

Storm at Sea

Matthew 14:22-33"

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This is the God's word as I read it to you from the Gospel of Matthew. If you're a visitor here, we're in a series on moments, events, scenes from the life of Christ, the narratives, the stories of the life of Christ. And this is the walking on water passage -- Matthew 14:22

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 dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside himself to pray, and 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, (fourth watch starts at 3 a.m) Jesus went out to them walking on the lake. And when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. It's a ghost, they said, and they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus 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 began to sink and he cried out, Lord, save me. Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. You have little faith, he said. Why did you doubt? 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.

Lord give us ears to hear what your spirit is saying to us today? Please be seated.

This is a walk, a little hike, a little jaunt Peter took on the waves there. Many hikes in human history, personal history. I love to think about the Appalachian Trail, which starts not all that far from here and ends at northern Maine. You know that tens of thousands of people try to cover the entire distance, which is 2243 or 93. I forget, miles but over 2200 miles. People try to hike the entire trail, hot at one end, cold at the other. Wet socks? Wet shoes? Wet shirts? Mice. Gnats. Lice. Loneliness. Hunger. Sleep. Rain. What do you call somebody who covers 500, 600, 700 miles and doesn't go all 22 miles? You call that person a quitter or do you call them a hiker? Some remarkable people have hiked the Appalachian Trail i.e. A blind man, a woman who is 80 years old, all 2200 miles, a man who was £350 when he started and 297 at the end. So amazing. People have finished and some amazing people have not finished, what do you call them? This is a remarkable hike Peter takes in Matthew 14. What do you call Peter? Do you call him a hiker? Man, He did a great thing. Or do you call him a failure because he sank into the waves? This is a test in the way we read the Bible, because it's a great temptation to read the Bible in a moralistic sense, looking at people and examining people to set up the question, did they do what was right or did they do what was wrong?

Let's evaluate Peter now. The Bible actually does command evaluation in various places. For example, in Hebrews 11, we have a sort of a recounting of the heroes of the faith, and it tells of the great things they did. Although the main thing they did was believe in God. And then over in I Corinthians 10, it tells the Corinthian church they should learn lessons from the mistakes of the Israelites in the wilderness. Although the main problem they had was not little acts of immorality, the main problem was that they lived by their desires and they worshiped. That is, they lived according to their desires instead of living

according to faith. Now, what I want to say to you today is that although we're very inclined to study, Matthew 14 is a story about Peter really it's essentially a story about Jesus who mastered the wind in the waves and saves his people. This story, may I say, is one of the most beloved, one of the most misused, abused question, doubted, memorized stories in the entire Bible. Some people, very pious people, say things like, you know, you need to identify your boat and step out, step out of your boat with God. It's kind of a me and Jesus reading of the Bible. It's just about me and Jesus today. And how shall I step out of the boat? Or It's a cautionary tale about pride and arrogance and thinking you can do great things for God because you're just you're just a poor and weak sinner. Why would you think you could do great things for God? Skeptics? And if you're a skeptic, we're really glad you're here. I love it when skeptics come. Everybody's really welcome to talk to me after church. But I specially want to talk to skeptics and doubters, but hard core skeptics - and I hope you're not one of those. If you hear hardcore skeptics say this never happened, this can't be. Nobody walks on water. We're scientific people. We can't believe in people walking on waves. Jesus, you know, he was smart. He found a sandbar. And so he was walking on a sandbar. And that's what the disciples thought. But the biggest danger is to make the most for us, the most common danger for people who come to church week by week is to read the story ballistically as a story about Peter. And if people read the story more realistically, what's interesting is that they come to opposite conclusions. Some people say, you know, Peter was great and bold and he did great things for God and you should do great things for God. Where to go, Peter? We should be like Peter and other people say Peter was a proud and presumptuous fool with a preposterous plan.

