

St Nicholas Church, Sighthill

Sunday, 6 March 2022

I'm Sinking Fast - The Fear of Overwhelming Challenges

**"It is in storms that Jesus does His finest work,
for it is in storms that He has our keenest attention."**

Courage is always a possibility

Hymn: Immortal Invisible, God only wise

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6HP-Sb0CDk>

Immortal invisible God only wise
In light inaccessible, hid from our eyes
Most blessed most glorious, the Ancient of Days
Almighty victorious, Thy great name we praise
Unresting unchanging, and silent as light
Nor wanting nor wasting, Thou rulest in might
Thy justice like mountains, high soaring above
Thy clouds which are fountains, of goodness and love
To all life thou givest, to both great and small
In all life thou livest, the true life of all
We blossom and flourish, as leaves on the tree
And wither and perish, but naught changeth thee
Great Father of glory, pure Father of light
Thine angels adore thee. all veiling their sight
All praise we would render, O help us to see
'Tis only the splendour, of light hideth thee

CCLI Song # 124466, Walter Chalmers Smith

Opening Prayer

God who is with us, You know what we need before we even quiet ourselves to ask (Matthew 6:8).

- When we feel burdened under the weight of our life and work;
- when we feel overwhelmed at the tasks laid before us,
- when we feel the pressure to succeed and the fear of failure in our bones,
- when we worry we might not be up to the task,
- when we fear the approaching of deadlines or meeting of expectations,
- when our bodies feel heavy with dread – you are with us.

The worst storms, Jesus, are the ones caused by our fear, when we grow afraid of losing our power, or we grow suspicious of the power of others, when we refuse to acknowledge your mysterious authority; Yet, it's in the storm that we find our capacity to love.

In releasing our weak claim to power and opening to your reign, we discover a new way of seeing ourselves as called and useful and beloved and the other, whoever they may be as dignified and precious and beloved. Here in the storm, Jesus, we need you, and we need each other, and the love you give us to share, leads us through sacrifice and self-giving to peace and calm, if only we will loose our hold on fear. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Bible Reading: Matthew 14: 25-33 (NIV)

Shortly before dawn 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."

Jesus walks on water video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iAglwzp3EDQ>

Reflection

"But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary" (Matt 14:24) As famous lakes go, Galilee- only thirteen miles at its longest, seven and half at its widest- is a small, moody one. The diminutive size makes it more vulnerable to the winds that howl out of the Golan Heights. They turn the lakes into a blender, shifting suddenly, blowing first from one direction, then another. Winter months bring such storms every two weeks or so, churning the waters for two to three days at a time.

Peter and his fellow storm riders knew they were in trouble. What should have been a sixty-minute cruise became a nightly battle. The boat lurched and lunged like a kite in March wind. Sunlight was a distant memory. Rain fell from the night sky in buckets. Lightning sliced the blackness with a silver sword. Winds whipped the sails, leaving the disciples "in the middle of the sea, tossed by waves."

The disciples fought in the storm nine cold, skin-drenching hours. And about 4:00 a.m. the unspeakable happened. They spotted someone coming out of the water. "A ghost!" they said crying out in terror (v. 26 MSG).

They didn't expect Jesus to come to them this way. Neither do we. We expect him to come in the form of peaceful hymns or on Sunday mornings or quiet retreats. We expect to find Jesus in morning devotionals, church suppers, and meditation. We never expect him see him in a bear market, pink slip, lawsuit,

foreclosure, or war. We never expect to see him in a storm. But it is in storms that he does his finest work, for it is in storms he has our keenest attention.

Jesus replied to the disciples' fear with an invitation worthy of inscription on every church cornerstone and residential archway. "Don't be afraid" he said. "Take courage, I am here!" (v. 27 NLT). Power inhabits those words. To awaken in an ICU and hear your husband say, "I am here." To lose your retirement yet feel the support of your family in the words "We are here." When a Little Leaguer spots Mom and Dad in the bleachers watching the game, "I am here" changes everything. Perhaps that's why God repeats the "I am here" pledge so often.

We cannot go where God is not. Look over your shoulder; that's God following you. Look into that storm; that's Christ coming toward you. Much to Peter's credit, he took Jesus at his word. "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." So He said, 'Come.' And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus" (Matt. 14: 28-29).

