

just seems hard every day.

Into our storm walks Jesus. I think it is important that this is not a story of the disciples coming to Jesus, but Jesus coming to them. They do not decide to row back toward Jesus... they keep rowing against the wind, in the middle of the lake tormented by the waves and Jesus comes to them. Both Mark and John make a point of saying the disciples received Him into the boat.

I want you to know that you don't have to be looking for Jesus, searching for Jesus, hoping for Jesus in the midst of the storm... Jesus comes to us. Jesus comes walking into our storm. We simply must receive Him. We must take Him in. I think that simply means we need to remind ourselves we are not alone... Jesus is present. That is a matter of faith and persistence.

Secondly, I want us to notice that Jesus is enough. Jesus' first word is not to calm the storm, but to encourage the disciples in the storm. Jesus is there, but they are still in the storm. Jesus words are interesting "take courage... it is I."

Take courage is translated in many translations "be of good cheer or cheer up." Others translate it "have some courage." Take courage is a command per say. It is interesting the word has both a sense of emotional and rational element. Take courage is to choose courage, choose faith, and choose to believe. It is more of a rational thought. It is to choose faith in the storm even when our emotion might tell us something else. Yet, this word also is "be of good cheer or cheer up." That is an emotional word. So, it is not simple to know God is with us but it also to experience the emotional lift, the deep sense of peace that yes, God is with us in the storm.

Jesus says take courage... it is I. There is no reason, except it is Jesus to take courage. The storm is still raging, the wind is still blowing, they are still in the middle of the lake... but Jesus is with them and Jesus being with them is enough. Take courage for no other reason than Jesus is with us.

Lastly, remember that Jesus came in the morning watch. It is said that it is darkest before the dawn. I don't know if that is true, actually it might be the darkest from 3 to 6:00am. However, it is interesting to me that what we would call the middle of the night they called the morning

watch. I will remind you that God's resurrection work was done before it was dawn. The resurrection story reminds us that before dawn, Jesus came out of that dark grave. It was somewhere in the fourth watch that God raised Jesus from the dead. The time when we might say it is the darkest and loneliest is that time when God is present and at work.

The story concludes with and they worshipped Him. They worshipped Him in that little boat, in the middle of the lake yet to reach the shore. That is my last encouragement to you today.



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TRINITY BAPTIST CHURCH
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TRINITY PULPIT

Take Courage!

Matthew 14:22-36

Living in the Carolinas we all are all too aware of hurricane warnings. When you live inland, keeping up with hurricanes is something you just do not do. You might hear it in a brief sentence on the news, but you really do not pay much attention to it. Mostly you are more concerned with a tornado warning than a hurricane warning. However, here in the Carolinas we are aware of potential hurricanes and hurricane tracks and intensity. With our ability to now track a storm, we can begin to watch a small depression from off the coast of Western Africa and then make its way across the water. We can watch it form into a tropical depression and then a tropical storm and then, of course a hurricane. Hurricanes, of course, also have their own rating system. They are rated from 1 to 5 considering their wind speed and the damage they might do.

As storms normally do, they will sometimes grow in intensity and then level off or even diminish over a period of time. Being able to track the storm's direction is also important. We can know that there is a storm coming up the coast, but most of the time we can predict if it is going to come inland or go off to sea. We can know that there is a storm out there, but our number one concern of course, is it coming to where I am? Will it affect me? Do I need to worry about this storm?

There are moments in life that we metaphorically refer to as storms. The storms of life can mean a physical, financial or relational challenge. It might be a struggle that comes and is over in a manner of days or even hours. Sometimes the storms of life come and settle in. They remain for months and sometimes years. Some of us might even feel that life has been one long storm. The thought of seeing the sun again, a day of ease, a day of rest is a long lost hope at this moment in our lives. We have come to expect the storm and we have learned how to function and survive in the storm.

It is also true that many storms in life never come to us. All the things we can worry about most of the time do not occur. We can worry about the storm of disease, war, conflict, loss of relationships, financial issues, and our families and yet many times the very things we worry about never happen. We spend a lot of time worrying about storms that just are not our storm. We are blessed to never pass through many of the things we fear the most. However, we must realize that the fear and dread in its own way is a storm of life.

Here in our text today the disciples come against a real storm not a metaphorical storm. However, for our purposes I think we can consider their real storm and struggle and our metaphorical storms and struggles.

