

Don't Jump Ship
Matthew 14:22-33
August 13, 2017

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, 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." "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Grace, mercy, and peace from the one, who is able to calm any storm, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

What do you think about good ole' Peter out there walking on the water? Most of us, at one time or another, have probably admired Peter's courage. Just stepping out of that boat, in the middle of a storm, took a lot of courage, or faith, or reckless abandon, or something. But, today, I want to take a look at Peter's little walk on the wide side from a different angle.

First, let's talk about how those disciples got in that boat. Jesus had just fed over 5000 people with just a couple of fish and a few loaves of bread. When that was finished, something happened that Jesus found disturbing. Matthew doesn't tell us this part of the story but the apostle John does. John says: *When the people saw this miracle that Jesus did, they said, "He must truly be the Prophet who is coming into the world." Jesus knew that the people planned to come and take him by force and make him their king, so he left and went into the hills alone* (Jn 6:14-15 NCV).

Jesus put his disciples in that boat to protect them. A situation had arisen that could have done great harm to the twelve. Here's the problem. The people were considering taking Jesus and making him their king, even if that meant using force. Not force against Jesus, but a revolution. But it wasn't the mob mentality or the violence of a revolution that Jesus was protecting his disciples from.

The protection Jesus was giving his disciples was protection from sinful pride. These men were Jesus' closest comrades. If Jesus became an earthly king, his disciples, undoubtedly, would have been his chief lieutenants. That would have been a very flattering thought. It might have been a bigger temptation than the disciples could have withstood. They were still very immature in their faith. They might have been sucked

into the crowd's way of thinking. So, Jesus rushed his disciples into a boat and sheltered them from the foolish fantasies of the crowd. Jesus protected his disciples. But, wait a minute. Those men escaped the danger of the crowd only to sail into the heart of a storm. Did Jesus knowingly send his closest companions into a dangerous situation? Yes. That's exactly what he did. And the disciples, because they obeyed Jesus, found them rowing for their lives.

Maybe you've been where these men found themselves. I have. You've done your best to follow the Lord only to find yourself alone at sea in the middle of a storm. If you haven't been there, life's not over yet, you may very well be there someday. Since that's true, there is something you should know about the storms of this life. There are two kinds.

First, there are storms of correction. These are the storms God allows in our lives to turn us from willful disobedience. The Israelites endured one whopper of a storm by wandering in the desert for forty years. Jonah had his storm in the belly of a great fish. Samson had his storm in captivity and blindness. Storms of correction can be hard to live through but they come from the hand of our loving Father.

There are also storms of perfection. These are the storms God allows in our lives to help us grow. These storms shape and mold us into better, more useful children of God. Paul describes these storms in his letter to the Romans. Paul writes: *We also have joy with our troubles, because we know that these troubles produce patience. And patience produces character, and character produces hope* (Rom 5:3-4 NCV). Storms of perfection also come from the hand of our loving Father.

Let's return to the disciples. They're in the boat, where Jesus put them, and they're in a storm, where Jesus knew they would be. But they didn't know that. All they knew was that they were in a small boat in a raging storm. Many of these men were fishermen. Chances are they also knew other fishermen, who hadn't survived one of these storms. The disciples were human, they were scared, and they were rowing for their lives.

Have you ever been in one of those storms? Maybe not in a boat fighting high winds and dangerous waves. Maybe in a doctor's office waiting for test results. Maybe on the job waiting to see who's going to be laid off. Maybe at a grave – just waiting. Whatever your storm, however bad things look, there's something here to give you hope and joy.

In the Gospel of Mark, we read another thing not recorded by Matthew. Mark tells us: *He saw his followers struggling hard to row the boat, because the wind was blowing against them* (Mk 6:48 NCV). Did you catch that? The disciples were in the middle of a fierce storm but they weren't out of Jesus' sight. Jesus knew where they were. He not only knew where they were, he was keeping an eye on them. There is no storm of life so severe that Jesus loses sight of you. His eye is on the sparrow and you can be sure he's watching you.

