

Title: A dark and stormy night
Text: Matthew 8.23-27
Theme: Jesus is Lord over everything.
Series: Matthew #49

Read Text:

This week Cathi was subbing for a 3rd grade class. One of the students wanted to know what the temperature was outside because it was about time for recess. Cathi said that she didn't know. The kid said, "check your phone." She said, "I don't know how to do that." He said, "Here, let me have it. You push this app, right here." I said, "that's great, they are paying you to learn. Such a deal!" We not only have apps that tell us what the current temperature is, we have warnings that will alert us when serious weather is coming our way. This text is teaching us that if you follow Christ, you need to anticipate that there are some storms ahead. This is particularly timely since today we are observing communion together, which is a time for us to renew our vows to Christ. This is good for us to remember what we signed up for. It is also good for those of you who have not yet come to faith in Christ to know what is involved in being a disciple of Jesus.

At the end of this gospel account, Matthew records the commissioning words of Jesus. *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."* (Matthew 28.19-20a) The mission of the disciples was (and still is) to go and make disciples of Christ. Each one who commits to being a follower of Christ is to then be baptized and is to be taught all that Christ taught the disciples. The pattern is clear. Jesus called for people to follow him and then he trained them and prepared them to follow him. Then, he sent them out to do the same. In chapter 10, the 12 disciples are named. These are the ones who answered the call. But we are in chapter 8 where some of these and others are considering the cost of following Christ by listening to what he says and observing what he does. Christ has made it clear that he demands commitment. But, he also wants each one to know what they are signing up for. Here is what I mean.

The theme of Matthew's gospel is Behold, your King! Matthew is comprised of 5 teaching sections, each one revealing more and more truth about Christ and why following him is needful, logical, beautiful, right and essential. In between the first two teaching sections are these two chapters (8-9) that tell us about the demonstrations of the power of Christ over disease, distance, disaster, demons and even death. The point that Matthew is making in these verses is that Christ is Lord (King) over everything. But, Matthew records more than miracles. There are three groupings of three miracles in these two chapters and each grouping is followed by a call to follow Christ. Each grouping of three miracles emphasizes a particular aspect of following Christ. In the first three miracles Jesus healed a leper by touching him. Then he healed the servant a Roman Centurion by speaking the word. And finally, he healed a woman (Peter's mother-in-law) on the Sabbath. We begin to see a pattern, don't we? Jesus does not fit into cultural expectations. We are right to suspect this. But, then when Jesus talks with these two men about the cost of discipleship, our suspicions are confirmed. Jesus is telling this one guy

that he has to be willing to follow Christ even in the face of family pressure, while the other guy he tells him that he needs to go back and count the cost because it is not easy.

This sets the stage for what is going to follow. The next three miracles reveal the power of Christ over Satan's domain. If you follow Christ, you should expect conflict. Christ and his followers are a rightful threat to the status quo. And this conflict will be more than just cultural; it will be spiritual. So, here is the big idea of our text today. You need to know that Christ is Lord over everything so that you will not only follow him, but that you may keep on following him even in the midst of the conflict. Therefore, the 3 points of the sermon are actually 3 phrases of a single sentence. If you follow Jesus he may lead you into terrifying storms in order to teach you about yourself and in order to teach you about him. The disciples trusted him enough to get into the boat. But, the boat was headed for a storm and this was no ordinary storm.

I. **Jesus may lead you into terrifying storms** ...(23-24)

So, Jesus gets into the boat and his disciples follow him. By the way, Mark's gospel mentions that there are other boats that follow too. "And behold" i.e. all at once a great storm arose on the sea. Storms on the Sea of Galilee are not unusual. The Sea of Galilee sits 600 feet below sea level. The hot, steamy air can quickly rise which sucks in the air from the desert that creates all sorts of turbulence on the water. But, this does not seem to be an ordinary storm that the Sea of Galilee is known for. Matthew uses a word that is normally used to describe earthquakes. The word is "seismos" that you recognize as the root word for seismographs. And the other thing that gives me the impression that this is unusually serious is because the disciples are terrified. Remember, at least four of these guys are experienced fisherman. They have been through a lot. When you are on a boat with fisherman and the fishermen are freaking out, it is time to freak out! Meanwhile, Jesus is sleeping.

A. **We do not follow Jesus so that life will be predictable.**

Before we make a major decision, we generally like to consider the initial cost and the ongoing challenges. Little puppies are cute, but vet bills aren't. When looking at purchasing a car many of us will read reviews in publications and on-line that give us reliability ratings. If 8 out of 10 people who owned that car had the transmission die at 36,000 miles, you want to know that before you agree to buy it, right? Therefore, in the interest of full disclosure I want you to know what will most likely happen to you when you follow Christ. And it probably will not wait for 36,000 miles.