This passage follows the event we considered last week. Let's consider the storms in Jesus' life in just a three-day period. The first day is the news of the death of John the Baptist. Jesus hears that Herod has beheaded John and Jesus chooses in that moment of grief to go away to a private place. The sheer weight and power of the words "the disciples went and got John's body and buried it and then told Jesus" lay heavy in this whole section of the gospel. The storm of grief, loss, injustice, pain, and fear for self is all wrapped up in that one sentence. Jesus, in this first storm, seeks solitude. The second storm we find is the next day as he arrives on the other side of the lake and is overwhelmed with the needs of those who are waiting on him. He sees the crowd and has compassion on them. Not only does He heal them, but also late in the day He does not send them away. Instead, He and His disciples feed and satisfy this 5,000 plus crowd. The storm of overwhelming need and demand is found on this second day. We all know the feeling of a day that has one plan, only for that plan to be altered by unexpected need and circumstances. So, this is the second storm. It is the need and demand of others.

The third storm comes later that night and into

the next morning. Jesus, after the crowds have been fed and gone away, sends the disciples on their way back across the lake. This time Jesus will go away by Himself to pray. After these two days, Jesus feels the need to be alone... completely alone with the Father. Jesus goes up on the mountainside to pray and the disciples get into the boat and are rowing to the other side. We have some idea about time with the language of the text. Jesus was there as evening came. This would have been about six o'clock. Jesus went to them in the fourth watch. This was the morning watch between 3 and 6.

The Romans had instituted a four-watch system. The first watch was known as evening. It was from 6 to 9 p.m. The second watch was known as the midnight watch and went from 9 p.m. to Midnight. The third watch was called cockcrow and was from Midnight to 3 a.m. The final watch or the fourth watch was known as the morning watch and was from 3 to 6 a.m.

Jesus went up on the mountainside and was there when evening came. That would have been six o'clock and this means that the disciples began to row before 6 p.m. By the time Jesus comes to them, it is at least 3 a.m. and John tells us that they are just a little over half way across the lake. The storm the disciples faced that night was tiring and frustrating. It had been relentless. These disciples, many professional fishermen, should have been across the lake and on dry land and resting for the night hours ago... but they were not. Now, after all of this time rowing... they were, according to John's account, about 3 and half miles into a 5 mile journey. They had made some way, but they must have been tired and we can really say after all of this time... they were just in the middle of the whole thing. They were too far away to go back to where they had come from and rowing into the wind they must have wondered if they would ever get to where they were going.

This is when Jesus comes to them walking on the water. In the middle of the storm, when they had grown tired and weary, when there was no turning back or seemingly going forward, when those thoughts of what are we going to do must have been going through their minds.... Jesus comes walking on the water. Jesus comes in the storm. When they first see Him they are afraid. They think it is a ghost. What else could it be? Surely not a human being walking on the water. What is it. They cried out in fear. Then Jesus speaks "Take Courage, It is I." Peter, in his boldness, cries out if it is You, then let me come to You on the water. Jesus simple invitation is come. Peter steps out of that boat and at first it seems is doing just fine, when all of a sudden he takes his eyes off Jesus and puts them back on the storm and begins to sink.

Peter moves quickly from faith to failure in this story. We can relate to Peter. Peter sinking cries to be saved and Jesus reaches out His hand and pulls him to safety. You of little faith, why did you doubt. They both get into the boat and the wind dies down. The disciples worshipped Him and said truly you are the Son of God.

What type of storm are you going through? When we look at the storm the disciples found themselves in that night, we find three different descriptions. Lets use them as we rate our storm.

Category 1- they were buffeted by the waves. The word buffeted means torment. They were tormented by the sea and waves. The word torment actually has as sense of satanic or evil. So the first part of the storm is described as evil and torment. Sometimes we might describe our storm as torment. We find ourselves in storms that are the creation of our own making or the making of another. If we use that word to think about evil, we might think of those storms in life that we have caused by our sinfulness or those consequences that come from the sinfulness of others. In general, we might think of the storms of life that are the result of living in a sinful world.

Think of the storms of life that are the result of our sinfulness or the sinfulness of others of our world. There are storms in life that we might describe as torment. In other words, we might say this is the hardest thing I have ever been through.

