



Jesus does his greatest work in the storm

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Welcome to our worship time. We are so glad you could join us.

Call to Worship (Mike Tiberi)

Psalm 46

God is our refuge and strength,

a very present help in trouble.

² Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,

3 though its waters roar and foam,

though the mountains tremble at its swelling. Selah

- 4 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.
- ⁵ God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns.
- ⁶ The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts.
- ⁷The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*
- ⁸ Come, behold the works of the Lord, how he has brought desolations on the earth.
- 9 He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire.
- ¹⁰ "Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations,

I will be exalted in the earth!"

¹¹ The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*

Songs

Living Hope Leaning on the Everlasting Arms Great is Thy Faithfulness Turn Your Eyes

WITH ME IN THE STORM

Matthew 14:22-33

Introduction

Offering: You can give over Zelle through your bank with no fees. You can also give by sending a check to Living Hope, 6N171 Gary Avenue, Roselle, IL 60172.

Open your Bibles to **Matthew 14**. The title of our message today is "With Us in the Storm."

In some of the most difficult times in our life, we feel like we are alone. Especially during this time of quarantine, we all long to be with each other again in church services together. It can get hard some days.

But we need to realize God does his best work in the storm. We're going to read about it right now.

Pastor Michael, can you read our passage today?

MATTHEW 14:22-33 | Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³ And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴ but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. ²⁵ And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. ²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear. ²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." ²⁸ And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ²⁹ He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. 30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." 31 Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³² And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 33 And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

In this passage, we read about how Peter and his friends got into a little boat one afternoon to cross the Sea of Galilee. Jesus wanted to be alone, so they were boating without him.

Peter didn't mind—he'd been on boats his whole life. He liked them. But this time a major storm blew in. Not a little shower either. The gospel of Matthew says the boat was "beaten" by the waves (Mt 14:24). It was so violent that it was all the disciples could do to keep the boat upright. By 3 o'clock in the morning (the fourth watch) the disciples were no longer worried about making it to the other side—they just wanted to stay alive.

The story of Jesus walking on water appears in three of the four gospels (Mt 14:22-36; Mk 6:45-56; Jn 6:16-24). But, only in Matthew do we also learn that Peter also walked on water!

The first thing we need to remember about this storm is that it wasn't a surprise to Peter. Jesus is God in human flesh, the God of Genesis (Jn 1:1-3). He's the Sovereign over the storm, the Founder of the storm, you might say. God brings just the right storms into our life to fulfill his purpose for us: he wants us to be like Christ. Whatever storm comes, his purpose is the same (Rom 8:28-30).

1. THE FOUNDER OF THE STORM (Mt 14:22-25)

THE PERFECT STORM

MATTHEW 14:22-24 | Immediately he [Jesus] made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³ And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴ but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them.

This is the perfect storm for Jesus to teach his disciples about going deeper in faith. It's not just about seeing great miracles. God is about showing us he is God of the storms. Jesus goes to pray, and he orders up a storm for his disciples at the same time. The boat was

"The disciples must discover that they have a Savior who is able not only to still the storm but even to use it as his pathway" (Hendrickson).

Why does Jesus order up a storm for his disciples? Jesus orders up a storm as a pathway to a deeper faith! They just saw likely 20,000 people fed. They can trust Jesus in the midst of miracles, but can they trust him in a storm? Jesus sends everyone away and the disciples venture out alone, without Jesus, onto the Sea of Galilee. Like life, it begins calm, but soon a great storm, with waves that could get up to 20 feet high start raging.

This is a ferocious storm, and the boat is being beaten, and now they are just trying to survive. Their mindset has changed from "We're going to have a great place in the Kingdom" to "I sure hope we live." Isn't life like that? There are great spiritual victories that are followed by brutal valleys of despair. This is how God designed life. There is always victory followed by valleys.

This is the perfect storm for Jesus' purposes for his disciples. Going deeper in faith means we are going to be put in uncomfortable situations.

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing (Jas 1:2-4).

Don't ask God to remove your storm. Ask him to help you see him in the storm. But this storm took place at a very strange hour: 3 o'clock in themorning.