Don't be like Peter. I just want to tell you something. When people interpret the Bible in opposite directions, they read the same passage in two different ways. There's something wrong with the whole hypothesis, and the hypothesis is this is mostly both sides think. This is mostly a story about Peter, and it's not. It's mostly a story about Jesus. The end of the story tells us, truly, you are the Son of God and the entire the entire account leads us in that direction to live not for moral principles, but to live under and for and with the Lord Jesus. Now, I want to give you the context for a minute. In Matthew 14, we have several things happening simultaneously.

We have the crowds who are enthralled with Jesus. As usual. They love him in Matthew 14, and they were falling around so much to hear him and to receive miracles that they actually followed until they ran out of food. And after three days, not just a few people, but 15,000 people were out of food. Now I know you think it says the feeding of 5000, 5000 males it says, which means probably 5000 females, women and a lot of children, let's say 5000 more the next 15,000. And Jesus fed them. And the crowds were pleased. We'll get to that in a minute. So there's crowds and then there's the Pharisees, Sadducees and the scribes, and they're kind of down on Jesus as usual, a mixture of disapproval of his way of life and envy. And then we have the disciples who are sticking with Jesus. Way to go. But making progress slowly. You know, Peter's called a man of little faith. The original just is one word, little faith. You're a little faith. And in this scene, Jesus heals. Crowds follow feet 15,000 and the people don't respond to it properly. Now, if I read through Matthew 14, you would notice at the end of the feeding the 5000, there's no comment by the crowds. They don't say praise God. They don't say thank you, Jesus. They don't say, Who is this? Is this a prophet? They say nothing. They simply eat the food and move on a little bit like teenagers who come into your house, you know, a bunch of are you laughing -- teenagers who come into your house and teenagers are always hungry.

That's the way God made them. And so they see a refrigerator door and they open it and they close it when there's nothing left and they don't even know they've done it. They just eat and move on to the

next house that has a big refrigerator and they don't say thank you because they don't even know what they did. They just filled that aching void in their in their body. And that's kind of like the crowd they just said that was great food over in John 6. It says the same thing in a very different way. It says some of the people wanted to make Jesus King by force because they were so enthralled with him making bread. Make us more bread they said.

Now, how many of you have dogs? Can I just ask quickly, do you have a dog or have had a dog or love dogs with great majority. Very good. Now, most people like to evaluate the intelligence of their dogs and they say their dog is smarter. I'll give you two tests as to whether your dog is smart.

Here goes -- test number one. Take your dog, throw a blanket on it. If it never gets out from under the blanket, you do not have a smart dog but if it gets out within 5 seconds or less, you probably have a smart dog. That's one test. Second test is throw a ball or something, hide something, whatever and point for your dog. And if your dog stares at the finger, it never stops staring at your finger. It might not be a smart dog, but actually very few dogs can follow the finger and realize that the master's pointing at that object over there may be one of the five or one of the ten dogs can do that. Those are intelligent dogs.

Now, I'm not actually talking about dogs. I'm talking about people because when Jesus performed his miracles, the people stared at the finger -- bread. We like the bread. Jesus said, No, no, no, it's pointing somewhere. It's a sign. I am the bread of life. So the people were having a hard time comprehending the point of the miracles. Miracles are signs. Now this problem with the crowd led Jesus. We don't know exactly why. He simply decided he needed to go off and pray. He often prayed by himself even for hours, and he prayed at length and he also perhaps wanted to get the disciples away from the malignant influence of the crowd and said, You cross over to this side of the Sea of Galilee and I'll catch up with you later.

