

THE LORD OF THE STORM

Luke 8:22–25

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Luke 8:22–25 (NIV)

“One day Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Let’s go over to the other side of the lake.’ So they got into a boat and set out. As they sailed, He fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger. The disciples went and woke him, saying, ‘Master, Master, we’re going to drown!’ He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. ‘Where is your faith?’ he asked his disciples. In fear and amazement they asked one another, ‘Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him.’”

This is my favorite story in all of Scripture. It’s my favorite place. And the Lake of Galilee is my favorite geographical place in the entire world. It’s a small lake about 15 miles from north to south at its furthest point and about 7 miles from east to west. It’s so beautiful. It’s the lowest fresh-water lake in the world. The surface of it is 680 feet below sea level. It sort of sits in the Jordan Rift Valley. Around it are 2,000-foot mountain sides. When there is a squall that comes up, it can arise very suddenly and the mountains serve as a funnel through which the wind can blow with great ferocity. The Lord loved the Lake of Galilee, and it probably was created by the Father at creation to serve as the private prayer chapel of Jesus. We know that on the hills, overlooking the lake, you can see many points on the shore from anywhere on those hills. We know that on those hills Jesus prayed, taught multitudes, He fed multitudes. By its shores He called disciples to follow Him. Now in the Gospel text this morning we find Him in a storm.

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To make this story live for us, we must get into the boat with Jesus and with His disciples. There are universals present. The Lake of Galilee is the sea of life. The storm is adversity of any kind.

The boat is our helplessness to overcome the adversity. And the Lord is the one who still speaks to the storm and to us.

Our message has three considerations: the storm, the boat and the Lord.

I. The storm

No one willingly seeks a storm. It isn't as though madness had seized the disciples and they saw that a storm was brewing over in the north and decided to get out in the Lake of Galilee and test how strong their boat was. No one, unless they're masochistic, willingly seeks a storm in their life. Storms, when they arise, come quite suddenly without any warning signal.

I realized, again this week, as pastor of this flock of God how quickly storms arise. Last Sunday morning, among the many people that were going out of this sanctuary that passed me and shook hands with me as I greeted people at the door, was a young man, Noel, fifteen years of age; he was here with his grandmother and aunt. For the last number of weeks, Noel—on his own—had been coming to church, reaching out for the Lord. A wonderful boy. After the service that day, he went home and he was in a neighbor's yard and he and a couple of other boys were climbing a tree and he was at the top. He lost his balance and reached for something to grab on to and grabbed a Southern California Edison power wire, and he has been, this last week, in intensive care in a deep coma at Fountain Valley Inter Community Hospital. Doctors do not give him great prospect for recovery. How sudden that storm originated in that family.

As I stood by Noel's bedside yesterday afternoon again, and looked at this 6-foot 1-inch boy, the size of my son and other young men in this congregation in age, it was as though everything in my heart that could be raked was raked. I went two beds down to little Oscar, who a week ago

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Saturday was out playing and a hit and run driver came along and ran him over. He too is in a deep coma. His aunt is in this church. I stood by that little boy's bed and realized, as I talked to the parents—who speak only Spanish—and prayed for that little boy, how quickly that storm has risen.

There are so many serious matters that face individuals in this congregation. Many of which have arisen very suddenly. Storms are sudden. The doctor says, "I'm sorry to tell you, but you have cancer and we can't operate." Or, "I'm sorry to tell you, but you have Alzheimer's disease." Or, "Your baby will not make it." Or, "we have done all we could."

I thought through a million scenes through my mind in the last few years. I realized anew how, every moment of our life, we live on the raw edge of danger. We live in our apartments, we live in our homes, we live in our split-level houses, whatever we live in—and it seems so calm and we get in our car and strap a seatbelt on and think everything is okay, "Life is a glide." And that quick we're on the raw edge of danger and we're in a storm, so unexpected in its ferocity that everything within us is shaken.

We saw the news this week of the Orange County paramedics who—out towards Santiago Canyon way, I believe it was—stopped to give assistance to a man in a car that had plunged over a cliff. They couldn't get the proper equipment down to the bottom of the ravine, so they raced down there themselves and gave him mouth to mouth CPR, only to discover after they had done it that here was a person dying with AIDS. The men who were on a mission to give help suddenly find that they themselves may be victims of a potential fatal illness. Their day was going along normally and suddenly, a storm.

