

## Sermon- Jesus Walks on the Sea of Turmoil

Scripture: John 6: 16-21

Sunday, March 25, 2018

As we continue our journey through the book of John, you might remember that the last time I preached, we were looking at Jesus' big feeding miracle. And when Jesus does something, it is always rich with meaning. So in the feeding sign there was two layers of meaning, the theological meaning and a pastoral meaning. The theological meaning is that Jesus was someone in the mold of Moses but even greater than Moses. But there was a pastoral layer of meaning. The pastoral meaning was that Jesus was personally concerned with what his people ate and drank. Not only that, Jesus was able to take a sincere offering no matter how small and use it to meet the need no matter how large. I remind you dual meaning message to prepare you for today's message, because as we look at the miracle of Jesus walking on water, here too we are going to look at the theological message and a pastoral message that Jesus is trying to communicate to us today.

Let's start with the theological message. So to understand the theological message, we have to examine the key elements of the story. So in terms of background what you have is, after the long teaching session followed by a big 12,000 person feeding miracle, Jesus and his disciples needed some alone time. So Jesus goes to some secluded place. The disciples now gather by the shore of the sea of Galilee and their plan is to travel by boat the approximately 2 miles to the city of Capernaum, which was always the place the group would return after their trips across the country. So these disciples were waiting for Jesus. But what happens is that it is evening and it starts getting dark and the disciples want to reach Capernaum for the night and so after waiting for some time and seeing that Jesus is nowhere to be found, they decide to proceed by themselves to Capernaum. The disciples were not by themselves because there were many people who were feed that day who were hanging around the disciples. Remember these are

the people who wanted to make Jesus king so they were keeping tabs on Jesus' group. So they too see that Jesus is no where to be found and that the disciples are getting into the boat without Jesus.

Anyway the disciples by now are anxious to leave and so they start rowing into the lake. Now the Sea of Galilee has some very peculiar geography. It is surrounded by hills on all sides and is a deep gorge. And because of that very quickly winds can swoop down and cause gale force winds and high waves. This phenomenon can be observed even today where there is an early warning system set-up and even the power boats have to remain at the dock when one of these storms are forecast. The disciples of course have this really small boat which they have to row by hand. And so when the gale stirs up, our disciples are in big trouble. They row and row, maybe 3 to 4 hours as John tells us and they were still out there in the middle of this dangerous lake. And by now it is really dark. And the disciples are growing desperate. And then suddenly, they see a strange sight. They see a person, actually Jesus their master who they were waiting for to join them, now walking on the water, in the middle of the storm and coming towards them. But obviously when you see someone whom you know but in this form it is quite terrifying and so all the disciples are gripped with fear as Jesus approaches them. But Jesus of course senses their terror and immediately reassures them saying, "do not be afraid. I am here". The disciples feel a sense of peace, they are now eager to get Jesus into the boat with them and they are miraculously transported to their destination. How amazing is that. If you were in that boat, I don't think you can ever forget that boat ride. That is why you find it in 3 Gospels.

But there is a very special thing going on here in the way this story was told. You see if you look at the elements of the story you find that it has all the elements of theophany presentations in the Old Testament. Let me explain. A theophany is the appearance of God to human beings. And when you look at the stories of these God appearances in the Old Testament you find that each of these stories share four common elements. First,

the humans experience great fear at this incredible sighting. Think of Moses in front of the burning bush or prophet Isaiah as he sees a vision of God in Isa 6:5. But that human reaction is always accompanied by a reassurance from God usually in the form of the words, “Do not be afraid”. As when John fell at God’s feet in Rev 1:17. The third element you will usually find is that the person receiving this visitation is feels a sense of peace. And there is a fourth element, that the person being confronted by the theophany is given some sort of commission. That is one element you do not see here, but that is because the commissioning is going to come later at the end of John. But in our story, in addition to the elements of theophany, for those who know scripture, the image of Jesus walking on this storm tossed waves is also an allusion to another passage of scripture. You see right at the beginning of the Bible in Gen 1 the scripture opens with these words, *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”*<sup>[a]</sup> *2 The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.* Now as you play the Gen 1 scripture in your mind, imagine Jesus walking easily on those churning waves in a dark night with just barely some light from the moon.

When you put this Gen 1 allusion and the theophany elements together, Jesus was communicating without doubt here and he was way more than Moses, people! He is none other than the “I am”. The God who created the world, the God who provided the manna in the wilderness. So at one level, Jesus comes walking on the water to communicate to his disciples that they are looking at the very substance of God.