PERFECT TIMING

Jesus sent this storm. But he meets his disciples in the storm, and he reminds them that he alone is their God. It just so happens to occur at 3 o'clock in the morning (the fourth watch).

Pastor Michael can you read verses 25-26?

MATTHEW 14:25-26 | And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. ²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear.

Hours before, it seems the disciples wanted to make Jesus king when he fed likely 20,000 people with five loaves and two fishes. Now they are trying to survive this storm that may be the end of them. The disciples are terrified thinking they are seeing a ghost. Can you imagine? I've never seen anyone walking on the water. We obviously can't judge them. Someone was walking on the water! That had never been done before. They didn't have this story yet!

Pastor Michael, why is it that God sends us storms at what we think are the least appropriate times?

Well, they may be the least appropriate times for us, but it is always perfect timing for God. When we are caught off guard, then we are like a tea bag: whatever is inside comes out. We need sound theology to live the Christian life, but God is even more concerned about the application of our knowledge of him. He wants to work on our heart.

In the Old Testament, the greatest problem with God's people is that "<u>These people</u> say they are mine. They honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. And their worship of me is nothing but man-made rules..." (Isa 29:13).

Storms test our heart. Only when we are pure in heart will we see him in the storm. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God" (Mt 5:8).

Yes, we need those storms to test our hearts and to grow our faith.

2. **FEAR IN THE STORM** (Mt 14:26-27)

Storms can be scary, especially when you don't recognize God or know what he is doing. Jesus is right there with them, coming toward him, but they don't recognize him. The disciples noticed a shadow moving toward them on the water. As it gets closer, it becomes apparent that it is the figure of a human being—walking on the water. It frightened them to their core.

A RUDE AWAKENING

MATTHEW 14:26a | But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear...

Instead of seeing God in the storm, they have a rude awakening. They think they see a ghost. The disciples are in distress, and the very person who is able to help them is approaching them, but they don't recognize him. Only he isn't in the boat, and the disciples can't make him out through the intense storm. They think Jesus is a ghost!

We are not all that different than the disciples. When we are in the middle of the storm, tormented by waves of disappointment and doubt, we are often no better at recognizing Jesus' presence than they were. Often we are looking for God, but we can't see much more than fears and phantoms.

A REVELATION

Jesus is walking on the water, and Mark tells us a very interesting detail that might perplex you. Mark says that Jesus "intended to pass them by" on the water.

Pastor Michael, can you read Mark 6:48?

Mark 6:48, And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them.

Pastor Michael, why would Jesus want to "pass them by"?

¹ John Ortberg, If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get out of the Boat (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008).

It seems the phrase "to pass by" here might be a play on words. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the verb "to pass by" (*parerchomai*) is used as a technical term to refer to a **theophany**—those defining moments when God made "striking and temporary appearances in the earthly realm to a select individual or group for the purpose of communicating a message." God put Moses in a cleft in a rock so Moses could see "while my glory *passes by.*'… The LORD passed before him." God told Elijah to stand on the mountain "for the LORD is about to *pass by.*"

There is a pattern to these stories. In each case God had to get people's attention—through a burning bush, or wind and fire, or walking on the water. With each person God was going to call them to do something extraordinary. In each situation the person that God called felt afraid. But every time that people said "yes" to their calling, fear was eventually removed, and they experienced the incredible power of God and his manifest presence in their lives.

Looking for God in the Storm

They didn't fully grasp it yet, but God was visiting them in the water-walking flesh. They've seen him feed thousands with almost no food. Now they are going to see this one walking in human flesh who is their Creator, the one who is defying the laws of physics. He wants his disciples know his love and his power in the storm.

We need Christ to pass before us in his power and majesty. Paul prayed for the Ephesians to have a tangible knowledge of Christ in chapter 1.

Pastor Mike can you read Ephesians 1:17-20?

Ephesians 1:17-20, That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places

We need to look for that revelation of Christ in the storm. He wants to draw us nearer to himself. These divinely appointed moments in the storm will come to you and me. The purpose is for Christ to reveal himself to us.

A REASSURANCE

Look at how fear gripped the disciples in that boat.