There are more ways storms can hit: a heart attack, or maybe a spiritual heart attack to a marriage. Suddenly, you become aware of infidelity, or perhaps in the economic area, suddenly

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an investment you have made has gone sour and your life savings are gone. Or a job you were counting on and held for some time is suddenly terminated. Or maybe you're in a spiritual storm that arose quite suddenly and you don't know where it came from. You're in an unexplained depression. I think of a friend of mine in the ministry who had served the Lord several years and said to me some years ago, "I don't know what's the matter with me. I'm still preaching but I don't know if God exists!" The problem that he was facing was a deep depression that had settled upon him. He was in a violent spiritual storm.

Who of us has not known the storm, the dark pitch of night blackness, the fury of the elements, the sea of life? Manageable on calm days, providing us—as it did the disciples—with a means for living, but suddenly its wild unpredictability throws us and threatens to destroy us.

Intellectually, we know that no storm could last forever. And intellectually, we know that no storm could blow everywhere at once. The problem is that it is this storm that is blowing where we are. If the disciples had been on land, they could have had shelter and safety, but they were in the storm. While no storm can last forever, the question is, "Can I last longer than the storm? Or will the storm last longer than me?" The storm.

II. The boat

The tense of the Greek means that "it was filling up." A boat is not designed to be out in a storm. It's designed for calm days, and that describes our lives. These incredible situations that are greater than our power or psychological or emotional or spiritual capacity to deal with, seem to be greater than anything we can ever match or contest with. The boat represents our helplessness. The disciples in that boat are doing everything and doing nothing. They are working harder than they've ever worked in their life. They're making every second count. They're bailing out water as fast as they can. The sweat is rolling off of them in the midst of the driving rain. They have

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never worked harder. They have never done more and they have never accomplished less. They are doing everything but doing nothing; because storms are like that. Frantically searching and clawing and crying out and yet nothing is happening.

The disciples are physically strong. The problem is, their strength is trapped inside the boat and the boat is trapped inside the storm. They might say, “If we could just be on land,” as we have said many times in storms, “If I could just be someone else! If I could just be somewhere else.” Our problem is, we’re in the boat. And our cries for help cannot be heard. And if they were heard, nobody could help us.

Mark lets us have the added little detail that in that storm, out on that Lake of Galilee, there were other little boats. Having been on that water as well as other water, I know how easily sound travels. That’s why Jesus often taught at the lakeside, because of the natural amplification. On a calm day, the talk could flow freely back and forth across the water. But in a storm, if a person tries to yell at the pitch of their voice, at the highest volume they could project, the wind would slap their words right back at them. In the storm, one finds himself or herself out of touch, out of communication, that’s why storms are such lonely places.

Marriage with storms are terribly lonely places. Physical illness and tragedy is a terribly lonely place because, while others try to reach out to us, there is within us a loneliness, a solitariness about that experience which only we know. And we can’t get out to others like we do on ordinary days.

Storms isolate. And in a storm, we must learn, as did the disciples, that there is only one to whom we can go who hears us. That brings us to...

III. The Lord

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There's a dash of humor in this story. A dash of realism. Isn't it just like the Lord to be sleeping in our storm? I recognize on the human side this is a marvelous example of Jesus' humanity. He is so exhausted from the stress of His occupation of preaching and healing that He can sleep through that violent turbulence of wind and water. Mark adds this little eyewitness detail of a pillow. His head was resting on a pillow. He was asleep on a pillow in the back of the boat. And, since Peter's influence stands behind the gospel of Mark, probably Peter is the one who got Him up and Peter notes, still in his memory, the pillow He was sleeping on.

So often it seems as if the Lord is doing absolutely nothing about our problem. We cry out in exasperation, "Don't You care, Lord, about what's happening to us? Can't You see what's happening to us?" "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

We look back on this whole incident now and say, "Of course the boat couldn't go down, because the Lord was in the boat and, if the disciples were in the boat and it were all sunk, we'd have never heard the gospel. So it's theologically impossible for them to go down." Theology is a wonderful thing, but when we're going through things emotionally and psychologically and spiritually we're not often thinking theologically.