Peter never would have made this request on a calm sea. Had Christ strolled across a lake that was a smooth as mica, Peter would have applauded, but I doubt he would have stepped out of the boat. Storms prompt us to take unprecedented journeys. For a few historic steps and heart-stilling moments, Peter did the impossible. He defied every law of gravity and nature; "he walked on water to go to Jesus."

My editors wouldn't have tolerated such brevity. They would have flooded the margin with red ink: "Elaborate! How quickly did Peter exit the boat? What were the other disciples doing? What was the expression on his face? Did he step on any fish?"

Matthew had no time for such questions. He moves us quickly so the major message of the event: where to stare in a storm. "But when Peter saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, 'Lord, save me!' " (vs. 30)

A wall of water eclipsed his view. A wind gust snapped the mast with a crack and a slap. A flash of lightening illuminated the lake and the watery mountains it had become. Peter shifted his attention away from Jesus and toward the squall, and as he did, he sank like a rock. Give the storm waters more attention than the Storm Walker, and get ready to do the same.

Whether or not storms come, we cannot choose. But where we stare during a storm, that we can. Feed your fears and your faith will starve. Feed your faith, and your fears will. The storm didn't cease, but Peter's discouragement did. After a few moments of flailing in the water, he turned back to Christ and cried, "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, he wind died down" (Matt. 14:30-32 NIV)

Jesus could have stilled the storm hours earlier. But he didn't. He wanted to teach the followers a lesson. Jesus could have calmed your storm long ago too. But he hasn't. Does he also want to teach you a lesson? Could that lesson read something like this:

"Storms are not an option, but fear is?"

God's lesson is clear. He's the commander of every storm. Are you scared in yours? Than stare at him. This may be your first storm. But it's certainly not his.

Questions:

1. What storms have you encountered in life?
2. Looking back where was Jesus in that storm?

3. Do you think Peter would have stepped out of the boat had the water been smooth?
4. What unprecedented journey has some storm prompted you to take?
5. What overwhelming challenges are you facing now?
6. How do you tend to feed your fears? How do you feed your faith?
7. How has a life-storm deepened your walk with Christ?
8. What purpose do you see in storms?

Adapted from JB BUMC

Prayer for ourselves and others

Heavenly Father, when we feel alone, beaten up, when tears fill our eyes, when we toss and turn at night when words can't express the ache in our hearts - be our refuge from pain, replacing our distress with peace Be our strength when we feel weak. Help us not to fear the future but to boldly trust that you are in control. Help us to "Be still, and know that you are God". Help us trust you with our decisions and future. Let us lean on you with all our heart instead of relying on our own imperfect understanding. Give us clear guidance in our lives. We ask for your help to direct our paths. Give us confidence that your direction is always the best way to go.

Heavenly Father, heavy fighting, shelling and air strikes across Ukraine have had devastating consequences for ordinary people. A million people have fled the country in recent days, and many more have had to leave their homes to escape the fighting. At Ukraine's borders with Poland, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and Moldova, huge numbers of people are arriving with only what they can carry. In many places there are long waits to cross and scant facilities waiting for them on the other side, with temperatures dropping below freezing overnight.

Heavenly Father, hear our prayers for our brothers and sisters in Ukraine. Lord we ask for peace for those who need peace, reconciliation for those who need reconciliation and comfort for all who don't know what tomorrow will bring. Lord God, we ask you to be with all - especially children who are suffering as the crisis in Ukraine deteriorates. We remember those who are anxious, fearful, bereaved or injured.

Lord God, we ask that decisions makers hear Your voice. Parents protecting their families -deciding whether to stay or leave. Church and other religious and community leaders as they support and comfort people. And Lord we ask for wise actions from global leaders - who have the power not only to start wars, but to stop them too. **And Father God we cry out for an end to this crisis. For mercy, peace, and truth - because You are light, hope, power, and love. In Jesus' name, Amen.**

Song: In His Time

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VbFUPFI6qu4>

Benediction

'He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. Then they were glad that the waters were quiet, and he brought them to their desired place of rest'. The same God who calmed the dangerous sea is present with us, cares for us, and can calm the stormy waters of our lives. We go in His peace, love and protection.