

The grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Today, we hear a story of the disciples caught in a chaotic situation. [SLIDE]

Jesus leaves them in the evening. He basically has them drop him off on the remote side of the sea, so he can ascend into the mountains to pray ... ALONE ... They are afloat upon the sea most of the night waiting for him. But it's not a calm, relaxing sea, where they rest peacefully through the night. Their boat is battered by the waves. They are no longer near the shore where they dropped Jesus off. The wind is howling – blowing them further away from land. The wildness of the open sea is all around them – their simple boat the only protection from this storm. And while this is certainly not the first time they have endured a storm at sea – This time, Jesus isn't simply asleep at the stern – like he was a few chapters back. He's off in the mountains somewhere. They are on their own.

Now some of us can relate to the situation of an unexpected storm stirred up when we don't expect it. We've been to the boundary waters, or out on a big lake when the weather has turned. We have found ourselves in a similar situation. Uncertain & overwhelmed.

Even if you've never set foot in a boat – you likely know the same sort of vulnerability, uncertainty, and overwhelm all-too well.

Talk to the parent who is trying to keep everything together. Make sure their children have all the things they need for school to start in a few weeks, and all the extra-curricular forms done and practices and schedules and tournaments on the calendar. They are trying to make sure there are shoes-that-fit and hotel rooms booked and carpools organized and dentist appointments and the yardwork is done and childcare arranged and that last minute vet appointment. Not to mention things like clean laundry ... or groceries ... or work deadlines. Overwhelmed. Chaotic.

Or to the family facing health challenges. Scans & tests to diagnose. There are doctor appointments and lab appointments and therapy appointments. Trips to the pharmacy. Waiting for medication that is in short supply or on social workers or an insurance decision or test results or an option for at-home or residential care. Managing pain and symptoms and side effects. Making decisions about treatment options and next steps. Overwhelmed. Chaotic.

We don't need **a boat** to relate to these disciples. We simply need to stop and look around. The difficulties that we face - and those who we know and love -- are OVERWHELMING.

[SLIDE]

In the midst of their overwhelm - in that little boat – a figure suddenly appears on the water moving towards them. His appearance - suspicious because of the water-spray and the wind. **AND** because it's 4 am and still mostly dark.¹ In the chaos – the disciples are beyond terrified – screaming out in fear. **BUT IMMEDIATELY**, Jesus speaks words of reassurance.

He announces.

Take Heart

I AM.

Do not be afraid.

In the swirling chaos of the sea – Jesus shows up and offers words of peace and encouragement. Assurance of God's power, divinity, and presence. The self-assured command to **NOT FEAR**.

I would imagine, that at the sound of Jesus' voice, the announcement of those familiar words "I AM" – first spoken by Yahweh to Moses in the Hebrew scriptures **AND** the reassurance to not be afraid – the disciples could finally take a deep

¹ Carla Works, "Commentary on Matthew 14:22-33" from WorkingPreacher.org, published August 10, 2014.

breath. *exhale* A sigh of relief. They'd have an inherent understanding that they were going to be okay.

And yet.

The storm still rages.

“Jesus doesn't actually rebuke the winds in this passage. **He just shows up.**”² A close reading of this story, we see that the wind doesn't die down until Jesus gets **into the boat** in verse 32. And **THIS** snap-shot moment of tension, of in-between the chaos and fear and overwhelm -- and those in the boat **FINALLY** declaring Jesus is truly the Son of God – is where I'm finding myself dwell in this story.

[SLIDE]

This “in-between” is real life. Storms rage. Exhaustion and vulnerability surround us. Chaos and overwhelm batter our boats. Sometimes it might feel like we don't even have a boat, but ... more like an inflatable pool lounge. The howling wind could pick up or shift at any moment with the next thing, the unexpected news, the last straw. We are tossed and fearful and uncertain. And it is **HERE**, in **THIS** moment that Jesus appears.

² Karoline Lewis, “Dear Working Preacher: When We Can't Walk on Water” from WorkingPreacher.org, Published August 3, 2014.

Christ - speaking words of reassurance.

Take Courage. Keep Hope

I AM GOD.

Do not be afraid.

You see, Jesus' presence isn't some magic cocktail of perfection. The winds and seas don't suddenly transform into a luxury vacation destination with the disciples sipping ice cold lemonade on a Mediterranean beach. Jesus' presence brings with it an **entirely different kind** of experience. Jesus showing up – in the **very midst of the storm** – is a salve all its own. They are not alone.

God dared show up in the moment of chaos and dwells with us ... right there in the overwhelm. Our impulsivity or doubt or fear doesn't keep Jesus away. Nor does our faith or goodness or devotion draw Jesus to us. It doesn't seem to matter whether we cry out or step out, sink or manage the impossible ... or stay in the boat wide-eyed and watching or paddling away. Jesus still is made known and enters this space with us. Whether we are paralyzed by fear & think we can walk on water - Jesus comes among us – as God incarnate.

Jesus reveals himself to us in the midst of chaos.

We are not alone.

Jesus speaks words of assurance to his beloved ones – “Take Heart!”

You are not alone.

Jesus is the great I AM – who comes to us in the storms of life.

We are not alone.

Jesus announces – “Do not be afraid.” I am with you.

You are not alone.

Amen.