MATTHEW 14:26a | But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear...

They are scared out of their mind, and they cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately spoke to them with three words of reassurance.

MATTHEW 14:27 | But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid."

"Take Heart"

First, Jesus says is "Take heart." Why? Because he is with them in the storm. He's there with us in the storms of life. He's not a ghost. When Jesus says, "Take heart", he's not saying the crisis is not real, but that in the presence of Jesus fear can be dismissed.²

"I Am"

The second thing Jesus says is "It is I" or "I am."

Pastor Michael, what is so important about these words?

Here we find the words, *ego eimi*. The esv translates it, "it is I." But in Greek it is a very straightforward formula that means "I am." "Don't fear—I AM is here." The phrase *ego eimi* is the name God used for himself in the Old Testament, most famously at the burning bush. God tells Moses to tell the Israelites his name. "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:14 LXX). Theologian R.T. France says:

We see in this expression ("I Am") an echo of the divine name in Exodus 3:14, here connecting the one who has power over the sea with the God who made it. ³ –**R.T. France (Theologian)**

So Jesus is the Great I Am who walks on water. He says it, and he demonstrates it! Here is the Creator with total power over the wind and the waves. He's walking three or four miles from shore on the Sea of Galilee!

"Do Not Be Afraid"

Finally, Jesus tells them: "Don't be afraid." In spite of the raging winds, the waves battering against the boat, and their fear-stricken minds, they immediately recognized their Master's voice. It was time to give courage, to still the storm that raged within the disciples, even before stilling the one that raged on the sea.

Jesus did not walk on the water to teach the disciples how to do it. Peter will soon try and fail; and there is no record of any of the others ever doing it at all. The Lord's purpose was to demonstrate his loving willingness to do whatever is necessary to rescue his children. He did not have to walk on the water to save them, but his doing so gave them an unforgettable reminder of the power and extent of his divine protection. He says to us to us right now, "Don't be afraid."

Pastor Michael, how should we take those words, "Don't be afraid" for us today?

We will never find ourselves in a place where Christ cannot find us; and no storm is too severe for him to save us from it. He protects his own, whom he will never fail or forsake (Josh 1:5; Heb. 13:5). The lesson for the disciples is the lesson for us: There is no reason for God's people to fear. There is no reason for anxiety, no matter how hopeless and threatening our problems seem to be. ⁴

Transition: Twelve disciples sat in the boat, paralyzed by fear, and we don't know how eleven of them responded to that voice. Perhaps with confusion, wonder, disbelief, or a little bit of each. But one of them, Peter, was about to become a water-walker. He

² R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 242.

³ France, ibid.

⁴ John F. MacArthur Jr., Matthew, vol. 2, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 441.

recognized that God was present—even in the most unlikely place. He realized that this was an extraordinary opportunity for spiritual adventure and growth. There may be great fear in the storm, but Christ is near to reassure us that he is with us. He'll never leave or forsake us.

3. FAITH IN THE STORM (Mt 14:28-29)

MATTHEW 14:28-29 | And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ²⁹ He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus.

COMMAND ME

One of the striking aspects of the story as Matthew tells it is that Peter does not immediately jump out of the boat. He begins by requesting Jesus to give him permission first. ("Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.")

Pastor Michael, why does Peter do ask the Lord to command him to walk on water? After all, he certainly does not have a problem acting out his impulses.

We see the faith and love Peter has for Jesus. He wants to be with his Lord on the water. He doesn't say, "I believe in the deity of Jesus" —he simply lives it out. He knows Jesus is God, and he asks God for permission to walk on water. What would you ask God in that moment? I think Peter is showing his impulsive nature, but he's also demonstrating faith. It's a beautiful picture of how God works with all of us.

You are a Piece of Work

Pastor Mike, how does God work with us in the storms of life?

Let's begin with a theological question: What does God do all day? God is not like us. He's never bored. Never has he needed to "kill some time". Well what does God do? Sit around and watch us? No! He works. He sovereign. Jesus leaves no doubt that he works, for he says, "My Father is still working, and I also am working." Paul tells us in Ephesians 2 –

Ephesians 2:10, For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

You are God's masterpiece! If you have ever had someone, maybe a boss or a spouse, say sarcastically to you, "You're a piece of work," it is literally true! You are a piece of work being formed by God! So it's right for Peter to say, "Command me!" It's Jesus doing the work.

