

In the Midst of the Storm...Calm
Matthew 14:22-33
Sunday, August 9, 2020
Beargrass Christian Church

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. Greetings and good morning!
- B. First, I want to express my deep gratitude to our young people.
 - 1. They helped plan, prepare, and present a profoundly meaningful worship experience on Youth Sunday last week.
 - 2. The message was communicated in so many creative ways and the sermon that Sarah and Lauren proclaimed was powerful.
 - 3. Their words were grounded in their personal experiences.
 - 4. If you haven't watched it yet, please go to our website at beargrass.org to check it out.

II. LET'S TURN OUR ATTENTION TO TODAY'S STORY.

- A. The story deals with a basic human emotion or feeling—fear!
 - 1. How many of you are afraid of something?
 - 2. It is a very big small group!
- B. A friend sent me a “Pearls Before Swine” cartoon from last week.
 - 1. Pig is making a list: “My Daily Worries Broken Down By Percentages.”
 - 2. “Worries about things that have happened—40%.”
 - 3. “Worries about things that will happen—30%.”
 - 4. “Worries about things that my happen—29%.”
 - 5. “Not worrying and thereby worrying that I am letting my guard down—1%.”
 - 6. Rat says: “Fun day!”
 - 7. Pig says: “I was worried that you would say that.”
- C. Most of us fear something—and we have long names for fears.
 - 1. One of the most common fears is “agoraphobia.”
 - 2. The word comes from the Greek language.
 - 3. Several years ago, Ellen and I stood atop the Acropolis in Athens near the place where the Apostle Paul preached.
 - 4. We saw the remains of the “agora”—the shopping/market area.
 - 5. So, if you have agoraphobia, like millions of people do, you are afraid of large, open areas—malls, airports, crowds.
 - 6. Some folks have it so badly that they don't leave their homes.
 - 7. And if you have it...you are loving this pandemic!
- D. But it is just one of countless other fears or phobias.
 - 1. We all have things about which we worry—and I confess that I intentionally try NOT to keep up with the news at times.
 - 2. The world seems to be getting scarier all the time—you never know what horribly terrifying thing will happen next.
 - 3. And sometimes our fears get the best of us—or worst of us.
 - 4. Most of us have some pretty good stories of our own to tell.
- E. Like some of you, we were not able to take our family vacation this summer—so we have spent some time remembering highlights of past vacations.
 - 1. One that always comes up is the last tram ride our family ever took together.
 - 2. Some years ago, we were in the Great Smoky Mountains.

- a. I convinced the whole Bond bunch to ride “Ober Gatlinburg.”
- b. The tram trip is advertised as the “longest in the country.”
- c. I think trams are terrific, but Ellen despises the thought of dangling far above the ground on a narrow cable.
- d. Yet we ALL had our tolerance tested on our last tram ride.
- 3. As we made our way up the mountain, a sudden storm blew in—lightning flashed, thunder rolled, the wind howled.
- 4. We were packed into the tramcar like sweaty sardines and we heard the radio crackle out a raspy message to the operator.
 - a. They were talking about shutting the tram down!
 - b. That would have meant putting up protective shields in the tramcar and literally “hanging out” until the storm passed!
- 5. Fortunately, we kept moving and rocked our way into the dock—just moments before a torrential downpour hit!
- 6. Now my family has a bad case of tramophobia—trama-trauma.
- F. Sometimes life is like that.
 - 1. Things are rolling along very smoothly and beautifully...
 - 2. Then, in the midst of the calm...a storm rocks our world.
 - 3. It happens to all of us...and unfairly...to some more than others.

III. **AND IT HAPPENS IN TODAY’S STORY.**

- A. In the middle of Matthew 14, the disciples are in danger.
- B. As we recall the movement of the story, we remember that...
 - 1. Jesus goes alone to the mountain to pray after sending his friends ahead on a boat.
 - a. But a storm suddenly hits them—and this is no gentle summer shower.
 - b. Several of the disciples are experienced fishermen.
 - c. If they are scared, this is a serious situation—this is angry water—death-dealing, life-threatening, churning chaos!
 - 2. So, Jesus wades into the water and comes to the rescue.
 - a. The sight of Jesus should be a comfort—but at first, they are terrified—they think they are seeing an unholy ghost!
 - b. Then good ol’ Peter tries to make a deal with Jesus.
 - c. “Jesus! If it’s really you—then let me walk on the water too!”
 - d. And he does—Jesus invites him to join him, and Peter steps in and actually starts walking on the water—this is incredible!
 - 3. But Peter takes his eyes off Jesus, gazes at the waves, and he begins to sink like the rock for which he is named.
 - a. Peter panics and pleads: “Lord, save me!”
 - b. Immediately, Jesus reaches out his hand and saves him.
 - 4. They get in the boat and in the midst of the storm, there is calm.
 - a. And an experience that begins in fear...ends in faith.
 - b. What begins in worry...ends in worship!
- C. Whatever our Gospel lesson is for today, it is a good story.
 - 1. It is full of suspense and tension and power and drama!
 - 2. Some folks flounder around trying to figure it all out.
 - 3. Did Jesus really walk on the water—or did he just know where all of the hidden rocks and reefs were in the Sea of Galilee?