Another note of comfort is that Jesus went to his disciples. He didn't just watch what the disciples were going through like some rubber-necker on the expressway. Jesus saw

the need of his people and he went to them. Jesus didn't abandon them to their storm and he won't abandon you to your storm. That's good to know.

We have now come to the point where we can take a look at what Peter did. And what did Peter do? He jumped ship. I've read all the different accounts of this scene in the Bible and no where have I found Jesus giving his disciples instructions to get out of the boat in the middle of the sea. Jesus told them to get into the boat and cross to the other side. It was Peter's idea to jump ship early. Peter didn't like where Jesus had put him so he changed things on his own.

That brings up the question, "Why did Jesus allow Peter to do something he hadn't commanded?" I think the answer is obvious. Jesus allowed Peter to have his own way in order to teach Peter, and us, some valuable lessons.

When Peter stepped out of the boat, he should have dropped right to the bottom of the lake. Why didn't he? Peter didn't sink because, even though he acted outside what Jesus commanded, Jesus kept Peter safe. We have all, like Peter, stepped outside God's will. But God is faithful even when we are not. We are his children whether we are obeying or disobeying. God's love for us never fails. God doesn't abandon us the second our sinful humanness leads us astray.

We can also see that God might let us create our own storms to learn from. While Peter was in the boat, the waves were a problem, but he was in a place where the waves could be navigated. When Peter chose to leave the boat, the waves became a much larger problem. If we decide to do life our own way instead of God's way, we might, like Peter, learn that things can become unnecessarily complicated.

Peter also learned the importance of faith. Even though he was doing things his own way, Peter stayed above the water as long as his faith in Jesus held solid. When Peter's faith failed, he failed. Think about this. If Peter's faith had held firm, do you think Peter would have sunk? Of course not. Faith in Jesus never disappoints. If Peter's fear hadn't become larger than his faith, he would have walked all the way to Jesus.

But Peter's faith did fail and Peter did begin sink. What happened next is another lesson in God's love and faithfulness. When Peter came to his senses and cried out for his Lord, Jesus was right there to save him. Just because we suffer from a momentary stupidity doesn't mean we are lost forever. God promises that he is there to love us, forgive us, and receive us back when we turn to him.

Jesus forgave Peter and Jesus saved Peter from his own failed scheme. What did Jesus do then? Jesus took Peter back to the boat. Jesus returned Peter to the very spot where he had put Peter to begin with. Do you think Jesus was telling Peter he wanted him in that boat?

Now, let's look at our lives in light of this account about Peter and his boat. Jesus has put all of us in boats, and we all have seas to cross in these boats. Sometimes the seas

will be calm. Sometimes we may encounter unbelievable storms. We are in boats of human relationships, boats of marriage, boats of parenthood, boats of church membership.

All of these boat rides can, and probably will, be subject to periodic storms. The important thing is not to jump ship. We are in these boats because Jesus wants us in these boats. If we jump ship, we might just find out how much more dangerous the storm is outside of the boat.

When you're in a storm remember the following things. Jesus is watching you. He hasn't forgotten you. Jesus loves you and knows what's going on. And, when the time is right, Jesus will come to you. He will supply you with everything you need to carry on. Just remember that Jesus acts in his time not ours. Lastly, Jesus doesn't expect you to walk on water. He just wants you to remain faithful to him in the situation he has placed you.

One last thing, when I wrote this sermon, I figured there might be some people who would hear or read these words and warp what I have said to suit their own selfish purposes. Because of that, I want to finish with this.

God places us in situations and God removes us from situations. Because we know this, Christians often make one of two mistakes. We either leave too soon or we stay too long. If we don't like where God has put us, we're in a hurry to make our exit. If we are too comfortable where God has put us, we are in no hurry to leave when he says, "Go!"

The problem then becomes how do we know what God wants us to do. We remain open to God and his direction for our lives. We learn to pray the ultimate prayer of faith, "Thy will be done."

My brothers and sisters in Christ, I pray that the Holy Spirit will keep you open to God's direction for your life so you might stay when God wants you to stay, go when God wants you to go, and never jump ship.