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⁵ Ibid.

COME TO ME

So, Peter says: Command me, and Jesus says, "Come to me!" Sometimes Peter gets a bad rap because he goes out to meet Jesus and he begins to sink. But we have to see that he's the only one of the 12 disciples that is willing to get out of the boat.

MATTHEW 14:28-29 | And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ²⁹ He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus

We ought not get down on Peter. He walked on water! What faith! It never would have occurred to me to ask Jesus if I could defy the laws of nature! We sometimes get down on Peter for sinking, but none of the other disciples got out of the boat!

Jesus probably isn't right next to the boat. The Lord is **far enough away** that Peter had to say "<u>Lord if it's you</u>, <u>bid me to come and walk on the water</u>" (14:28). This is amazing! Peter gets out of the boat and walks to Jesus! I don't care if the walk was only 3 feet – Peter was walking on water!

But it was likely more like 50 or a hundred feet. It was enough a distance that the disciples didn't recognize him at first! I can imagine Peter walking or even running to Jesus on water. His faith was empowered. He's doing something no human begin except for Jesus has done.

How beautiful it is that Jesus commands us to come and follow him, even if it is out onto the water. Jesus told Peter to "come" to him on the water. Even though it made no sense, Peter did what Jesus said. This is what obedience looks like—doing what Jesus says. Jesus often answers in ways that defy our logic, and in Peter's case, it defied nature as well. Is there any area in your life that you are not following the Lord in?

God's Empowerment

It is not human nature to walk on water. But as Jesus called Peter out and gave him the power to walk on water. With Jesus' command, Jesus granted the power to defy nature. We have the same power to do what God wants us to do. No matter what the storm is, we have the power to do what God wants us to do. Peter shared the glory of water walking with Jesus. There is only one other person to walk on water: Jesus.

SAVE ME

MATTHEW 14:30 | But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me."

Peter looked to Jesus in faith. That's how he walked on water. The Lord willed it, and Peter believed. Once Peter knows it's Jesus, he understands that Jesus is bigger than the storm. But there came a point when Peter began to sink. Peter's faith was enough to get him out of the boat, but it was not enough to carry him across the water.

Many have criticized Peter. But, I have yet to see any of his critics repeat his feat. We can learn a lot from Peter walking on the water.

Faith Looks to Jesus

Although a storm surrounded him, Peter looked to Jesus. The only problem was that he stopped looking at Jesus. The principle is clear: especially when life is a tumultuous storm, don't stop looking for Jesus.

"Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith" (Heb 12:2).

Faith Takes the Next Step

Pastor Michael, how is faith pictured in this narrative of Peter walking on the water?

Faith is simply taking the next step. We can't look too far ahead and start worrying. Peter took one step to get out of the boat and onto the water. Peter was doing just fine when he was focused on the next step and got into trouble when he lost sight of his next step. In life, God always has a next step for us, and he promises to give grace (2 Cor 12:9), no matter how hard that step is, if we will only look to Jesus.

Faith is a Growing Experience

Peter grew in experiencing the supernatural power of the Lord. Peter did not experience the supernatural power of God that allowed him to walk on water until he trusted Jesus by actually getting out of the boat. Is there anything God wants you to do, but you are too afraid to "get out of the boat"? Peter had enough faith to get out of the boat, but not enough to walk all the way to Jesus. Faith is a growing experience.

Fear Will Sink You

Notice, when Peter loses focus, he starts sinking.

Pastor Michael why is fear so dangerous in the believers' life?

Fear will always sink the believer. We are called never to fear anything, except fearing God and trembling before his love and grace. Is there any fear that is gripping and controlling your decision making? Repent of fear in your life, because fear is always connected to idolatry. Peter had no control over those waves, but he should never have taken his eyes off the one who did.