And so they begin to go over. And John, it says, they'd gone about two miles. It says fourth watch the night. Fourth watch is 6 a.m.. Looks like Jesus dismissed them around sunset. So in 9 hours they'd gone about two miles. That's not very good. But you may think, well, you know, I know we know that four the disciples are fishermen and they're used to the Sea of Galilee. It's not a problem. They're pros. They can handle it. It also says over in Mark, that they were straining at the oars. It says they were tormented by the waves in Mark. So let's give the disciples marks for persistence. Jesus said, cross the sea. They're going to cross the sea if they possibly can. But they've been at it for 9 hours minimum, maybe ten, maybe even 11. And the labor made them tired. The hour made them weary, the storm frightened them. And then they see a figure, a dimly lit figure walking on the waves toward them. And it says they were terrified and cried out to the ghost. That ghost did not exist, but they thought it was a ghost. That was their thought, because in the ancient world, ghosts are signs of impending doom. They think we're going to die. And. And here comes this figure. It's not biblical teaching. It's in their mind, popular culture of the time. We might say, here comes this figure, and he's going to drag us off to Hades. And Jesus says, take courage as it is. I take courage. It is. Don't be afraid. Now, you grammarians - You're going to be very happy that it says it is. I know it's me, but I want to talk about that. It is. I'll. But the first thing I want to tell you is in the original, the words our *ego aime* short words. And they mean I am. I am Jesus as I am. You may say, Wait a minute.

I've heard that before. Yes, you have. We can talk about it in a second. But it's one of those statements. You can have two meanings, because today when we knock on somebody's door and you know, they're going to say, who is it? What do we say when we knock on the door of a friend? They say, Who's there?

And we say, It's me, it's me. Now, that's a very short sound. It's me. And when you say it's me, what you're saying is you will recognize me by this tiny little locution. It's me. That's a really short sound, but just a tiny little bit of my voice. You knew my voice so well that you will know that it is I your friend - in those days when you knocked on the door and somebody said, Who is it? You said, *ego aime*, I am. It's me. But it's also true that I am means I am. And after all, Jesus is walking on waves, which is kind of a hint that something's up because God alone was. We know from the Psalms masters the wind in the waves. In one, Simon says, God walks on the storms. So we have the idea that Jesus is God. And then and then Jesus says, I am, I am. That's God's name. I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I am El Shaddai, the mighty one that protects you and cares for you. I am the one who blots out your sins so says Isaiah. Jesus says I am the way, the truth and the life. I am the door. And some would say the climax is when he says before Abraham was I am. So we have Jesus identifying himself as the living God and also saying, Hey guys, relax, it's me. He's doing both at once. Now, teacher sometimes say, as Jesus came to his disciples on the storm. So He comes to us on the storm today. This is one of those statements that's true, but not quite the perfect emphasis. It's true that the Lord cares for us in our storms. The Bible says God says, I will never leave you, I will never forsake. He says, I'm with you always. So it's true that the Lord comes to us in our distress, but it's very important that we realize that before we talk about Jesus and me, we've got to state that this is a real event that actually happened in history before, before we transform it into a story about me and Jesus, let's just make sure we're affirming that Jesus is the living God who walked on a storm that threw water in their faces and buffeted a boat and the wind was firing around and the sail cloth was either tattering or pulled down and their clothes were wet. It was a real storm. Jesus was walking on water in a real storm before. It's an inspiring story. It's a true story. It's only inspiring if it's true. It's a true story. And Jesus does say I am God and he does say I am the God who is with you 12 and He does say He is the God who is with us today. We read the verse earlier about trouble in this world. You will have trouble. We read that at the beginning of the service, but it also says take heart. I have overcome the world and it also says I will never leave you nor forsake you in your trouble.

Let's just pause and think about the times and we're afraid for a second. Have you ever been involved in sports and you land awkwardly and you hear a crunching sound and you think, that's not good? My leg, my ankle, my hand, my shoulder does not usually make crunching and snapping sounds. And suddenly you're afraid. Then you go to the doctor. Maybe you go to the doctor for another reason and the doctor is looking at you and he doesn't say, it's going to be fine. He says, let's look at that a little more closely. You think I don't want you to say that? I want you to say happy things like you're going to be fine. But he says instead, something like, we may need to run a few tests and then were terrified. Suddenly there are times when we're afraid.

