

The first line of the old gospel hymn  
"Jesus, Lover of My Soul,"  
written by Charles Wesley, says,  
"Jesus, lover of my soul,  
let me to Thy bosom fly.  
While the nearer waters roll,  
while the tempest still is high:  
Hide me, O my Savior, hide,  
till the storm of life is past.  
Safe into the haven guide;  
O receive my soul at last."

Wesley envisioned our journey through life  
as a voyage on a ship that would be  
unsuccessful without Jesus on board.  
In Job 9, the biblical character Job  
compared the passing of life to floating  
on a very swift boat, for he said,  
"And my days are [swift] . . .  
they pass by like skiffs of reed."

It is not at all surprising that the biblical authors,  
as inhabitants of the Mediterranean world  
including the Sea of Galilee,  
would at many times use sea imagery.  
Water was very powerful to the Hebrews and very scary.

Today's text is about Jesus walking on the water  
and it appears in three of the gospels  
John, Mark and Matthew.

This week I mainly want to focus  
on John and Mark' account.  
But before we get to the water we have  
to understand what has just happened  
that leads them to getting into  
the boat in the first place.

The appetite of the crowd from the  
Feeding of the 5,000 in John's gospel  
was to make Jesus a bread king.

We ended last week's scripture with-  
the people who saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did  
began to say Surely this is the Prophet  
who is to come into the world.

The next verse tells us that they really didn't understand who he was.  
Jesus knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force,  
withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

The event of the feeding of the five thousand and dealing with the temptations of the people to make him their earthly king wore him out both emotionally and physically.

Jesus had retreated to the hills around the Sea of Galilee to pray,  
to reconnect with the Spirit and power and will of God.

Instead of giving praise and glory to God for this amazing act of providence,  
the people try to seize Jesus and make him their king.  
They missed the message  
but want to exalt the messenger.  
That's not what Jesus had in mind.

That's why in Mark this passage begins with the words, "Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd.  
After leaving them,  
he went up on a mountainside to pray."

Jesus had no intent on being crowned king.  
His desire was to awaken the people to the power of the living God.  
So Jesus has just performed a miracle that has backfired on him.  
He needs a moment alone to refocus his mind on God's will,  
not the people's praise.  
He needs to refresh his Spirit.  
So he goes up on the mountain to pray.

It is not clear in John's version,  
but it appears the disciples had become impatient that he had not yet arrived for their departure, so they went on ahead and got in the boat and left without him.

Maybe they should have learned  
from Jesus' example and gotten down  
on their knees in prayer,  
perhaps they thought they knew  
better than Jesus.

You see, just like the five thousand,  
they too had the misconception that Jesus  
was to be a reigning earthly king.

As we read John, we might come away  
with the impression that the disciples of Jesus  
abandoned Him and left Him stranded.  
Mark's version though gives us a  
different reason why they left.

Mark 6:45 makes it clear that the disciples  
were operating under the instructions of Jesus.  
He sent them away.  
He made them go.  
Jesus told His disciples to do  
something and they did it.

The word for "made" in the Greek means,  
"to necessitate; to constrain, or to compel."  
What that means is that getting into that boat  
and crossing the Sea of Galilee became  
a necessary thing for them to do because  
He was urging them, compelling them,  
and persuading them to do so.

The idea here is that they didn't  
want to leave without Him,  
but He "compelled" them to do so.  
This is significant.

There are times in our lives when we  
may feel that God is compelling us to go somewhere  
or do something or say something  
and we have the feeling that God isn't going  
to be with us in it.

We feel as if God is abandoning us  
to the situation.  
Many times, the primary reason we feel that way  
is that what He is asking us to do

is risky, scary or it doesn't seem  
to make sense to our way of thinking.

But Jesus makes them go across without Him.  
My question here would be,  
Lord if you send us across,  
how are you going to get across?  
What do you think you're going to do?  
Walk on water?

They were doing what Jesus told them to do  
in the right place and at the right time  
and they still found themselves in the middle of a storm.  
Are you in a storm right now?  
You may be thinking to yourself,  
"Lord, what did I do to deserve this?"

It may be that you have done nothing wrong.  
It is possible to be completely obedient to the Lord  
and to still find yourself in the middle of a storm.  
I want you to hear that.  
The Bible says the rain falls on  
the just and unjust alike.

Just because we are Christians is not  
a guarantee that we will not have storms  
in our lives and that it will be all clear sailing  
even the disciples, those closest to Jesus  
have to endure the storm.

So they left Jesus back on shore.  
And to make matters worse,  
John's gospel tells us that they had taken the only boat.  
The disciples couldn't see him and  
they had no idea that he is watching over them  
but there is something else that they forgot.

No it wasn't Jesus,  
it was instead something that was  
in the boat with them that should  
have comforted the disciples.

There were 12 baskets of leftovers  
which bore mute testimony to the power  
and the compassion of God.  
When they looked at those 12 baskets,

they should have realized that the God who provided for the needs of the multitudes would not fail to provide for them in the midst of this storm.

Remember they didn't just scrape by or have a little more.  
They had an abundance of bread.  
We are guilty of the same thing.  
We have been blessed by the Lord in an abundant way.  
But when the storm comes, we forget.

