

THE STORM OF LIFE

John 6:16-21

Key Verse: 6:20

But he said to them, "It is I; don't be afraid."

Life is often compared to voyage. Sometimes we have a smooth sailing on calm water. Other times, our boat runs into a furious storm or an iceberg. On the night of April 14, 1912, the Titanic was on her maiden voyage to New York with 2,200 people onboard. The gigantic ship hit an iceberg and four hours later sank. The lives of 1,517 people perished in the sea. Only about 30 miles from the ship was another huge ship, the SS Californian. The Titanic's telegraph operator frantically sent out SOS, but the wireless set on the Californian was closed because the ship's only operator (Cyril Evans) had gone to bed. So many people perished because no one could hear the cries for help.

In today's passage, Jesus' disciples find themselves in the middle of a dark sea with their lives in danger. Jesus heard their cries (he always hears our cries for help!). He came to help the disciples, walking on the water. He told them, "It is I; don't be afraid." We learn that Jesus is the Creator God in whom we can put our trust. We also learn that Jesus gave his disciples a storm training to help them to overcome fear and become courageous spiritual leaders. May God help us learn to overcome storms of life by welcoming Jesus into our boat!

I. THE STORM OF LIFE WITHOUT JESUS (16-19)

Look at verses 16-17. *"When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them."* For the disciples, this particular day had begun on a cheerful note. Jesus decided to have a leadership retreat with them at the far shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus and his disciples had been so busy in helping the people with all kinds of problems that they often didn't have time to eat (Mk 3:20). So they were excited to have a retreat with Jesus. But their plan did not work out.

As we learned in the first part of this chapter, a great crowd of people followed them there. They were a demanding crowd who had no consideration for Jesus and his disciples. To the disappointment of the disciples, Jesus would not send the crowd away. Instead, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus wanted to feed them. He asked the disciples, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" (5) The disciples looked at each other and shrugged, saying, "Doesn't he know that we don't have money? Besides, there is no McDonald's or Burger King around here." Philip took out his calculator and argued why it was impossible for them to feed the 5,000 people by presenting a cost estimate to Jesus. But Andrew had faith in Jesus. He understood the shepherd's heart of Jesus. So he looked around and found a boy with a lunch bag. He brought the boy's lunch to Jesus with the prayer, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" (9) It

seemed a ridiculous idea, but Jesus accepted his prayer and faith and performed a great miracle. Jesus fed the hungry 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish. Jesus also helped his disciples to participate in the work of God by helping the people to sit down in groups and distributing the bread and fish. They also collected the leftovers and 12 baskets were filled with the food. Each of the 12 disciples had one basket filled with bread and fish. No doubt they were amazed at the miracle. They experienced personally that the shepherd's heart of Jesus could bring forth a miracle of feeding 5,000 with five loaves and two fish.

We are praying for 8,000 SU students to come to know this Jesus. It seems impossible to reach out to them when we think about what we are up against. We are weak and don't have much to offer, while the spiritual indifference and pleasure-seeking mindset of students seem impossible to overcome. But Jesus, who fed 5,000 with five loaves and two fish, is on our side. Andrew's prayer, Jesus' shepherd heart, and the disciples' participation in helping the people to sit down resulted in a miracle. And this spiritual principle is still relevant to us. If we bring to Jesus what we have, our five loaves and with fish, with prayer, God will bless them to feed young students with the life-giving word of God. May God use each one of us to participate in the work of God by helping students sit down and study the Bible!

Look at verse 17 again. *"where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them."* Now it was already evening. It was dark. The disciples went down to the lake to go back home. They got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. But Jesus had not joined them. Where was Jesus? According to Mark's Gospel (6:46), Jesus went up on a mountainside to pray. He had a busy day of helping the large crowd. But Jesus found time to pray in a quiet place. It was time for him to recharge himself through a fellowship with God. We must learn from Jesus how to restore ourselves after a hard day at work.

