# Walking with Jesus in the Storms

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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 toward them on the sea. **26** But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, 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 toward 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 worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." (Matthew 14:22-33)

## 1. The Sea of Galilee

Last Sunday the Holy Land pilgrims were sailing the Sea of Galilee. While we were in the boat, we had a Sunday worship service. Four pastors shared five minutes messages. I shared the story that Jesus calms the storm in Matthew 8:23 and the following. Jesus and his disciples are sailing the Sea of Galilee together. Suddenly a furious storm comes up on the lake. Jesus is sleeping. The disciples wake Jesus, saying, "Lord, save us! We are going to drown." Jesus gets up and rebukes the winds and the waves are completely calm.

When we were in the boat at the Sea of Galilee, I wondered whether we would experience such a storm. But on that day the Sea of Galilee was so calm and quiet. There was almost no wave at all. Although there was no storm in the Sea of Galilee, one of the pastors shared a shocking news. In her church one of the pastors was shot and was in critical condition. She may not have a storm of her personal issue, but her heart was full with a storm of her colleague.

## 2. The Disciples are in the Storm

Today's scripture tells us about a different storm that the disciples of Jesus experience in the Sea of Galilee. Jesus is not with his disciples in the boat this time. Right after Jesus feeds five thousand men with five loaves of bread and two fish, Jesus makes the disciples get into a boat and go ahead of him to the other side of Sea of Galilee towards Gennesaret. Jesus goes up to a mountainside to pray by himself.

Matthew 14:24 says, "***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 toward them on the sea***." Matthew tells us the disciples were in trouble, but Jesus was not with them. The disciples would have been fighting the storm for most of the night. They would be exhausted, cold, and frightened. The disciples would have wished that Jesus was with them. Many hours later, in the early morning, Jesus meets the disciples, walking on the lake among the darkness and the waves. The image of Jesus would have looked like a ghost. How would we have reacted if we were with his disciples at the Sea of Galilee? The disciples were terrified and cried out in fear. Jesus calls out to the disciples, "***take heart. It is I; do not be afraid***" (verse 27).

The disciples had never seen anyone walk on water. But somehow the disciples realize that Jesus is before them doing the impossible and walking on water in front of them. Simon Peter now famously asks Jesus to call him out onto the water. Jesus tells Peter to come out of the boat and Peter gets up and walks on the water to Jesus.

Peter gets distracted by the fierce winds around him and begins to sink. Simon Peter cries out: "Lord, save me." Jesus extends his arms and saves Peter. The passage reminds us that even in the storms of this life, Jesus will come and save us as he saved Peter.

**3. Jerusalem: Past and Present**

This message was one of major themes during our recent trip to Israel. I feel very privileged to have gone to Israel over the past 11 days. I've learned a lot about Israel and Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the capital of Israel and the name means "the city of peace." Despite the name, the city has been the focus of years of war and confrontation in the Middle East. Jews, Christians and Muslims all claim the city as Holy for their faiths. Both the Israeli and Palestinians in the area claim Jerusalem as their capital cities.

In Jerusalem, we saw the remains of the years of upheaval. We saw signs in many parts of the city. The Romans destroyed the Temple in 70 AD. And since then the city has been ruled by the Persians, Byzantines, Muslim, Crusaders, Turks, Ottoman, and the British before being set up again as Israel. Throughout the history of Israel many buildings were destroyed and many people were killed.

What about Israel today? We noticed in Israel that there are walls separating Palestinians and Israeli and many checkpoints between their areas. Palestinians have to carry IDs and are questioned to pass the checkpoints. Many Palestinians including Palestinian Christians left the country to Jordan, Lebanon, and other neighboring countries to avoid the potential conflict. That is why Christians in Israel are less than one percent.

While we were in Israel, some of us were able to share a dinner with a Palestinian Christian family in Bethlehem. We learned about their trouble with excessive taxes, difficulties getting citizenship and the conflict between Jews and

Arabs. During our time in Jerusalem, two rockets were fired at Tel Aviv from the Gaza Strip. The Israelis responded with strikes against many military sites. We noticed that many people in Israel live in the storms.

**4. Hope for the Future**

I couldn't imagine how the people in Israel could live in such turmoil. But during our stay, I could see that many of the people have hope for the future of Israel. Christians as well as Jews believe that the Messiah will come to Jerusalem and that Jerusalem will be the capital of God's peace on the earth. That's why many Jews and Christians who die in foreign countries want to be buried in the mounts near Jerusalem.

How do we know that such a city filled with violence will become a city of peace? The Bible tells us multiple times of God's promise for peace in Jerusalem. Zechariah 8:3-5 says, "**Thus says the Lord: I will return to Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of the Lord of hosts shall be called the holy mountain. 4 Thus says the Lord of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of their great age. 5 And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets."** We saw many children on the street in Israel.

Isaiah 9:6-7 also says, ***"For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this***." The Bible reminds us that in the storms of life, God is still in control. God cares for us and sent Jesus to earth as the Messiah of the world.

**5. Hope for the UMC**

Each of us goes through storms at different times in life. The United Methodist Church as a whole is experiencing an inflection point in our history. The UMC in Germany recently released a statement expressing opposition to the recent decision on the denomination's stance on homosexuality. They say, "we want to stay together as a church where people of differing opinions can live with each other. We do not want to let go of each other and we don't want to separate from each other, but we want to hold on to each other and to be there for each other. For we are convinced that Jesus wants to use us and our gifts jointly and together."

The controversy in the denomination can feel like a storm with waves crashing around us. But even as it seems like a storm may be around us, we are constantly reminded that the Lord is with us in the storm and that Jesus would come to save us.

## 6. Conclusion

Today's story tells us that the disciples didn't have the power to save themselves from the storm. Yet they were saved and made it through when Jesus comes and meets them. Despite the storms, we know that we will always be safe and that Jesus will guide us through it all. For us, many things can seem impossible. But with Christ, we see that even the impossible becomes possible.

## 7. Application

Following after Jesus doesn't guarantee a life without any storms. We will all face some kind of trial or difficulty in the future. Yet as Christians, we know that regardless of the storm that comes before us, Jesus will lead us and guide us in the way that he wants us to follow.

While we were in Jerusalem, we had a dinner at a rabbi house. About six years ago, he, his wife, and their nine children moved from New York to Jerusalem. The rabbi and his family felt that God wanted them to live their life in the promised land instead of living a comfortable life in New York. They had two more children in Israel. Now they live with 11 children. Their living cost is higher than New York. Although there are many challenges in Israel, they are happy in Jerusalem because they believe that God would take care of them.

About thirty years ago I visited the Holy Land as a seminary student. This time I asked myself why I visit Israel again. When I heard the story of Palestinians' struggles and frustrations from our guide who is a Palestinian Christian, I felt that I have to do something for them. I do not know at the moment what I need to do for them. But I will remember their difficult life living in the storms, pray for them, and wait for God's direction.

Do we feel that we are living in the storms? Today's story reminds us that Jesus knows what is happening at the Sea of Galilee while he prays in the mountain. He does not come to them to save them immediately. He waits for hours until early morning.

Certainly for the disciples their sailing at the Sea of Galilee is scary. Yet their experience teaches them that Jesus is the savior. Verse 33 says, "***those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God***."

We have hope knowing that Jesus isn't just the person who solves our problems when we have problems. But Jesus is the one who lifts us from death to be children of God. He wants us to live to bear witness to God's love and kingdom here on earth. As Jesus' disciples wait for his coming to save them, we patiently wait for his coming when we are in the storms. When Jesus saves us, we will realize that Jesus saves us to share God's salvation with others. Amen.