According to Christianity Today :
Islamic State militants seized control of the "Christian capital of Iraq," The land grab sent has sent an estimated one-fourth of Iraq's remaining Christians fleeing. "An exodus, a real via crucis ... [Christians] are walking on foot in Iraq's searing summer heat towards [salvation in] the Kurdish cities of Erbil, Duhok and Sulaymiya, the sick, the elderly, infants and pregnant women among them," a regional Christian leader told AsiaNews. "They are facing a humanitarian catastrophe and a real risk of genocide. They need food, water and shelter." Qaraqosh, Iraq's most-populous Christian city at 50,000 people, is in the province of Ninevah, 18 miles southeast of Mosul, where CT recently reported the Islamist takeover of Iraq's second-largest city. The move brings IS (formerly ISIS) on the border of Kurdish territory. (The Telegraph maps where Christians are concentrated in Iraq in relation to other religious groups, and The Guardian maps where the militants have control of the region.)

"All Christian villages are now empty," said Bishop Tomas. Already, IS militants have taken down crosses on churches and burned church manuscripts, according to the BBC.

As IS militants continue their sweep of northern Iraq toward the capital of the Kurdish region, tens of thousands of Christians are on the run, trying to avoid the IS ultimatum given in Mosul and other areas: convert, pay a protection tax, leave, or die.

Thousands of Iraqis fled to the mountains after the predominantly Yazidi (another religious minority) town of Sinjar fell, where they have no food and water. Open Doors reports that 45 children have already died of thirst as Kurdish troops have no way of getting to the stranded refugees.

Pope Francis has appealed to the international community to aid Iraqi Christians as they flee the harsh conditions: "[O]ur brothers and sisters are persecuted, they are pushed out, forced to leave their homes without the opportunity to take anything with them," said Pope Francis, according to the statement. "To these families and to these people I would like to express my closeness and my steadfast prayer. Dearest brothers and sisters so persecuted, I know how much you suffer, I know that you are deprived of everything. I am with you in your faith in Him who conquered evil!"

Let us not think for a moment that evil is not alive and well in this sinful world and there are storms in life that are torment. We must pray for our brothers and sisters.

Category 2 is isolation. We are told that the boat was far from the shore. It essentially was in the middle of the lake. It was in that place where there was no turning back and it was still far from the other side. There is a sense of isolation in this description. There they were in the storm in the middle of the lake and they were by themselves without Jesus.

Now much has been made that Jesus may have been able to observe them the whole time. If Jesus was up on a mountainside and could over look the lake, He might have been able to see them striving against the wind. Mark's gospel says that after Jesus had finished praying He could see them striving against the wind. Interestingly, John and Mark do not include Peter's moment of walking on the water, only Jesus coming to the boat and getting in.

Whether or not Jesus watched them the whole time or whether He noticed them from the shore or just knew in some supernatural way, it really does not say.

The story is more from the perspective of the disciples. In their minds, they were in the middle of the lake in the middle of the storm and they were alone.

Some of our storms are storms just because we feel we were there alone. The truth is there are many moments in life that would not be so overwhelming, so fearful or so difficult if we had someone to share him or her with or just thought that someone understood.

There is something about the storms of life that make us first feel isolated from others. We can convince ourselves that no one has ever been through this before and we are alone with our experience. We can also begin to convince ourselves that although God promises to never leave us or forsake us, we feel alone. Some of us might categorize our storm today as isolation.

Category 3 is striving against the wind. The waves tormented them and they were in the middle of the lake alone and it was added they were against the wind. Have you ever felt that life is being lived against the wind? It just seems that life is difficult, no matter what you try.

Doing anything against the wind is hard. Running, biking, sailing, boating, rowing, playing golf, tennis, football, baseball, just think of how the wind is part of all of those sports. World records are broken and missed because of the wind. Even travel against the wind can be difficult.

The thought here is that the storm was blowing against them and had blown against them the whole way and it was not letting up. Everything they tried was against the wind.

Sometimes we feel like life is against the wind. There is not a day to rest; nothing comes easy, everything and everything is a struggle. We are against the wind.

So, how do you categorize your storm? Some might say torment; it is the hardest thing I have ever been through. Some might say isolation. I just feel alone. Others might say against the wind. It is not one particular thing, but it

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