Speaking of hiking, most years, my family hikes in the Rockies. Big Rocky Mountains. And things happen when you get up high. The lightning is supposed to start striking around 11, but the lightning doesn't always read the bulletin on that. Sometimes it starts at 1020 and sometimes, you know, you're way above the tree line and the lightning is hitting and sometimes you're way above the tree line. You see a weird cloud, its colors aren't quite right. And then you realize, that's a sleet and hail cloud and we're way above the tree line and you're frightened. What are we going to do? And then as you're running down, you see a fork and you don't remember this fork and it's not well marked. And you're frightened, you're terrified.

Psalms, tell us to cast our cares upon the Lord. Psalms, tell us that the Lord catches our tears in a bottle when we're terrified. An interesting thing that happens in this passage, and often happens in life, is that the Lord does not deliver the Apostles right away. Right? He came in fourth watch, three or four or five in the morning. He could have come at one, he could have come at midnight, he could have come at 11. But he chose to come later, which is the way it often goes in a crisis, isn't it? You know, you're looking for a job. You know, you have the skill set and why am I not getting a job? Just takes longer than you think. And when you're sick, you think, I know I'm going to get better, but why am I getting better so slowly? Or maybe somebody you love is not getting better. You think? I think, Lord, why? Why not? Why aren't you coming? Now, a very strange thing comes from the gospel of Luke. Luke says they were terrified because they had not understood about the loaves.

I remember the first time I read that as a Christian, I thought, What? They were terrified because they had not understood about the loaves. You would think they'd be terrified because the storm was about to make their boat drown. They were about to go down. No, they're terrified because they didn't understand about the loaves. And I was thinking as a new Christian, what loaves? What are you talking about? Who's supposed to think about loaves of bread while their boat is about to go down in a storm? The answer is the disciples. Because Jesus had just taken five loaves of bread and two fish and fed 15,000 people earlier. Not that day, but the day before and they're supposed to remember. They're supposed to think if Jesus could feed 15,000 people from five loaves and two fish, he can take care of us because we're his disciples. Now, this, of course, is a lesson for you, too. You should understand about the loaves because God doesn't change. So if God can feed a multitude with five loaves and two fish, then He can take care of you and your distress.

We're supposed to meditate on what God says because God doesn't change. He's the faithful covenant. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. His ways or his ways. And if you think, well, that doesn't work for me, it should. But if it doesn't work for you, then I still say at least think about other times the Lord came through for you when he answered a prayer or delivered you in a remarkable way. Think about that. Instead of becoming terrified in a crisis, I'm not putting the crisis down, having no job, being terribly ill, being caught in some crisis. There are difficult things, but we're supposed to stay calm if we understand about the loaves. It's hard. We get excited.

For some reason, I was thinking about calming down and I remembered because I have, you know, grandchildren are young. I remembered how babies cry and they get so worked up that even after they're calmed down ten or 15 minutes later, you may be holding that baby. They'll still be sulking, You know that sound? That's the sound of I was crying 20 minutes ago and I and my breathing was so far off, it hasn't quite come back into rhythm yet. That's how upset babies get. Of course we get upset, too. We don't show it the same way. We should understand about the loaves because the Lord promises, I will never leave you and I will never forsake you. Well, that's part one of the story.

Part two -- Peter says, great, I'm so glad you've come. And Jesus, this is what he says. It's incredible if it's you, bid me to come to you on the water. What do you mean? If it's you? I'd like to say, can you just guarantee it you for a second instead of saying if it's you? But what he said is if it's you bid me or command me to come to you.

