

It's Safe to Get Out of the Boat **Matthew 14:22-33**

Introduction

I want to begin by asking you to get a mental picture of the scene described in today's text. Now, please listen as once again I read verse 24 from this Gospel text.

The boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. (Matthew 14:24)

What do you see?

[Play the "Stormy Seas" video]

How close was your image to the visual you just saw portrayed on the screen? My guess is that most of us visualized nothing that extreme! I certainly never have! You and I were probably closer to something that could be called "choppy waters" – maybe something bumpy enough to warrant a dose of Dramamine, but nothing quite so severe as what we saw on this video. We probably visualized something closer to this:

[Show artist's rendering]

Truthfully, the storms on the Sea of Galilee would not ever be of the intensity of the video, but by the same token the storm described in today's Gospel text was probably stronger than this current picture or anything any of you visualized. That is an important detail if we are to make sense of what happens in this story.

The boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. (Matthew 14:24)

The word "buffeted" used in the NIV. The English translation seems manageable. Experienced fishermen should be able to handle a boat that is "buffeted." Right? But this is also the word that is used in the Greek to describe a political revolution or mob riot. Picture the evening news stories about the mob protests happening in our cities.

When you picture the Sea of Galilee in that light, this story not only becomes more amazing, it becomes more applicable to what happens in real life. It is the perfect text for the year 2020.

Think about it. Here you are, sailing along, living your life. Like these disciples, you are trying to do what Jesus asks you to do.

Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. (Matthew 14:22)

Then WHAM! The storm hits. It comes out of nowhere, and it comes without warning. And it is not just a storm, IT'S A STORM!!! The Sea of Galilee is notorious for such storms,

but on this night even these experienced fishermen were caught off guard by the intensity of this one. They were used to choppy storms, but this one buffeted!

In the midst of this stormy night, something amazing happens. Jesus walks across the top of the water as if those waves were a paved walking path through Northridge. As He approaches the boat, he invites Peter to join him in the middle of the storm, away from the security of the boat. A classic gospel story!

Let me make three observations:

OBSERVATION #1: WHEN THE SEAS ARE ROUGH MOST PEOPLE WILL STAY IN THE BOAT

Look at verse 29:

“Come,” (Jesus) said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. (Matthew 14:29)

There were 12 men in the boat that night. Only one climbed out and walked to Jesus. Mathematically, that is about 8%. The other 92% opted to stay in a boat that was being “buffeted by the waves.”

We don't know their reasons for staying in the boat any more than we know Peter's reason for getting out of it. But using ourselves as examples, we can probably figure it out.

For some it might have been a matter of logic: Simple human logic tells you that it is safer in the boat! Buffeted boats are better than stormy seas! That makes so much sense we could put it on a T-shirt! From our human perspectives, there is no logical reason why anyone would ever dream of getting out of that boat. Every cell and synapse in our logical brains tell us that when the boat is buffeted you should “sit down and hang on.”

- That is exactly what happens in the storms of our lives too. When the waters rise, our first instinct – and often our lasting instinct – is to hang on tight to what we already have. We just grip it a little tighter, because it is what we know.

For others it might have been a bit of peer pressure: I mean, 92% stayed. There is safety in numbers. The majority is never wrong! Are they? If all your friends are doing it ...

- The majority of the dialogue recorded in this text happens between Jesus and Peter. As I was meditating on this text, I tried to imagine what the other disciples were saying as Peter threw his leg overboard. But I couldn't hear their voices. I could only hear my Mom. “Just where do you think you're going, young man?” My guess is they were saying the same thing!

For others it might have been a fear of failure: What if this doesn't work? What if I sink? What if my faith isn't strong enough? What if Jesus doesn't come through?

- And so we stay, right there in that buffeted boat. Paralyzed by a fear of everything that might go wrong. Life is happening out there on the seas! But we will stay right here, thank you. The risk of being wrong is simply too great.

That brings us to observation #2:

OBSERVATION #2: WHEN THE SEAS ARE ROUGH THE BOAT BECOMES A PROBLEM

Look at verse 24:

The boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. (Matthew 14:24)

Despite having at least four experienced fishermen on board, this boat was in big trouble. It brought them that far, but it was not going to make it to shore. Despite that, they were intent on riding it out and hoping for the best.

It may have been their only option at first, but once Jesus comes into the story, the boat becomes a liability. It is no longer a solution; it is now a problem. Why? Because the disciples trusted the boat to keep them safe.

The boat becomes the thing I trust.

The boat gives me something to hang on to.

- The boat gives me a fighting chance.
- The boat has sailed through storms before.
- The boat has kept me safe so far.
- I have a lot of experience with the boat.

Remember the story of David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17)? Goliath issues a challenge that causes the entire army of Israel to tremble. David, a little shepherd boy, volunteers to fight with only his slingshot and five small stones. But what is the first thing King Saul does? He tries to equip David in a set of soldier's armor. Because the armor is what keeps a soldier safe. David declines, and faces the giant just like he faced the predators that wanted to kill his sheep. David says to Goliath:

You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel ... All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's. (1 Samuel 17:45, 47)

Your boat might be a suit of armor. It might be ...

- Your network of family and friends
- Your job
- Your health
- Your good looks or charm

Over the course of time, every of those boats will be buffeted. God will not allow you to put your trust in any of them. He wants you to trust in Him, and only Him.

Which brings us to observation #3:

OBSERVATION #3: WHEN THE SEAS ARE ROUGH JESUS INVITES US TO COME

Look at verses 32-33:

*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. (Matthew 14:27-29)*

No big speech. No parables to teach. No sermons to preach. Just "Come."

Over the course of my ministry, I have tried very hard NOT to be one of THOSE ministers. You know the kind – ones who leave you feeling as if your faith is lacking or you are somehow spiritual inferior if you have problems that don't instantly go away when you pray. I wish I could tell you that coming to Jesus eliminated your problems.

Notice that the sea does not become calm when Peter crawls out of the boat!

And yet Jesus invites. Come, He says. Nothing complicated.

It is an invitation that He offers throughout the pages of Scripture. The context is varied, but the invitation is the same.

Come, all you who are thirsty ... (Isaiah 55:1)

Come, all you who are weary and burdened ... (Matthew 11:28)

"Come ... Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. (Isaiah 1:18)

Peter heard the invitation, and despite his uncertainty, he responded.

Because the safest place in any storm is wherever Jesus is.

APPLICATION

No matter what you are experiencing in your life today, I want you to know that Jesus is inviting you to come.

- He is inviting you to step away from all those things that you think are your security – those things that are being buffeted by the storm around you.
- He is inviting you, even if it feels like no one else is willing to walk along with you.
- He is inviting you, because where He is will always be the safest place to be.

Let's pray. Amen.