

THEME: "Take Courage! I AM."

Text: Matthew 14:22-33 (NIV)

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. 23 After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, 24 but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. 25 During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. 26 When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. 27 But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." 28 "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." 29 "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. 30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" 32 And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. 33 Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

The Bible account that is our text for today is about fear and faith in the midst of a storm. Kind of ironic that this is the text that came up for this week in the periscope (or preaching "calendar") that I use, as we've been hearing and seeing reports of a terrifying hurricane has been battering the state of Texas and causing catastrophic flooding with more and more torrential rain on the way.

When I think about the times in my life that I have been most afraid and have been literally paralyzed with fear, my thoughts usually go to the last time a hurricane hit the state of Texas in 2008. I was living by myself as the pastor of our church in the Houston area at that time when Hurricane Ike made a direct hit on the city. I remember what it felt like to ride out that storm overnight—hours and hours of pounding, hurricane force winds and rain. I remember hearing the brick house I was living in "creak" and "groan" from its force. I remember hearing what turned out to be the tops of large pine trees smash against the peak of my roof at one point, and in the middle of the night, when the storm was its fiercest I wanted to look out the window to see what it looked like outside and to see if there was any damage and all I could manage was about a 2 second peek through the blinds of my bedroom window. I immediately went back under the covers of my bed which I had moved to the center room of my house. That hurricane was a horrifying event that I'll never forget, and the fear that I felt at times during that hurricane—paralyzing fear that makes you feel truly helpless—is something I will never forget. It's been hard for me to even hear about and see footage of the devastation and the flooding that's going on down there right now because it brings those memories back and makes my heart hurt for the people who are having to go through something like that again, just nine years later.

Have you ever been that afraid before? So afraid that you were paralyzed with fear? Maybe it was during a storm. Maybe it was during the earthquake that many of you were here for in 1989. If you've ever felt **fear** like that you know that it is not a good feeling. It's not just moments or incidents in life that can "paralyze" us with fear, either. It can be any number of things that come our way in life. It can even be life that paralyzes us with fear! What is it in your life right now that you would say you **fear** the most? Is there one thing or a number of things in life that you would say you are afraid of?

In our text for this morning we read of a situation where Jesus' disciples were paralyzed with **fear**. Can you blame them? If you were on a boat in a terrible windstorm rowing desperately for shore in the middle of the night and you see a figure walking on water near you, do you think you'd be afraid? Our text tells us, "**When the disciples saw him [Jesus] walking on the lake, they were terrified. 'It's a ghost,' they said, and cried out in fear**" (Matthew 14:26).

sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" (Matthew 14:30) He began to look around again at the wind and the waves instead of at Jesus, the one who was allowing Peter to walk on the water with Him.

It can be very hard NOT to look at the "wind" and the "waves" of life that are all around us—especially in times that are particularly troubling or terrifying. It is easy to lose our focus on Jesus and the fact that He IS, and is right here with us. Our problems are real. Our struggles are real. Our **fears** are real. It is not surprising that many times we are afraid. We are not surprised that the disciples were afraid in the situation they were facing in our text! That's what you'd expect them to be! We would be too. Our problems and struggles—life-threatening or not—our tragedies and losses, our sins, our guilt, our **fears** are all too real. Jesus can seem very un-real. We can't see Him with our physical eyes. We can't touch Him. We sometimes have a hard time seeing His work in our lives. We can easily become afraid and begin to sink, just like Peter.

But Jesus reminds us He IS real! **"Take courage! I AM. Don't be afraid."** It has been said that courage is not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. Because Jesus IS we can be courageous. Because Jesus IS we can triumph over our fears, because with Him by our side we have nothing to fear!

When we are drowning in the "winds" and "waves" of life we can (and should) do exactly what Peter did: We can cry out to Jesus, **"Lord, save me!" (Matthew 14:30)** He has saved us, and He WILL, always! He reached out His hands on the cross to forgive us—to forgive us even for all the times our **fears** have overcome our faith. If He was willing to do that, to die for us in order to forgive us and give us life, we can be certain that He will also **"reach out His hand"** to catch us and pull us out and rescue us from the "wind" and the "waves" of life's troubles—at just the right time, in just the right way—just like He rescued Peter! We read again from our text, **Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"**

Jesus comforts us by calling out to us in the storm, **"Take courage! I AM. Don't be afraid."** But doesn't He also often have to gently rebuke us for our lack of trust in Him? **"You of little faith,"** He says to Peter, and to us, **"why did you doubt?"**

Jesus is not some "little" lifeboat in the midst of the stormy seas of life. He is mighty to save—and to save completely! Listen again to the last verses of our text: **And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. (Matthew 14:32).** The Gospel of John also tells us that after they let Jesus into the boat, **"immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading." (John 6:21).**

Jesus is able to save us completely as well. Not just to reach down pull us out of the "storms" of this life, but also to take us safely to the "shore" where we are heading—our true home in heaven. Jesus has reached down to us to save us. He came down from His throne in heaven to put Himself in the midst of the "wind" and the "waves" of life on this earth. He came to live as, **"God with us"—"Jehovah [Yaweh], the "I AM" God, with us!"** He came to die for us so that we would never drown in the sea of our own sins or be taken under by the "waves" of our guilt. And He absolutely proved once and for all that He IS and always will be **"I AM"** at His resurrection from death. So, because of Jesus we don't even need to be afraid of death! Jesus resurrection guarantees us that death will not be the end for us; it guarantees us that life—everlasting life, body and soul in heaven—is waiting for us when He comes again to receive us to Himself **(see John 14:1-6).**

Jesus has gathered us here again today in His house—away from the storms, the "wind" and the "waves" of life—and has come to us once again through His Word and called out to us, **"Take courage!" "Take courage! I AM. Do not be afraid." (Matthew 14:27).** How are we going to respond to Jesus' words? With **fear**? Or with FAITH? May we respond to Jesus' Words and His rescue of us in the same way His disciples did that night on the sea, **Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly YOU ARE the Son of God" (Matthew 14:33).** Amen.

Prayer for a “Fear-Conquering Faith” – 8/27/17

O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—You alone are God! You alone can do all things! We acknowledge that You are in control of all things: this universe, this world, our lives, and our very souls.

But we confess, Lord, that we have not always trusted You. Our FAITH in You has not always overcome our FEAR. Forgive us, Lord, and wash us completely from all our sins.

**LORD, Give us
STRENGTH to serve You,
COURAGE to commit all things to You,
and FAITH to trust You in all things!**

O most merciful God and Father, Creator of Heaven and Earth we come before You today awed by the expression of Your power in the recent hurricane, and distressed in heart at the loss of health, life, home, property, and necessities that so many experienced. We thank You, Lord, for Your protection and Your mercy in keeping so many people, including my family members and loved ones, safe during and after the storm. By this visitation and powerful reminder of the passing of all things, help us to look to You for that which is eternal.

We pray that you would comfort those who lost loved ones, homes, and property in the storm and flooding, and we pray that You would give hope to those whose hope has vanished. We ask You to be merciful, to restore power quickly, and if it be Your will, cause the rains to stop and prevent further flooding and devastation.

With the tender touch of Your mercy we also ask You, dear God and Savior, to look upon all who are sick in any way. Treat with compassion all who suffer, all who are weak and weary and worn and sad. With the promise of Your presence cheer the lonely. Bless the fatherless and the widows. Help the needy.

**Strengthen our faith in You, dear Jesus. We believe in You!
Help our unbelief!**

In Your name we pray, as we pray now the prayer that You taught us, “Our Father...”