Now, this little spot here I learned today is called the boat deck by a lot of people. I don't know why, but I'm going to make use of it. So people know what boats were like in Jesus day. They know that they were actually not tiny little dinghies, but the boats fishermen would use like the apostles would use to catch a

lot of fish would be about this high from here down to they're above the water now, if I were a younger man and I don't know, I'm not. So leave it at that. If I were a younger man, I might hop down, except the camera would lose me. It'd be a big problem. So just imagine Peter getting down off the boat into surging waves in a mighty storm at four in the morning. He says, I want to do it. And Jesus says, Come just quickly. Remember, people sometimes criticize Peter for his preposterously presumptuous plan. The Lord does not criticize us when we do great things for God. He just doesn't -- don't criticize Peter. Jesus said, come. So he's supposed to come. Now, it's also true that once he comes, he gets to Jesus close enough that Jesus can grab by the hand as He sinks. And so we think, well, there it is, Peter's weak. Peter's foolish. And I say to you, but the story is not fundamentally about Peter. The story's not telling us don't vacillate or doubt the way Peter did. The story tells us that. But that's the presupposition, not the point. The point is not Peter doubted. The point is not Peter failed. The point is that Jesus never fails. Not that Peter took his eyes off Jesus. The point is that Jesus didn't take his eyes off Peter. We fail the Lord and He doesn't fail us. That's the point. The Lord does not fail us. Even more, doesn't hesitate, even move, vacillate, even we falter. The Lord keeps his eyes on the lilies, on the birds. He keeps his eyes on us. Humans waver and vacillate. That's not the point. That's the context. That's background information. The point is God never fails. Jesus never fails his people. He keeps his eyes on us when we take our eyes off him. And so Peter cries out. He's terrified. The Lord saves him. Now, if you've read the Bible and I know one of the Sunday school classes studied this today, if you know this, there are two stories about storms at sea in the first one, and the second one have some pretty strong similarities and not identical.

There were storms on the Sea of Galilee. Maybe I'll tell you about that another day. But in the first one, Jesus was asleep. And the disciples are so concerned that they think they may drown and they wake Jesus up and they say, Lord, we're perishing. Why? I just thought you'd like to know. I just thought you'd like to die wide awake. On the other hand, they do say save us, we're dying. But you can save us as you wish. And at the end of that one, Jesus says, why are you frightened? Men of little faith? Same word, little faith, little faith ones. And they say, what kind of man is this at the end this time, little faith and Jesus at the end hears them say, Truly, you're the son of God.

They're making some progress. Lord masters the storm on Earth on both occasions. Now, Peter is a good (by which I mean typical) representative of disciples, because we have faith and we doubt. Like Peter, he had enough faith to get out of the boat, not enough faith to keep his eyes on Jesus. So he succeeded and he failed. He trusted Jesus enough to step out of the boat, but not enough to trust him fully. Again, the point is not Peter.

Sticking with the theme of hikes three times in one day, sticking with the theme of hikes, my wife comes on a number of the hikes in the Rockies in Colorado with us. Not the really big ones, but still a lot of hikes in one year. We're taking a hike on a place called Chihuahua Gulch. Great hike. And the water is higher than usual and we usually could cross just so here. Not too hard. But this year, this year, the water is much higher than usual. And in the little bridge, a generous term for what it was, but the bridge was underwater. And so we had to find a Ford and cross it. The water was pretty strong, very cold. And there's a cascade right over here. And my son's in law and I said, we're going to cross here and the water's coming up to about here and it's coming cold and hard. And my wife said, I don't want to cross. And we said, of course you don't want to cross it. Hop on my back. She said, well, I'm not sure about that. Yeah, I was 50 years old. I thought I was in pretty good shape, but she wasn't quite sure but she got in my back. It was fine. It took about 8 seconds to cross. She had imperfect faith in me, but it didn't matter. She climbed on my back. That's all that mattered. It's not the quality of your faith. The question is

not is my faith perfect? Do I have total trust? No. Peter had a little faith. Not perfect faith. He had a little faith. Little enough that Jesus had to work with him, but enough that Jesus had something to work with. You don't need perfect faith. You need some faith. The question is not how much faith do you have? The question is in whom do you put your faith? Whom do you trust? And if you have a little faith and flawed faith and imperfect faith and doubting faith and partial faith and your trust in Jesus is all powerful and all good and divine and loves you, then good enough.