I don't think that the disciples woke Jesus up to rebuke the storm. I don't think they had made the transference of concept that if You can do miracles in this area You can also do miracles in that area. I think they had struggles in seeing that. And their lack of faith that Jesus indicts them for shows us that when they woke Him up, they really didn't have any faith. I think they woke Him because they were just ticked off that they were doing all this work bailing water and He was sound asleep, snoring, in the back of the boat. "One more hand may make the difference and keep this rickety craft together! Wake up, Jesus! Help us bail water." It's often the case that, when we go to Jesus with our problems, we present Him with a solution of ours that is not His.

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Have you ever given the Lord orders about how to deal with a problem and He's chosen to ignore you? It's terribly frustrating!

The Lord, once He awakens, speaks to the storm, bids it to be at peace, sends out this miracle of communication in which there's a sonar range in His voice where the elements show Him as the Creator who can speak, and His voice is translated in such a way that natural elements obey.

That's power, friends! I can't even get my dog to listen to me!

The winds hear His voice. It would be great if every storm ended that way. They finally wake the Lord up and He speaks and the storm ends. I'm going to throw a monkey wrench into this text.

Based upon the totality of the New Testament, we know that Jesus does not always still the storm. There's more than one storm in the New Testament. Paul, writing in 2 Corinthians 11:25 says, "Three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea." The Lord gave him the equivalent of an E-ride at Disneyland in the days when they had E-rides, instead of stilling the storm in Acts 27, the fourth storm for the Apostle Paul, a wild ride across the Mediterranean where they didn't see sun or stars, but were in a blistering-driven wind and storm. Paul says, "Not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed." There was no supernatural calming of the waters.

I went through the times of imprisonment recently in the Book of Acts and looked, again, at the fact that in imprisonments, there are sometimes miraculous releases and other times there is scourging and other times there is prolonged imprisonment and other times there's even beheading. Not always is there a miracle where the earth shakes and the doors open.

What shall we say then, when we come to the Lord of the storm? We must acknowledge that whether He speaks to our storm and stills it or not, He is still the Lord of the storm and, if He chooses not to still it, He's working out some other purpose.

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Stanley Jones, in his book *Abundant Living*, says this about pain in the midst of our storms of life: “Unless pain is working out to some end, it breaks us by its meaninglessness.” That is, pain could end in dull, fruitless suffering. Or pain could be taken up to the purposes of God and transformed into finer character, greater tenderness, and more usefulness. Each of us can choose for ourselves whether we want the pain to be fruitless or to have purpose. We face our storms. We can choose to decide, in God, whether they’re going to be counting for nothing or whether some wonderful character of our life will be fleshed out and made beautiful in the process.

The Lord always speaks to us in the storm. He says to the disciples, “Where is your faith?” In Mark’s gospel, He additionally asks, “Do you still have no faith?” (4:40, NIV). Faith is trust in Him. The Lord always has a word for us.

Horatio Spafford experienced this when his three children—his girls—were crossing the Atlantic, and there was a storm, and they all went down and were lost. He found later, the Lord speaking to him. “When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll. Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say, ‘It is well, it is well with my soul.’” He found the Lord speaking to him in the storm.

I have never found yet the Christian who, at some point or another in a storm, has not received some promise of the Lord in the Scripture with some assuring word that gives them identity and meaning in the storm. Something books can’t give, something preachers can’t give. But it’s the Holy Spirit that gives us that sense of, “I am with you.”

He challenges the disciples about their lack of faith. I love to tell this story, because this is my favorite text in the Scriptures. In my senior year at Fuller Theological Seminary—Bob and I were both at Fuller a few years ago—I was chosen and had the honor of being the last speaker of the last chapel of the year, the last senior speaker. Dr. Clarence Roddy liked me. He called me

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his “hillbilly preacher” because, in those days, I used to shout a lot. That’s before I found out that people had tender ear membranes. I decided to preach from this text. It was the first time I’d preached from it. I called my sermon “High Winds and Desperate Voices and an Unexpected Word.” The unseen agenda I had for that sermon was that Roddy had made the statement that he had never had anyone ever go to the pulpit with a manuscript, but what he couldn’t tell was that they were using a manuscript. I thought to myself, “I’m going to fake out my homiletics professor and bring a manuscript to the pulpit and see if I can get away with it.” He didn’t know I used it so I got away with it. Isn’t that stupid, the reason why some people preach sermons? I had these words strung together like pearls on a string. Every word was euphonic. It just sort of had a ring to it. There were people actually getting seasick as I preached this sermon. A marvelous piece of prose. When I took my seat, the “Amen” was sung, I got ready for the adulation of the throngs. The faculty was in the first two or three rows. I got the lesson of my life from my New Testament professor. Godly, humble Dr. Everett Harrison. A former missionary to China, author of standard works on the New Testament. He shook my hand and said, “George, that was a fine sermon. You know that’s always been my very favorite part of the Word of God.” I said, “Mine too.” He said, “You know the thing that’s always impressed me about Jesus’ statement about their having no faith and why He rebuked them is, if you remember back when that story begins, He had said to them, ‘Let us go across to the other side.’ What happened was in the middle of the storm, they forgot the Word of Jesus. And when you forget the Word of Jesus you will always be afraid, for faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. If you’re going to have faith in your life, you must listen to the Word of Jesus and keep on listening, even in your storms.” All the air went out of this kid, as I recognized that Dr. Harrison had just told me what the text meant after I had preached on it in flowery words for 25 minutes. I said to