When the disciples got into the boat, the water of the sea was calm. They felt good about the boat ride. Besides, some of them were former fishermen and were very familiar with the Sea of Galilee. Soon, however, a strong head wind was blowing and the waters grew rough (18). The Sea of Galilee is situated in a basin surrounded by mountains. Cool air from the Mediterranean Sea is drawn down through the narrow mountain passes and clashes with the hot and humid air lying over the lake. So the lake is particularly susceptible to sudden, violent storms. The disciples struggled at the oars. But the boat did not seem to be going anywhere. They were about three or four miles from the shore. And the night seemed to become darker and the storm stronger. When they saw that the sea was too stormy to handle with their strength, they became fearful. They were afraid that they might drown. They were overwhelmed by fear. They remembered many horrible stories about people who were swallowed up by the stormy sea.

Suddenly they saw a man walking on the water. And the man was approaching their boat. Look at verse 19. *"When they had rowed three or three and a half miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water and they were terrified."* It was

Jesus. But they were terrified, because they thought he was a ghost (Mk 6:49). When the disciples were overwhelmed by fear, every moving thing looked like a ghost to them, even Jesus. It was the same Jesus whom they lived and traveled together everyday but the fear in their hearts played a trick on their eyes.

Likewise, people without God are overwhelmed with fear as they go through storms of life. Jacob in the book of Genesis was determined to be a man of success in every way. First, he cheated his older brother Esau and took away the birthright of the first-born son. Then he was afraid of his brother's vengeance and ran away from home. Next, he struggled for his love. He worked for 14 years without compensation in order to marry Rachel. Finally, he struggled to build wealth for himself by any means. Twenty years later, he was coming home with four wives, eleven sons, one daughter, and two huge groups of animals and enormous wealth, all because God blessed him. But Jacob had a great anxiety despite his success. His storm of life was facing his brother Esau again. He thought Esau would kill him and all his children and animals. This anxiety had been his storm of life for 20 years. Jacob lived in this storm because he did not believe the promise of God given to him at Bethel. It turned out that he had worried about nothing, because his brother welcomed him with love.

We cannot expect our lifeboat to sail on glassy waters all the time. Just when we think that everything is going our way, a sudden storm may rock our boat. For example, if we sail on a boat called career or power, then it will meet the storm called competition. If our boat is human love, it may meet the storm called betrayal. If we try to hold on to the boat called beauty, it will certainly meet the storm called aging. Our boat called body may be rocked by the storm called sickness. If our boat is money or wealth, it may suffer from the storm called economic downturn or stock market crash. How can we overcome the storms of life?

II. THE STORM OF LIFE WITH JESUS (20-21)

Look at verses 19-20. *When they had rowed three or three and a half miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were terrified. But he said to them, "It is I; don't be afraid."* After prayer, Jesus came to his disciples, walking on the water. The disciples were terrified. But Jesus said to them, *"It is I; don't be afraid."* When Jesus said, "It is I," he declared himself to be the Creator God who controls the nature. No one can walk on water, let alone stormy water. Ever since an apple fell on the head of Sir Isaac Newton, we accept his universal law of gravity as one of the most fundamental laws of the nature. We know we should not try to walk on water as we will surely drown. But Jesus walked on the water in that stormy night. More importantly, he said, "It is I; don't be afraid." Jesus taught them that he is the Creator God. "It is I," Jesus said. The disciples must know who he is. If the disciples were only wowed by the miracle of the feeding the 5,000, they missed the whole point of it. The point was to teach who he is and his shepherd's heart toward his people. Now he walked on the water. It wasn't a stunt to impress them, like David Blane often tries to do with his illusions. The point was to teach them who he is—the Creator God. Jesus said, "It is I; don't be afraid."