It's not about our moral. The Christian faith is not about our moral performance and how well we did in the last 20 minutes. The thrust of the Christian faith is in whom do you trust? Answer Truly, you're the Son of God. That's what the passage is teaching us. Now, of course, there's a man. We'll talk about him in a few weeks, a month or so who says I believe helped man believe. That is a prayer Jesus can work with. Total unbelief is a different matter. Imperfect faith, brothers and sisters, if your faith is imperfect and you trust in Jesus, you're in good shape. Don't despair. Again, we want to read the Bible. I'm telling you, don't read the Bible. More or less. We don't read the Bible asking the question, How is Peter doing? Simple illustration. If you've been here a long time, a lot of Bible studies. You went to a Christian school, your parents characterized you. Any of the above. You probably know the story of Abraham and his near sacrifice of Isaac. Right. And if you ask a number of people who've gone to church, what's the point of the story of Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac? Many people will say we should obey God even when it's hard. We should obey God, even when we can't see why he gives a command. Those are both true statements, but there's a back half. They're not the main point. The main point which is stated for times in Genesis 22, is the Lord will provide because we know the Lord will provide, we can obey difficult commands, not obey difficult commands. That's moralism. Faith says the Lord provides through Christ in Christ. Therefore, we can make it through a crisis. Therefore, we can hit a difficult command. We're God centered and we're Christ centered here.

Now, to apply this to ourselves, you might ask questions like, when do I cry out? Well, I mentioned some. You don't have a job, you're sick, you're in pain. Your loved one is in pain. There are times when we cry out, pain goes on and on. We're uncertain of the diagnosis. We're uncertain if we will recover. I cry out under time pressure. I'm speaking personally. Here's the thing I hate the most. I answered ten emails. And while I answer the ten emails, 14 more come in. I cry out. All I do is answer emails. And after doing nothing but answer emails, I've got more emails than when I started. I cry out. We cry when we try to fix things and we try to fix things for people that won't be fixed. Like it's hard. I'm trying to fix my spouse, it's hard, I'm trying to fix my parents, my boss, my workplace, my church, my self.

Not too long ago, I heard the story of a man who had a very prominent position, was doing very well at it. He just quit. He said, I'm exhausted and tired of leading, tired of taking care of people. I'm tired of the stress, of tired of the burden. I'm out top of the game, top of the world, No sin. He just was done. Too many duties, too many bills, too much stress. Let's remember that believers are crying out throughout the world in places that we don't think of. I know that we probably have on our mind the strife in the Middle East today. Can I just remind you, there are a lot of Christians in Iran that God is bringing many to himself in Iran. They cry out in Iran, in Iraq and Sudan, and Egypt and China. People cry out when they're in the middle of self-destructive behavior or when loved ones are in the middle of self-destructive behavior. For example, gambling, which is insanely addictive addiction, is what does addiction. It's when the pain exceeds any pleasure you ever had for a long time.

And you can't stop people crying out when they're addicted or when a loved one is addicted. We have many reasons to cry out and we cry out to the Lord who hears our prayers and may not come at once. But he comes. He says, I will never leave you. I'll never forsake you. He cares for us. He has power and he has grace. Chaos and anarchy do not rule this world. The Lord does. We need to keep looking to Jesus in these times. And if we fail and take our eyes off Jesus, Jesus keeps His eyes on us. That's the good news. That's the Gospel. He never takes his eyes off his children. He will never leave you. He will never forsake you. He is the good Lord.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we admit that we are little faiths. We wish we had and maybe some of us do have rich and strong and robust and even almost perfect faith. I'm sure some of us do, but most of us, at least the times, are men and women of little faith. We doubt, we hesitate, we vacillate, we look at the waves. We say it's too much or help us to keep our eyes on you, to trust you, even when we vacillate to believe you are here, you are present, you are working in us, you are perfecting us in the Gospel, or looking to the day when we will be perfect for this. We thank you this we confess this we say in our hearts this we now sing and we pray in Jesus name, Amen.