Let's go back to the conversation that Jesus just had with the scribe. Jesus was re-setting the expectations of the scribe. In other words, what you imagine is not necessarily reality. Let me explain. There is a pattern established in the Scriptures for every person who follows the call of God. It basically goes like this: 1) God calls a person to follow him. 2) The person responds in faith. 3) Life goes bonkers!

Let's look at some examples.

1) Noah

Noah was minding his own business when God called him to build an ark. Noah agreed and life obviously went bonkers.

2) Abraham

Abraham is called by God (out of the blue). Abraham follows God and life goes bonkers. Abraham leaves his home, and spends the rest of his days wandering like a nomad, even offering his own son to God at one point.

3) Moses

Moses was watching sheep, when God called him to follow him and Moses agreed and of course, life went bonkers.

Go down the list and you see this with Samuel, David, Elijah, Isaiah, and Daniel. In every case these people follow God, thinking that it is the right thing to do, and it is, but having no idea of how intense and challenging life is about to get. Jesus told these guys to get into the boat, but he did not tell them everything that was going to happen. Do not assume that because you follow Christ that life is going to be smooth sailing. In fact, you need to assume that following Christ means that you are about to head right into a storm.

Now, there is another angle that I want to explore in this. What happened to the children of Israel as soon as they were delivered from Egypt? Pharaoh and his army came after them, right? They were following God and they followed God right into what looked like a trap. Then they were rescued at the Red Sea and they followed God into the desert where there was no water. So, again, the pattern is set. But, what they experienced was a preview of what Christ would experience. We noted this back in Matthew 4. After he was baptized, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Seriously! The Spirit of God led Jesus into this storm and the storm was intense. I noted then that Jesus was doing what Israel failed to do. Jesus went into the desert (after his baptism) and responded with faith and obedience, while Israel responded with fear and disobedience. He did what they could not do. Of course, this was part of his entire life that was lived in our place. He always lived perfectly in our place. But, Jesus not only lived in our place, but he calls us to follow him. This event here is an illustration of that. Jesus calls the disciples to follow him and he leads them into a storm. It was not what they had imagined. It was not what they had assumed. It was not what they had planned on. But, it was exactly what God had planned, even if the storm was generated by satanic forces attempting to destroy Christ and his disciples. (I am not saying it was, but Matthew's language makes me wonder, particularly noting that Jesus rebuked the winds and the sea in a manner similar to how he rebuked demons.)

B. Following Jesus is not easy, now.

So, following Jesus is not predictable. Which means of course, that it is not easy. The Bible makes it very clear that we do not follow Jesus in order to escape challenges in this life. We not only live in this world that is presently under the curse of sin and experience the consequences of that like everyone else, but we live in this present age, that is temporarily ruled by the prince of the power of the air who is no friend to grace, and is the sworn enemy of all who follow Christ. Christ came to lay claim to what is rightfully his. He has established his kingdom and he will not be denied the throne. He is taking back what He made, but because this present age is in rebellion to him, there is a fundamental conflict that is being fought. It is in this world, and it is in our hearts. Jesus spoke of this in John 16.33, "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

C. Following Jesus is not necessarily rewarding, now.

Just like Moses, these disciples had no idea how long the journey was before them. They were getting into a boat for a little ride, not realizing that Peter would end up decades later crucified for his allegiance to Christ. James would be beheaded. John would be tortured and exiled. On and on it would go. Jesus was already preparing them through this event and many others like it, that they needed to adjust their expectations. Right now people may not applaud you. Right now, you may be running right into a storm. Right now you may fear for your life. Right now you may be alone and frightened, but this is not the end. Just getting to the shore is not the goal.

This was not the last storm that the disciples would face. This storm was part of their training for future storms. The struggles you endure are themselves preparation for more struggle. In this life we do not arrive. However, there is another shore that awaits you, and when you reach that, there will be no more storms. Jesus may lead you into terrifying storms...

II. ...In order to teach you about yourself ... (25-26)

The sea is not at rest, but Jesus is. The disciples are terrified but Jesus is calm. It is fine for a boat to be in the sea, it is not fine for the sea to be in the boat. We see the situation exactly as Matthew wants us to. The disciples are in the middle of a serious problem that they cannot fix, which is exactly what they need to know.

A. You cannot save yourself. (weakness)

If you are going to follow Christ, you must know this truth with your soul. You cannot save yourself. The severity of the storm that threatened to kill them is a picture of the severity of the condition of our soul. These disciples needed to experience and fully appreciate their lost-ness and their hopelessness. Unless something happens really fast, we are dead! What they were experiencing physically and environmentally was true

spiritually. And at this moment, no one had to convince them that they were hopeless apart from Christ, they knew it!

B. You are prone to fear

Situations like this are so good for us because they reveal things about us that we either are afraid to admit or want to refuse to admit. We like to think that we are smarter than what we are; stronger than what we are; and by all means, better, much, much better than what we are. We see people doing something sinful, and we react with disgust as if we would never stoop to such a thing. What a joke! We are just as prone to weakness as anyone else. So, here are the disciples. Everyone is terrified. No one can say that they believed that it was going to be fine. They were all fearful, and they all needed to know that.