There is a second message to Jesus’ “walking on the waves” miracle. It is the pastoral message. Let’s look at the incident again from the pastoral lens. Well, when you look at what happened, the disciples where in a boat being tossed about in gale force winds and very high waves. And when they look out into the storm what do they see? They see Jesus himself walking towards them. Is Jesus affected by the storm. Not one bit. And what is the first thing that Jesus tells them when they see him. Jesus tells them, do not

be afraid, I am here. I don't know about you but all of us go through storms in life, right? What if all of you who are going through some storm or the other can look into that storm and see Jesus walking through it and coming to you. What if he is saying these words to you? "Do not be afraid, I am here." We know from John that as soon as the disciples heard these words from Jesus something changes for the disciples because from fear now they are eager to have Jesus in the boat with them. So Jesus enters their boat and they immediately get to their destination. So if you look at this story from a pastoral point of view, I think there are three take aways for us.

First, if you are a disciple of Christ, then instead of focusing on the storm, look for Jesus Christ in it. Now you might ask, just because Jesus Christ was there in that storm, does it mean that Jesus Christ will be in every storm that you face? Are we right to generalize this? I think that that is a valid question. And my answer to that is this. Yes, you can generalize in this case and say Jesus Christ is there in every storm in your life, if you are a disciple of Christ. Why do I say that? Because if you look at the Bible, there are promises all over that imply exactly this. In Deut 31:8 His promise is, "He will be with you and not forsake you, so do not fear or be dismayed". In Heb 13:5 God's promise is, "I will never leave you or forsake you", 1 Peter 5:7 it says, "cast your cares upon him for he cares for you". In Matt 28:20 it says, "lo I am with you always, even to the ends of the earth". These are just a small selection from a vast number of similar promises. . But every single promise of God for constant protection under all circumstances including the storms of life are specifically for those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ. Now I can hear many people in our society who will rise up to protest this exclusivity and say, how can you be so narrow minded and thing of yourselves as an exclusive club. Actually, if you examine the situation carefully, you will see why God's promises are effective only for his disciples. You see when God says, "I will not fail you" in Deut 31 he is also saying that "you have to go boldly forward with courage in the difficult mission God has placed on you". Going boldly with courage in God's mission is the condition to his promise that

he will not fail you. In Heb 13:5 when he says I will never leave you or forsake you, he is also saying, “don’t covet and be content in all things”. If you are content in all things, then he promises to never leave you or forsake you. In Math 28 he says, to his disciples to “teach them to observe all things that I have commanded you and then I will be with you always even to the end of the world”. So all God’s promises have to be read together with their associated conditions. Now by definition who are the people who are willing to obey God’s commandments. It is only his disciples. So God’s promises are the accompanying reward specific to each command that he is giving his disciples.

There is a practical dimension too to why God’s promises are only applicable for his disciples. Imagine you are in the boat and there is a storm and Jesus is standing there in the storm. Now imagine you are not a disciple of Jesus. And Jesus says do not fear. Someone who is not a disciple will not be reassured by those words, “do not be afraid”. They will continue to panic and want to simply jump out of the boat. If Jesus were to speak to them and tell them, “stay in the boat my child and just wait till I come in”. Do you think a non-disciple will obey the words of Jesus and stay calmly in the boat? No they will not. If Jesus says stay, they will get up and jump. Unfortunately that is human nature. And if they jump they will only fall into the water and die. The non-disciple dies not because Jesus is partial but because the non-disciple refuses to obey and stay on the road to life.

On the other hand, when you are a disciple and you are going through a storm, because of all the promises in the Bible, you can be sure that Jesus will be right there walking towards you in the storm. Know that he has the power over the storm. All you have to do is invite him into your boat. And when Jesus comes into your boat, what is the result? The result is that you will reach your destination. What does this mean for you and me? It is like this. Life has its ups and downs. Its rough patches and smooth patches. In either season we can forget God. When things are great we can forget God and be caught up in wordliness and when things are going badly we can panic and take things in our own

hands. When we are caught up wordliness inside we have no peace and we are in a mode of constant striving. On the other hand, when we invite Christ to come into our boat, it is like we get completely aligned with Christ. When we are aligned with Christ, no matter what is your external reality, whether you are going through a rough season or a very peaceful one, internally you are very much at peace. You are filled with contentment. You are in a state of Sabbath rest. Apostle Paul experienced this state of peace when he wrote these word in Phil 4 <sup>12</sup>I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. <sup>13</sup>For I can do everything through Christ,<sup>[d]</sup> who gives me strength. And that was why Paul was able to rejoice even when he was in prison. Because Apostle Paul had reached that state where no matter what the external circumstances were, internally there was no striving. He was already at his destination with Jesus by his side.

So Jesus is telling you and me today that he is the Lord above all the storms of your life. If you are his disciple, he will guide you through the storms and even get in your boat. And when he is in your boat you will be at peace. And you will not be frantically rowing and getting nowhere like the people of this world. You will be with Jesus relaxing on the shore. I hope you will ask Jesus to get into your boat today. Let us pray.