He shouted, "Save me, Lord." Right away, Jesus reaches out his hand. He helps Peter up and says, "You surely don't have much faith. Why do you doubt?" When Jesus and Peter get into the boat, the wind die down. The disciples in the boat worship Jesus and say, "***You really are the Son of God***!"

3. What Do the Disciples Learn from the Storm?

What do the disciples learn from the storm in today's passage? They learn that Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus is the Messiah whom God sent to save His people. In Matthew 16:13-16, Jesus asks his disciples in Caesarea Philippi, "***Who do you say I am?***" (16:15) Peter says, "***You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God***" (16:16). Peter's answer comes from his experience when Peter is delivered from drowning by Jesus. The storm in the sea of Galilee is a learning opportunity for the disciples. For Peter, the storm changes his life. Peter learns not to worry about his life but trust the Lord until he dies.

The Bible doesn't say how St. Peter died. However, in John 21:18-19, Jesus foretold the manner of Peter's death. The most common church tradition is that Peter was crucified upside-down in Rome. When Peter was put to death, he requested to be crucified on an inverted cross because he had denied Jesus three times. He did not consider himself worthy to die as Jesus had died. After Peter experienced the saving power of Jesus in the storm, he trusted Jesus and loved him dearly until he died.

4. Our Church and Our Life

What do we learn from this story? During the first part of last week I prayed for the future of our church. I kept asking, "God, what do you want us to do?" One day, while walking on the canal, I felt God asking me a question, "Is Swift Memorial UMC <u>your</u> church?" In that moment, I felt like God was telling me that God would take care of the future of our church, and that we don't need to worry, but instead allow God to lead the direction of the church.

Later in the week, I felt God asked me a more serious question, "Is your life your own?" I realized that my life is not my own. Just like everyone else, I did not ask anything or influence over how I would be born. My life was given by my parents and led by God's plan. Psalm 139:13 says, "***It was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb.***" We know that God is the one who gives life. God is the owner of our lives.

5. Taking Risk

What do we do then with the lives we are given when the Lord is our owner? I believe we are called to go beyond ourselves and be willing to step out into unfamiliar territory to help others experience the life changing grace of Jesus. When Peter sees Jesus coming toward the disciples, he asks Jesus to call him out of the boat and walk on the water. Matthew 14:29-31 says, "***'Come.' So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came towards Jesus. [30]But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!' [31]Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?'"*** This story reminds us that Peter walks on the

water when he focuses on Jesus. When he begins to see the strong wind, he begins to sink.

When you hear this story, you might think the story of Peter is impossible. Of course, there is no physical way people can walk on the water. But the point of the passage is to show us how much Peter trusted Jesus. Peter trusted Jesus so much that even though it was physically impossible, Peter was able to overcome the impossible and walked on the water toward Jesus. Walking on the water involves taking a leap of faith with no guarantee of success.

6. Strawberry Festival

Think about the strawberry festival yesterday. We were hoping for sunny weather but all the weather reports said there would be rain. We decided to have the festival anyway. When it was raining, I prayed, “Lord, make rain stop at 11 a.m.” Probably rain stopped around 12 p.m. Many people came and enjoyed strawberry shortcakes, hot dogs, and hamburgers. I would say the weather was perfect bringing many people to church. One of visitors wanted to join the church even before she comes to worship with us on Sunday. All vendors said that they enjoyed being part of our festival and that they would come again.

I know fundraising is important, but I believe God would be happy that we made many people happy at the strawberry festival. I hope we can do more often. I would love to do it every day so that we can make the people in the community happy and invite them to Jesus. I am so grateful to those who made the strawberry festival a success. I praise the Lord for making the day perfect.

7. Conclusion

Every one of us will experience ups and downs as we go through our life’s journey. Each one of these moments is an opportunity for us to experience God’s amazing power and grace just as the disciples of Jesus experienced that day in the storm. God knows what is happening to each and everyone of us and will come to save us when we are in trouble. Although the situations can be scary, we have nothing to be afraid of because our God is for us and is always with us.

8. Application

This morning I am so grateful to the Lord for encouraging Mary Lou, Charlotte, Deborah, and Beth to join the church. I pray that joing our church can be a blessing to them and our church.

Are we in the storm? It is a time for us to find Jesus in the storm. Let us wait for our Lord Jesus who will come and save us. The Lord will turn anxiety to the best. In Asian culture, a time of trial is often seen as an opportunity to experience blessing. Even when we might be in a storm, may God bless and help us experience his amazing saving power. Amen.