Faith Sees Christ as Sovereign

Christ is the Savior and Sovereign. Without the understanding that he "works all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph 1:11), you will go crazy trying to figure out Plan B. There's only a Plan A: trust Jesus.

Jesus not only saved Peter from hell, but on this occasion, Jesus saved Peter from **drowning**. Remember, when the waves are over your head, they're under his feet. You can choose to worry or worship when we realize Christ is the Sovereign over the storm.

Our Faith Failures are Never Wasted

We might say this was a major failure on Peter's part. But remember, he's the only one that got out of the boat! It wasn't a wasted test of faith. Though he failed, we are still learning from Peter's failures. Whatever you are going through, it's not wasted.

Pastor Mike, why does Jesus rebuke Peter?

The Lord wanted Peter, and he wants all of us, to grow in faith and endure. This is a major theme of the Bible. Who the Lord loves, he rebukes and chastens. He's going to continue to help us grow. Peter saw the wind and "he was afraid." Perhaps he was **running up a ten-foot wave**. At some point he gave into fear and began to sink. He didn't have to sink. Jesus rebuked Peter because he stopped looking to Jesus. But Peter got to experience the saving hand of Jesus. He would never forget it. Jesus didn't waste Peter's storm, and he won't waste yours.

4. OUR FOCUS IN THE STORM (Mt 14:31-33)

Sometimes in life our focus is to get rid of the storm. Jesus has a different focus. He wants us to worship him in the midst of the storm. Sometimes we need to go through the storm to see his mighty power in our lives, so we can worship him.

JESUS' FOCUS

Jesus was right there, and he allowed Peter to sink. But the truth is, Peter was never going to drown. Many times in our Christian life, we have true faith, but it does not survive the crisis.

MATTHEW 14:31a | Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him...

When we fail as Christians, we need to remember to take Jesus' hand. Don't stay a failure. You may fail, but you must quickly put your focus back on Jesus.

PETER'S DOUBT

MATTHEW 14:31 | Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Pastor Michael, why did Peter doubt? Why do we doubt?

The word "doubt" (from Greek *distazō*) suggests the idea of trying to go in two different directions at once or of serving two different masters simultaneously.⁶ When we lose our focus on Jesus, we always sink. We have to be single-minded, single focused people.

Matthew 6:33, Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Keep your focus on Jesus. We are not to worry and take on God's role. We are to focus on him, and he will bring everything else to pass. The main thing we need to be concerned about is "what brings God the most honor in this situation?" Then we need to obey whatever pleases God.

⁶ Craig Blomberg, Matthew, vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 235.

RIGHT FOCUS EQUALS RIGHT WORSHIP

Look at what happens through the storm. Their faith grows and they immediately start worshipping Christ! They see that Jesus is bigger than the whatever storm they were going through.

Pastor Michael, would you read verses 31-33?

MATTHEW 14:31-33 | Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³² And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³ And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

The storm stills and the disciples' reverence and understanding of Jesus reach a new high. Jesus is the very Son of God, exercising prerogatives reserved in the Old Testament for Yahweh himself (*cf* Job 9:8 and Ps 77:19). ⁷

Just as instantaneously, "the boat was at the land to which they were going" (John 6:21). They had been three or four miles out to sea and the storm was still raging as fiercely as ever; but in an instant it stopped and the boat was at its destination.⁸ It's hardly surprising that the disciples began to worship Christ! They could see him as God who controlled the storm. Their hearts were softened in the storm.

The point is: sometimes it's only through the storms that we can properly see Christ in all his power and glory. Don't ask God to change the storm. Ask him to change you in the storm!

CONCLUSION

What we are called to do—it's so basic and obvious, but so hard to do in practice—is to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, and our ears open for his encouragement (even if it does contain some rebuke as well). And our wills and hearts must be ready to do what he says, even if it seems crazy at the time.⁹

Let's remember the encouragement from the author of Hebrews 12:1-2.

Pastor Michael, would you read this passage?

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb 12:1-2).

Let's look unto Jesus especially in the storm! Amen and amen!

⁸ MacArthur, 444–445.

⁷ Blomberg, 236.

⁹ Tom Wright, Matthew for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-15 (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 191.