- D. Some of you may recall that Israel's National Parks Authority approved a project to build a bridge in the Sea of Galilee.
 - 1. I did not say over—the bridge was to be built IN the sea.
 - 2. It was to be slightly submerged so tourists would have the illusion that they are walking on the water—just like Jesus!
 - 3. Isn't it sad that people want to take this spectacular story and trivialize it by turning it into a water park attraction?
 - 4. At times, our attempts to make the biblical stories more real and literal sucks the very life and power out of them.
 - 5. Critics of the bridge wonder what's next?
 - a. Fine dining at the "All-U-Can-Eat-Loaves-and-Fishes Deli?"
 - b. Maybe beverages at the "Water-Into-Wine Bar?"
- E. At times it helps to put our questions aside and just savor the story.
 - 1. This is an awesome account of the mystery and majesty of Jesus.
 - 2. The journey takes unexpected twists and turns—and yes, there are surprises and crises and a resolution.
 - 3. But we get a deeper insight into Jesus' identity.
 - 4. The story speaks to us on so many different levels.

IV. WE KNOW ABOUT STORMS IN OUR LIVES.

- A. Haven't we all experienced times in our lives when we seem to be sailing along smoothly—then it HITS us—out of the calm, storms!
 - 1. Your boss tells you that the company is downsizing or rightsizing—the real word related to this story should be "capsizing." Storm.
 - 2. Your spouse comes home late after work and wants to talk. You are told that there is somebody new...a divorce is imminent. Storm.
 - 3. Your child's behavior is different—something has changed. What about the new friends? Drugs are found. Storm.
 - 4. You haven't talked to your parents...and the last time wasn't very good. A sibling calls. One of them has died. Unresolved grief. Storm.
 - 5. You haven't been feeling good. You go to the doctor and the tests come back. You hear the word you dreaded to hear. Storm.
 - 6. Sadly, on the 75th anniversary of the explosion of the atomic bomb, another explosion rocks a city, a war blows up, a plane goes down, refugees try to resettle, fires in the west, hurricanes in the east, protests, pandemic. Storm. Storm. Storm.
- B. The waves crash in on our battered boats and we try to stay afloat in the midst of what seems to be a pretty chaotic world at times.
 - 1. You are all too aware of those challenges...we all are.
 - 2. And for some it seems that the storms never cease.
 - 3. We also know how people respond and react.
 - 4. Some people reach for a bottle...some reach for drugs.
 - 5. Some folks withdraw and escape...some lash out.
 - 6. Some people reach for the remote control, as if changing the channel will make it all go away.

V. AND YET, THIS STORY ENCOURAGES US.

- A. Jesus speaks words of comfort to his fearful disciples and to us.
 - 1. "Friends, take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid."
 - 2. What beautiful words to those with fearful hearts!

3. And Peter—Peter may have made some mistakes along the way—like we all do—but he eventually gets it right in this story.
 4. When the going really gets tough, he knows where to go.
 5. And he doesn't go it alone—he knows where to reach for salvation.
 6. It is good to know that in our moments of distress, Jesus comes.
 7. Sometimes he surrounds us with his peace and love.
 8. Sometimes he is present—whether we know it or not.
 9. And he often works through those around us—special people we describe as real “life savers” in our lives.
- B. John Lewis has been in the news a lot lately since he passed away.
1. He faced endless storms in his tireless fight for civil rights.
 - a. He was beaten, spat upon, and burned with cigarettes.
 - b. He endured tear gas, whips and tubes wrapped in barbed wire.
 - c. On Bloody Sunday he almost died from a billy-club beating.
 2. Someone said, “John’s life was exceptional, but he never believed that what he did was more than anybody could do.”
 - a. “He felt we all have the capacity for great courage, a longing to do what’s right, a willingness to love all people, and to extend to them their God-given rights to dignity and respect.”
 - b. “Because he saw the best in us, he will continue to serve as a beacon in that long journey towards a more perfect union.”
- C. I also read a different point of view from a friend of Lewis.
1. He said: “I had a mistaken notion that John wasn’t angry enough.”
 - a. “Why didn’t he demand revenge for the unspeakable racism?”
 - b. “How could he accept an apology from Governor Wallace or forgive the pathological Bull Connor?”
 - c. “Why would he forge relationships with former Klansmen?”
 2. “But over the years my ambivalence melted into reverence as I came to better appreciate the power of Lewis’ grace.”
 - a. “It equipped him with undeniable moral authority that allowed him to change minds and hearts and lives.”
 - b. “His ability to forgive, along with his bravery and contempt for injustice were among the sturdiest pillars of his greatness.”
- D. And all of that was grounded in a deep, abiding faith.
1. Do you remember the beloved hymn?
 2. Standing on the promises that cannot fail, when the howling storms of doubt and fear assail, by the living Word of God we shall prevail, standing on the promises of God.
 3. John Lewis said something related to today’s story that will continue to inspire us: “Do not get lost in a sea of despair. Be hopeful. Be optimistic.”
- E. Friends, I’m not sure what storms you are facing, but I know this...
1. When the storms of life are raging...
 2. When everything seems out of control...
 3. When we feel totally helpless and hopeless...
 4. Whether the ends of our stories are heartbreaking or heroic...
 5. In the midst of the storm...Jesus comes.