That is why we are instructed to remind one another.  
The world says, "Drink and forget your troubles."  
That is why we have a huge problem with alcohol.  
We as a nation are drinking to escape from something, escape to something.  
Just watch the Corona commercials and see what they are selling.  
Jesus instead says, "Drink and remember."

A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough.  
The Sea of Galilee is 600 feet below sea level and is surrounded on the east and west by mountains and steep valleys.  
These can act as a wind tunnel to direct the cold air rushing down from the heights above, whipping across the lake with heavy winds.  
The disciples had found themselves laboring under a strong wind.

Our translation tells us that they "rowed," but this term need not conjure up images of oars.  
The point is not so much the method of locomotion, but the fact that it involved heavy toil on the part of the disciples.  
They were straining.

And Mark tells us that as Jesus was praying he glances down at the Sea of Galilee.  
A violent storm is moving in.  
Jesus' friends could be in trouble.  
How does he respond?

Scholars tell us that the author

of the Gospel of Mark is  
a man who respects action.  
Some theologians believe that Mark  
was writing to the persecuted Roman Church.  
These people needed words of hope,  
and they needed them now!

In his short Gospel,  
he uses words like “immediately,”  
“at once,” “quickly,” and “without delay” 47 times.  
So what do we expect him to record in this story?  
We expect him to write that  
Jesus IMMEDIATELY came to the rescue.  
Cue the trumpets.  
It’s hero time!

But Mark doesn’t tell us that  
Jesus reacted immediately.  
In fact, Mark writes that “When evening came,  
the boat was in the middle of the lake,  
and (Jesus) was alone on land.  
He saw the disciples straining at the oars,  
because the wind was against them.  
About the fourth watch of the night he went out to them . . .”

That’s interesting.  
The first watch of the night was from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.  
The second watch covered 9- midnight.  
The third watch lasted from midnight to 3:00 a.m.  
And the fourth watch was from 3:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m.  
So the storm started sometime in the night.

But Mark is very careful to record that Jesus  
responded in the fourth watch,  
the wee hours of the morning.  
Could this mean that Jesus knew  
his friends were in trouble,  
but he didn’t respond right away?

From his vantage point on the mountain,  
he could see them straining against the oars.  
He could hear the wind shrieking,  
the waves slapping the sides of the boat,  
the lightning crackling on the surface of the lake.  
He saw his friends in trouble.  
Why did he wait to help them?

Have you ever experienced the absence of God?  
That's an uncomfortable question.  
If we're not careful, we might start  
getting honest with each other.  
We might break through our shiny smiles  
and vigorous handshakes and prosperous appearances.  
We might revisit an old wound  
we thought we'd kept safely hidden from view.

Night time is the perfect time to experience,  
like the disciples did,  
that feeling of "straining at the oars."  
In the darkness and in the quiet,  
our anxieties and inner struggles  
take on a life of their own.

And just as we were taught to do,  
we pray and read our Scriptures and  
call our friends for support.  
Many times, we find comfort, strength, and wisdom.  
But sometimes . . . sometimes  
we feel nothing. Emptiness.  
No help. No comfort.

The heavens do not break open and  
the cavalry doesn't ride into town.  
What's wrong with this picture?  
Where is God when the storm strikes your house?  
What do you do when you are alone  
in the midst of the storm?

You have to know that Jesus is aware of  
what you are going through even in the storm.  
Even though look as you might, you can't see Him.  
And we all go through storms where  
it seems God is not in it,  
and cannot be reached.

It reminds me of the words of Job.  
See if this strikes a chord in you those times  
you felt God was absent.

"Look, I go forward, but He is not there,  
And backward, but I cannot perceive Him;  
When He works on the left hand, I cannot behold Him;  
When He turns to the right hand, I cannot see Him.

Have you ever felt that way?  
Have you ever felt that God was nowhere  
to be found when you needed Him the most?  
What do we do when that happens?  
What was Jobs response to this dilemma?

Job says no matter which way I turn,  
God is absent but the next thing Job says is  
But He knows the way that I take;  
and When He has tested me,  
I shall come forth as gold.

In the midst of these winds and the cold  
and the tired night, the disciples see  
Jesus walking on the water.  
When they had rowed about three  
or three and half miles,  
they saw Jesus approaching the boat  
walking on the water, and they were terrified.  
Mark add when they saw him  
they thought he was a ghost.

We all know that Jesus walked on the water.  
Have you ever thought how it would feel  
if you could do the same thing?  
Soon, you will be able to do just that – well, almost.

See, there is a company that is planning  
on building a bridge in the Sea of Galilee, near Capernaum.  
You heard me right;  
they are going to build it 'in' the water.  
They plan on building that bridge  
about 2 inches under the surface,  
so that tourists can walk out on it,  
and have their picture taken so  
it will look like they are walking on water.