Look at verse 21, “*Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.*” Realizing that it was Jesus, the disciples welcomed him. They did not see Jesus as a ghost anymore. They welcomed him into the boat. Immediately, the boat reached the shore where they were heading. This event teaches us that life without Jesus is a constant struggle. We may struggle very hard to survive, but we go nowhere, because in the end sinful men are swallowed up by the sea of death. This is the reason why Jesus gave the disciples a storm training so that they could learn to depend on God. Jesus taught them to overcome fear and become courageous spiritual leaders. They needed this kind of training. With their own strength they could not go anywhere. But when they welcomed Jesus, they arrived safely at their destination. Likewise, at the time of a storm of life, we must hear Jesus’ voice, “*It is I; don’t be afraid.*” All we have to do is invite Jesus into our boat of life.

As I said earlier, life is compared to voyage. Sometimes, our life is like a gliding yacht on gentle water. So some people feel that they are on a big ocean liner like *Titanic*; nothing can be on their way to their destination called happiness. But we know what happened to this giant, so-called ‘unsinkable’ ship. Many times, our life confronts a stormy sea that we cannot handle with our own strength. Most people become fearful and helpless when they face the stormy sea of life. But we must hear Jesus’ voice, “*It is I; don’t be afraid.*” Without Jesus we cannot overcome the fear and anxiety in our hearts. When we have Jesus in our boat, there is no fear in our hearts. We don’t have to be afraid of the stormy sea of life.

Why did Jesus train his disciples in the storm? He gave them a ‘storm training,’ so that they might overcome their fear problem. God doesn’t give us fear. Fear comes from Satan. It is an effective weapon that Satan uses against us. Fear increases when we our faith becomes weak. We can overcome fear when we have faith in Jesus. Spiritual leaders must overcome fear to carry out God’s mission.

Another reason the Lord gives us a storm training is that it helps us to depend on God. We always have a small or big storm that reminds us that we need God in our lives. Storms of life help us to know what is important in life. There is a story about a *Titanic* survivor. As the ship began to sink, this passenger had a choice to make. There was a bunch of expensive jewelry and then there was this orange. Which one do you think she grabbed? She chose the orange. When life is threatened, we come to know what is really important in our lives. So all storms of life can be opportunities for us to come closer to God.

Jesus saw that his disciples needed to overcome their fear. He wanted to help them solve their fear problem so that they might be shepherds for the people who were suffering from fear problem. Like the disciples, each of us has a fear problem that challenges us. Some of us are fearful about a specific matter such as getting sick without health insurance, failing an exam or losing a job. Others have vague fear about uncertain future. Each of us must solve this fear problem. How? We must listen to the voice of

Jesus, *"It is I; don't be afraid."* We must invite Jesus into our boat and let him be the co-captain of our ship.

Jesus can help us in all kinds of stormy situations in life. It is interesting to note that Jesus used the Sea of Galilee as a training venue for his disciples. In one instance, Jesus was in a boat with them, sleeping in the stern, when a furious storm arose. When the disciples woke him up, as they were about to drown, Jesus got up and rebuked the storm, saying, "Quiet! Be still!" (Mk 4:35-41 cf. Lk 8:22-25; Mt 8:23-27). The wind died down immediately. The disciples asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and waves obey him!" In today's passage, Jesus came to help them, walking on the water through the furious storm (19-20). In Matthew 14, Jesus told Peter to walk over to him on the water. He was able to do it when his eyes were fixed on Jesus, but began to sink as soon as he looked at the waves. Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" (Mt 14:31) We learn that Jesus can help us to overcome our storms when we fix our eyes on him and put our trust in him. Notice that Jesus sometimes gets rid of the storm for us; other times he wants us to go through it. Either way, Jesus assures us that we will get to our destination as long as we are with him.

In today's passage, we learned that we are safe from the storms of life when we are with Jesus. Jesus also takes us safely to our final destination, that is, the kingdom of God. May God help us to overcome storms of life by listening to the voice of Jesus, *"It is I; don't be afraid."* May we invite Jesus into our lives! May God raise up each one of us to be a courageous spiritual leader in this stormy world!