

# Jesus and the Storm

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Preacher: Pastor Cathy Hall Stengel

[ 0 : 00 ] Hi, welcome to the sanctuary on this Tuesday afternoon, this beautiful time of the day when I can come here and light candles and take off my mask because I'm the only one in this whole part of the building and spend some time in prayer, in scripture, and with you.

The scripture that my heart was drawn to, and I wasn't even entirely sure why, is from Matthew chapter 14 when we read about Jesus sending the disciples in the water, in the boat, ahead of him and he goes to pray and then all kinds of chaos breaks loose on the lake with the disciples, all kinds of things unfold.

Why might that have been a scripture that God said, Kathy, go there, read there?

We the church staff and the leaders of all the teams have been about finishing all the reports, getting ready for next year, nominating and staff, parish relations committee and compensation, and a budget for 2021.

I think that our finance people could easily say to you that creating a budget in a time when the storms blow and we don't know what 2021 brings.

[ 1 : 46 ] It creates a little bit of anxiety and yet they persevere. And tonight we will go over a budget.

Is that why God sent me to this passage? Is it about nominating committee? Is it about the staff and compensation for next year? Is it about the budget?

Is it about the current political climate? Is it about the fear and anxiety that people are feeling about whatever the state of this pandemic might be?

What is it? Is it about my own faith? Is it me? I see in that passage. I have it printed up here next to my phone.

What is it, God? What would you have me see? I'm pretty sure that if it was a multiple choice question where you have A and B and C and D is often all of the above and E, none of the above.

[ 2 : 54 ] I pick D for how it is that God might have pointed me towards this scripture. There are a lot of the places in the Bible where we hear about anxious times.

We hear about conflict and war and starvation and wandering in the desert and people who are facing the death of loved ones and they're desperate for healing and good news.

The Bible is full of those stories. Life and birth and death and chaos and trauma and tragedy and beauty and so many things.

This passage, to me, it tells a little bit of the story of this chapter of life that we're all in.

Not just us from Pendleton Center and Niagara Falls and all of those of you who watch this from far off and nearby.

[ 4 : 01 ] But the whole world is experiencing a level of chaos. The pandemic is part of it. Things are a part of it.

Fear is a big part of it. Anxiety about all kinds of things. And some of that is the anxiety that a person might feel very anxious and their heart might be fast and all of those things.

Some of it is sort of a...we might not even name it. We might not even be able to say that things are anxious, that people are anxious.

And yet, what we see around us feels a little bit sometimes like how the disciples might have felt on the boat when the boat is rocking and rolling and the wind is blowing and probably water is splashing over the side of the boat.

And they're wondering, will they ever get to land? They had been sent on the boat across the lake the night before. And Jesus comes in the morning and finds them on the boat crying out.

[ 5 : 16 ] They're scared and they're lost and they haven't made it to land yet. And Jesus sees them and he goes towards them. And when they see him, they're more terrified because they think, what is this?

A ghost coming to us in the midst of an already terrifying time in our lives. What does Jesus do?

Jesus calls out. He speaks out to them and he said, be encouraged. It's me. Don't be afraid.

You can almost imagine at least the storm inside their heads began to calm. They had seen Jesus do miraculous things.

And so surely Jesus was coming to save them. And Peter. Peter sees Jesus walking on the water and he says, Jesus, let me walk on the water.

[ 6 : 19 ] Call me to come to you. And Jesus says, come. And so Jesus has Peter get out of the boat and walk on the water, which is calmed some.

But then the wind began to blow and the water to turn a little bit. And Peter became afraid and he started to sink.

And he called out to Jesus and he said, Lord, rescue me. There's been a lot of that in the last six months.

There's been a lot of that when we see the lives that we knew change into something that we're not sure we recognize. Nothing's the same.

Nothing's the same. It doesn't mean it's all bad because here we are. And we are people of hope and people of faith.

[ 7 : 26 ] And yet nothing is the same. We wear masks to church. We wear masks to the grocery store. We wear masks when we go to.

I went to an auto parts store the other day. We wear masks when you go there, too. Do we get used to it? Or do we feel like it makes the ground beneath us wave and wind and storm?

I don't just mean the masks. I mean, what has happened? And I think more importantly, what is going to happen? What is going to happen?

I think about these congregations. And I think about the people we've connected with across the land, across the state and across the country.

And they have been blessed by what we have brought to them. Things that we could have never brought to them before this pandemic.

[ 8 : 31 ] Because God looked across the storm. And he saw people. He saw people who said, Lord, what do we do?

We're afraid. We need to be people of hope and people in ministry. But we don't know the way. And Jesus said, it's me.

Be encouraged. Don't be afraid. And so our congregations began to reach out through the Internet.

By telephone. By so many different ways. And then finally, we were able to safely open the doors for people who were ready.

And yet we're still on the Internet, on your computer, on your TV, on your phone. Because we know that some of you just need to stay home. It's the right thing to do.

[ 9 : 32 ] And you don't have to apologize or feel guilty that you can't come and be here. I understand that it sometimes makes you feel sad because it's your church.

It's your church here and your church in Niagara Falls. And this is a part of what your life has always been. At least for a time. Longer than it's been a part of my life here in Pendleton Center and Niagara Falls.

So what do we do as a church? As we look towards the end of this year and we work on the nominating work.