I think that is kind of cheesy,  
but I am sure somebody will get rich from it.  
Speaking of making money off  
of Christ's miraculous water walking,  
Mark Twain was accompanied by his wife  
on one of his visits to the Holy Land.  
They were staying in Tiberius on  
the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

It was a moonlit night,  
and the weather was perfect,  
which gave Twain the romantic idea of taking  
his wife for a boat ride on the lake.  
They walked down to the pier,  
and Twain inquired of a man sitting in a rowboat  
how much he would charge  
to row them out on the water.

Twain was dressed in his usual  
white suit, white shoes, and white Texas hat.  
The oarsman, presuming him to be  
a wealthy rancher from the USA, said,  
"Well, I guess about twenty-five dollars."  
Mark Twain thanked him, and,  
as he turned away with his wife on his arm,  
he was heard to exclaim,  
"Now I know why Jesus walked!"

He was walking on the water.  
Why were they afraid?  
Have you ever noticed the number of times  
Jesus is telling the disciples not to be afraid.  
It seems that the disciples are  
always either scared or asleep.  
We all know fear is a powerful emotion.

Fear can captivate us in a way  
that no other emotion can.  
For example, Did you know that  
The African impala can jump to a height  
of over 10 feet and cover a distance of  
more than 30 feet straight ahead.

Yet these magnificent creatures can be kept  
in an enclosure in any zoo with a 3-foot wall.  
Why? Because the animals will not jump  
if they cannot see where their feet will land.

We can all relate to the impala.  
There have been times when instead  
of stepping out in faith, we remained rigid  
because we couldn't see where  
that step would lead.

Faith is the ability to trust

what we cannot see, and with faith  
we are freed from the flimsy enclosures  
of life that only fear allows to entrap us.

Sometimes it is true that we have nothing  
to fear but fear itself  
because fear is the absence of faith.

And faith is not "believing in spite of the evidence."  
Faith is obeying in spite of the consequence.  
Faith says, "I will do what the Lord says,  
even though it means a storm is headed my way.  
Even though it means there will  
be difficulties, obstacles,  
and challenges, even though it may  
be brutal and difficult, even though I must struggle,  
I will obey."

Struggles stretch us and help us  
to move further in our Christian experience.  
When they first manufactured golf balls,  
they made the covers smooth.  
Then they discovered that after a ball  
had been roughed up you could  
get more distance out of it.  
So they started manufacturing  
them with dimpled covers.

So it is with life; it takes some rough spots  
to make us go the farthest and the result is  
He will help us grow.  
How do you walk on water?  
Well one answer is if you want to walk on water  
you have to make sure Jesus is in your boat.

But He said to them,  
"It is I; do not be afraid."  
Mark adds Take Courage!  
Then they were willing to take him into the boat.  
The wind died down and they  
were completely amazed.

In order to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ  
we have to let him in the boat of our lives.  
And if we wish to arrive safely at God's  
intended destination for our lives

then we need to receive Jesus our Captain, into the boat.

If we refuse to listen to the Captain  
then we will miss out on his great expertise  
that we need in order to navigate  
through the storms and grow in our faith.  
We are too inexperienced to do it on our own,  
so it is vital that we learn to accept the authority  
of the real Captain and stop trying to play captain ourselves.

Author Stephen Covey captured  
a great truth about authority.  
While on maneuvers,  
a battleship lookout noted a light  
in the dark, foggy night.  
After noting the light's coordinates,  
the captain recognized that his ship  
was on a collision course with the other vessel.  
The captain instructed his crew,  
"Signal the ship: We are on a collision course,  
advise you to change course 20 degrees."

The return signal countered,  
"Advisable for you to change course 20 degrees."  
The captain signaled, "I'm a captain, change course 20 degrees."  
The response was, "I'm a seaman second class,  
you'd better change course 20 degrees."

By this time the captain was furious.  
His signal officer ordered,  
"I'm a battleship. Change course 20 degrees."  
The reply came back: "I'm a lighthouse.  
You make the call."

We need to stop pretending to be the captain  
and stop trying to take control of the boat,  
and we need to listen to the Greater Authority  
if we wish for our lives to go  
smoothly and not crash and sink.

We read in verse 21 in John's version  
that when the disciples received Jesus into the boat  
that they immediately arrived at the shore line  
of the place where they were going.

I think some of us don't really

have the faith to believe that God  
will provide for and watch over us in this life.  
We take control of the boat  
and try to go places we weren't meant to go.

We then end up lost at sea going to and fro,  
searching aimlessly for God's will for our lives,  
when we could know God's will  
by simply inviting the Captain,  
or Jesus Christ, into the boat.

If we invite him in then we will  
immediately arrive at our destination.  
And he will guide us to the next step in our journey.

I hope you have been asking during this sermon ,  
"Who's piloting my ship?  
Am I at the helm, or is God?"

In 1871 Edward Hopper wrote a poem  
that revealed who was in charge of his life,  
and from this poem we find some words  
that we should take to heart.

He wrote, Jesus, Savior, pilot me  
Over life's tempestuous sea;  
Unknown waves before me roll,  
Hiding rock and treacherous shoal;  
Chart and compass come from thee:  
Jesus, Savior, pilot me.  
Have you let Jesus into your boat?

Are you studying, praying, serving  
more to be a disciple  
or are you still just an innocent bystander? Amen.