C. You must be rescued by another

V.25, believing on Christ does not get much more basic than this, does it? “Save us Lord, we are perishing.” Of course Jesus reminds them that he cannot fix this because he is in the carpenter’s union and this is a fisherman union issue. Seriously, this is great! If it takes a terrifying storm to make you aware of your need of Christ, then that storm just became your best friend. Another interesting thing is that Jesus wakes up and in complete contrast to them, he does not panic. In fact, his first concern is not the storm, but it is them, isn’t it? Seriously, I crack up when I read this. Jesus says, “Why are you afraid?” Now, hold the phone for a second. Why does Jesus ask this? Why does he ask them why they are afraid? Is this some sort of joke? Is he just yanking their chain? Why are we afraid? Are you kidding me!?!?! We are about to die and you want to know why we are afraid?

But, I don’t think that he is yanking their chain. And I don’t think that Jesus is conducting some sort of survey of how humans reflect on their emotions in the face of terrifying storms. Jesus is asking them a question so that they will reflect upon the answer. They are afraid because they think they are going to die and unless Jesus does something about it, they are dead. And this is why I find this so interesting. Before he fixes the storm, it’s like he wants to fix them. Jesus does not want this teaching moment to be wasted. And then he points out something else...

D. Your faith is small

Jesus is right. Our faith is small. We are prone to trust ourselves instead of Him. We are prone to panic instead of trusting God. We are quick to doubt his motives, or even his actions. But, their weakness in faith does not mean that he will not act. He does what we cannot do. Jesus may lead you into terrifying storms in order to teach you about yourself

III. ...And in order to teach you about Him.

A. **He is with you!**

Jesus got into the boat first. He was with them. When Christ is with you, there is no need to panic. Because...

B. **He does not panic.**

We learn how to respond to situations based on how our leaders respond. This is one of the reasons why Winston Churchill remains such an iconic leader. During W.W.II Germany is bombing the daylight out of London, and Churchill is completely unfazed. He said, "The only thing we have to fear, is fear itself." If the Prime Minister does not panic, then the citizens do not need to panic.

If the Lord of the universe is riding in your boat and he is not in a panic, then you do not need to be in a panic. He's got this one. But, you need to know that He's got this one. You need to know that...

C. **He can save.**

"Then he rose..." I take this to mean that Jesus was still laying down! He hadn't even gotten up yet. Now, notice the difference between what he does and what we do. When we are in a crisis like this, we pray. Jesus does not pray for help, he is the help. Jesus does not pray for calm, he is the calm. He speaks and commands the winds and the sea. He not only can save...

D. **He does save.**

"...and there was great calm." What had been a great storm is now a great peace. The sea that a second ago was violent, was now still. The men who were about to die, were now safe. And now, the disciples are asking the question. "What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?" How would you answer this? How should you answer this? What is the obvious answer to this?

E. **He is Lord over all.**

Yes, a thousand times yes, He is Lord over all. But, what if you are in a boat and the Lord of heaven and earth is in the boat with you, what are you supposed to think? On the one hand, the only person who could do something like this would be God, right? If it were a prophet of God, he would have appealed to God, like Elijah did, or Moses or Joshua.

Many years ago, I was asked to preach a sermon at a church camp for elementary kids. They gathered in a structure that had an aluminum roof and it was pouring down rain. The noise from the rain on that roof was so loud that I knew that these kids were not going to hear a word that I was saying. So, I prayed. I prayed out loud and asked God to

stop the rain and it did. Right then, it stopped. Frankly, I was probably more stunned than they were. But those kids did not move that entire sermon, which of course was more amazing than the rain stopping.

A while ago, my neighbor couldn't get his lawnmower to start. I knew that he was not priming it enough, so I said, "Hey Richard, need some help with your mower? Let me pray over it." So I put my hands on the mower, and pretended to pray while I pushed the primer several times. Then I said, "try it now." Of course he thought I was crazy until he pulled the rope and it started. "How'd you do that?" He wanted to know. I just pointed to the sky.

But Jesus did not appeal to God for help, nor did he work some sort of trick, this man rebuked the wind and the sea, and they submitted. Who can do that? And that is what these men have to face. But, if they conclude, rightfully so that he is God, then they have another question. Well, if he is God, then, what is God doing in a boat in the middle of the night in the Sea of Galilee? And what is more...how can I be in his presence. These men do not have it all figured out yet, but they are learning.

Matthew says that they "marveled." They were amazed. But, just because you are amazed, does not mean that you believe. Judas Iscariot marveled too, but his amazement at the power of Christ was obviously not saving faith. Judas followed Christ with his feet, but not with his heart. And when Jesus did not give Judas what he wanted in the moment, he was ready to dump him, and all of his miracles and power in order to get a god who will do what Judas wanted.

These events are not recorded so that you will simply be amazed. They are here so that you will follow Christ, with your heart.