And some of you might not know what that is. But that's looking around and seeing who might God be calling into leadership. Into mission. Into ministry.

In areas of finance and trustees. And other ways of being in ministry in this church. And in Niagara Falls.

[ 10 : 38 ] It's a time when we look at our staff. And say, are we being faithful to God with the staff we have? Are we being good stewards of our resources?

What do we do in 2021 in terms of our staff? It's a time when the finance team and some of the staff does the really hard work of creating a budget.

And we've already talked about it once. And then there's been lots of communication. And the question is, how do we create a budget when we don't know what the new year is going to bring?

How do we create a budget when we don't know so much? Sometimes we look over our shoulders in the past to see, well, where's the encouragement?

Where is the encouragement for people and resources to volunteer and to serve on teams? Where has it come from in the past?

[ 11 : 50 ] It's come from you. It's come when there's a time and a place where somebody says, I see something in you. And I believe in you.

Come and serve with us. That's how we did it before. And that's how we will do it now. And that's how we will do it in the future.

The reality of the church and the number of people that can be here and masks, they're not going to stop that. We're going to keep planning for the future and for what those opportunities might look like.

And even in new and different ways. It's a time when I'm mindful that the staff that you have known longer than I have, oh my goodness, they have worked so hard.

Hard. At home, from home, here, back to home. They have been faithful to what they have been asked to do here.

[ 12 : 59 ] I think about our finances. Maybe sometimes we get a little bit into that sloshy water of the waters rising and we wonder, well, what are we going to do?

Where's the money going to come from? It's the same thing. We look back over our shoulders and we see where did the support come from over the years.

Where did the support come from in March when we could no longer have worship in person and the checks came in and the donations came in online and in the mail.

And that's where we're going in the mail. You found ways to get your offerings here. And that's where we're going in the future.

We are counting on the people, the volunteers, you and your gifts. We are counting on our staff as they grow in depth and have endured this pandemic.

[ 14 : 08 ] And we are counting on and planning for the abundance of your generosity. Is the generosity just money, my friends?

It is in part because we need it. And it's important and it's what God calls us to do. And it's the church that you have claimed.

And so it's right and good to support the church with your finances. But generosity isn't just that. Sometimes generosity is patience.

Patience. Belief. Belief. That we, just like Peter, when he said, call me out on the water.

He believed anything was possible. Because he believed and he saw Jesus. There isn't a person here.

[ 15 : 18 ] Volunteers. Staff. Sunday morning. The people out in the communities. The people calling. All of our pastors. There isn't any one of them who isn't doing their very best to find our way to making sure we see Jesus in the midst of the storm.

You don't know me. Many of you don't know me. But I'd like to invite you to be generous with patience.

To be generous with kindness. To be generous with helping us keep this place safe. To be generous in knowing that we're all in the storm.

We're all in the boat. We're all the ones who are stepping out in water of things we don't know. And what's the one thing we have in common?

You see the cross behind me? The same Jesus who said, be encouraged. You don't have to be afraid.

[ 16 : 34 ] It's me. And the same Jesus who when Peter said, I'm going to go down. I'm going to sink. I'm afraid.

The winds are blowing again. Help me. And Jesus reached out and took his hand. That's my prayer.

That we realize, you know what? At the end of the day, no matter what, we're in the same boat. All of us. We're in the same boat.

We are. We are. So when the wind blows and one of us is afraid, then maybe more than one. But maybe there are also people who can see Jesus when we can't.

And so together we see the light and the life and the hope of Jesus. And even if the storm is raging around us and we have no control over it, the storm in here and the storm in this space can be calmed.

[ 17 : 49 ] I appreciate your letting me come into your lives this way and visiting you in a very different way than I might have. I hope that you'll still invite me to come and serve communion at your home in whatever way works for you.

I did it this past Sunday and it was wonderful. So just let us know if you would like a visit and to receive communion because if you're safer at home, that's exactly where we want you to be.

We want you to be safe. And so we're happy to come to you in whatever way feels best to say hello, to pray and to offer you the gift of Holy Communion.

I thank you for welcoming me as best any congregation can who is not all gathered here together. You have been such encouragers.

And I see in you what God sees in you. Probably not as well, but I see light and life and giftedness and faithfulness and a willingness to find the face of Jesus in the storm and be encouraged.

[ 19 : 16 ] Let's pray. Let's pray. Oh God, how the winds blow and sometimes things flap around us just like they were sails on a sailboat.

Sometimes things fly around and just like things flying off the deck of a boat in a storm. Lord, we so often struggle when we don't feel like we have control.

And so, Lord, we sometimes look for what we can control. And yet it's so hard. Help us.

Send your Holy Spirit. Send the face of Jesus to show us the way. To give you honor and glory and praise.

Help us to see Jesus' face so that we can see the way. To make sure that this church is about nothing more than you.

[ 20 : 18 ] And serving this community. This area. And remembering what we bring to it.

Your word. Your hope. Your life in light. Lord, I pray for all who can hear these words. That they might know your love.

That they might feel some safety in the wind. And that they might know that you will never, ever leave them. In the boat.

Out on the stormy lake. By themselves. Hear us and guide us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Thanks again.

It's good to be with you. And I look forward to when we can do it again. Take care. And be in touch. We're here.