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myself, “If I ever preach on that text again, I’ll never forget that.” The reason why we fail in our faith is we forget the Word of Jesus. “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end...” (Matthew 28:20, KJV). “I will never leave you or forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5). “The plans I have for you are not for evil but for good, to give you a purpose and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11).

When our children were small, we’d take them to Disneyland. Now they can go on their own. I don’t have to do that anymore, folks. There are some things age has blessed you with. I still go about once every other year, just to keep the title of Southern Californian. I don’t really need to go onto Space Mountain anymore. But my favorite ride there has always been Pirates of the Caribbean. When the kids were small—Evangeline about five and George about three—we took George for the first time. Those of you who’ve been on the ride know that you get in this boat, it’s moving along on a track, you go through an place where there’s kind of an open sea area and the pirates are shooting a cannon and the lights are popping out of the water, where the balls are dropping. Then you go into a fiery village where sailors are chasing women and the village is burning down. You come to the area where there’s a drop. The boat is going to go down into a waterfall and there’s going to be a pirate on a keg, holding a gun, ready to shoot you. All these voices screaming at you. As we were going through, we had no sooner got into the whole thing when George started clinging to me like a drowning cat clinging to your body. He was just clawing into me. He wasn’t enjoying that at all. When we came to the waterfall, he was scared spitless and crying.

I thought, “The difference between him and me is knowledge.” He doesn’t understand corporate liability laws. No way is Disneyland going to take a chance on losing people on a water ride. They reduced the risk. OSHA’s been out and has given them a good inspection. They’re safe.

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Not only are we safe, but the boat is on a track. It's not free-floating. George thinks it's free-floating. It's not free-floating, and besides, the waterfall is only a few feet deep. It's not endless like he thought it was. The difference between me and him was knowledge. That's why he was frightened and I wasn't.

But that's the difference in the storm. The boat looks like it's free-floating on the lake. It's not. Paul's wild ride across the Mediterranean looked like the old timey ride at Disneyland. But it wasn't. Moses said it at the end of his life, as he addressed the children of Israel in Deuteronomy 33:27, "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."

There is one who has His hand firmly on our life and we may lose our grip on God, but He never loses His grip on us. He either speaks to the storm and rebukes it, or He will speak to us in the storm and give us power to outlast it.

Closing Prayer

Our Father, we thank You for Your Word. We thank You for the Bible, which tells us, "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior" (Isaiah 43:1-3, NIV). We thank You for that. We remember, Lord, that in the storm, we are afraid. Help us, Lord, in looking at this story to recognize that the most fundamental fear in that story was not the fear of the storm, but the fear of You when You got done dealing with the storm. There are moments now when we're in Your presence where we tremble at Your awesome power. That's not to be compared to that day when we stand before You and tremble anew in awesome wonderment at the power that raised Christ from the dead and raises us up as well. You're greater than the

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storm, Lord. We're not lost in the storm. You're with us in the storm. You're committed to our boat. If we go down, You go down. You're not going down. You'll bring us through. You'll either quiet the winds and the waves or You will work it out for a better glory. We trust You, Lord. That's what faith is all about. Trusting You. Leaning upon You. Hearing Your Word in the storm. Recognizing the times when we feel like we're taking a wild free fall. We're not free falling at all. We're supported by You. In You we live and move and have our being. We thank You for that. We praise You, that You are our refuge and underneath us are Your arms, Your everlasting arms. We thank You. Bless those who go through the storm here today. Bless them, encourage them, help them, love them. In the name of the Lord. Amen.