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[35] On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." [36] And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. [37] And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. [38] But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" [39] And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. [40] He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" [41] And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?"  
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## ***"Stormy Weather Faith"***

Whew! It had been a long day. Jesus instructed the disciples to take their boat further out to sea. He needed to rest. As the disciples guided the small boat away from the large crowds, they found themselves in the middle of the peaceful water. However, four of the disciples who were seasoned fisherman knew that the Sea of Galilee was known for its stormy temperament.

A strong wind often broke through the surrounding mountains and got trapped inside. It would then circle around like

a lion, stirring up massive waves until it slowly died down.

However, today it was unusually calm - for now.

In fact, it was so calm that the small peaceful waves slowly rocked Jesus to sleep. This was really turning into a relaxing evening. The sun was just setting over the mountains, and all was well. I can picture Peter letting his guard down to relax. Even a crusty ol' fisherman like him could enjoy a sunset that looked like a watercolor painting.

But then, from out of this picture-perfect evening, I can see Peter's body tense up. His trained body senses that the winds are about to pick up. His hunch is confirmed when he hears a screaming, howling wind break through the mountain range. This one was going to be big - really big! By now the other disciples are aware of the coming storm as well. Imagine their surprise when they looked down to find Jesus still sleeping like a baby!

They steadied themselves for the force of the howling wind. But it came upon them faster than they anticipated. It hit them

like a brick wall and knocked them off their feet. They scrambled to get up and prepare for the first wave from the sea. It came just seconds after the wind and hit them, tossing their boat like a toy.

Peter had never seen a storm like this before! Wave after soaking wave crashed into the small wooden boat. The boat was taking on water faster than the twelve could bail it out. This was an uphill struggle. The seasoned fisherman, along with their fellow disciples, had been outmatched. Unless this storm died down now, their ship was sunk!

Jesus! Why was Jesus still sleeping? At least he could help bail out the boat! Didn't he care that they were about to end their lives with a watery grave? Full of fright, they shook their Lord to consciousness. "Don't you care that we are perishing?!"

Jesus, Lord of All, rose from his restful nap and looked the storm straight in the face. "Quiet! Be still!" In an instant, the

wind went from a deafening roar to complete silence, and the waves went from rolling mountains of destruction to a glassy calm.

With the storm gone, Jesus turned to his disciples. "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" It seems clear that any faith the disciples may have had was certainly a fair weather faith - gone at the first sign of bad weather.

But you have to feel for the disciples.

It's easy to sit back and enjoy God's creation when all is well. Yep, being a Christian sure has its advantages when God's blessings are plain as day. It's real easy to have faith when your ship has come in and life is smooth sailing. It's real easy when everything goes as and you're completely healthy. It's real easy when your family and friends are there to support you.

But each one of us knows that life isn't always smooth sailing. A sudden wind can howl at any moment and turn our life into a storm. It only takes a single glitch to throw off an entire well made plan. Maybe you didn't get that new job or raise that

you have been working so hard for. Perhaps an unexpected pregnancy postponed your future goals. You might have just received news from your doctor that you have a terminal case of cancer. And the only way that any of these problems could get worse is if your family and friends turn their backs to you and force you to face your stormy life alone.

The reality of the storm sets in. This reality drops a pit into your stomach that grows and grows until it bursts into full-fledged panic. The poet e. e. cummings sums up this feeling of helplessness and panic, "this world is all a leak, and life preservers there are none." Now, instead of waiting for your ship to come in, you find yourself waiting for your ship to sink.

It's at this point, when you're neck deep in trouble that you begin to wonder where *God* is during this storm. Instead of trusting him for preserving us, we blame him for abandoning us. Doesn't he care? Doesn't he realize the trouble we're in? Heaven forbid that he isn't watching! Or even worse, maybe he has fallen

asleep during our time of need! You decide that now is as good a time as any to pray and try to wake God up.

"Jesus don't you care that I am drowning?" I'm hurting here! Are you there? Are you listening? Do you even care?

The moment these questions leave our lips, we recall Jesus' words to the disciples in the sinking boat. "Why are you still afraid? Do you still have no faith?" These words ring out loud and clear in our hearts.

"Why are you still afraid?" The very fact that we are panicky and full of fright is proof positive that our faith has once again fallen short.

"Do you still have no faith?" Jesus points the finger back at us. It is not him who has fallen asleep on the job - it is us! He has always been with us. But we have too often failed to trust in his care. By panicking, we have misplaced our trust in God to preserve us. As it turns out, the storms that strike our lives often reveal our own fair weather faith.

This is the real problem! Sure, our difficult, worldly problems demand attention, but this is our salvation we are talking about! This is faith, the rock on which we stand! How can we stand on something if it's going down with the ship? It is only natural to ask ourselves, "How can we strengthen our fair weather faith and turn it into life saving faith?" The answer is quite simple. We cannot. But God can. And God does. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God."

Our faith is a gift! It is not something which we do all by ourselves. God gives it to us! And God strengthens it as well. God gives us exercises which build up our faith. These exercises give us the opportunity to trust him in all sorts of conditions. Some of these exercises are small, we may find them trivial. Other exercises may be large; we may find them very difficult. But all of these exercises help to strengthen our trust in God.

And the more and more exercising our faith does, the more and more it can handle.

What then is this exercise program for faith? It's very simple. It's been in front of you all along, from the very beginning. God strengthens our faith by guiding us through the storms! Isn't it ironic? The very things that threaten to capsize our boat God uses to make us stronger! By guiding us through the difficult times in our lives, God gives us opportunities to trust in him.

Talk about ironic! The very things which we first saw as problems and difficulties turn out to be a part of the solution! Why does God let bad things happen to us? The answer is not because God enjoys a cruel joke or falls asleep. The answer is to reveal the weakness of our faith and to give us plenty of opportunities to grow and be strengthened!

He does this to be sure that we will be with him in his heavenly home. He wants to give us faith to trust in him. And he



wants to strengthen our faith so we will rely on him and him alone when the times are rough.

Everything is in his hands, and he promises to see us through. Isaiah 43 sings this promise out loud and clear. "This is what the Lord says, 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.'"

Our Lord is with us through thick and thin. When the going gets tough, God gets going. He sticks by our side and gets us through the hard times. He gives us hope. He gives us a light at the end of the tunnel. We know that whatever life throws at us, we can carry on. We can carry on knowing that Christ is leading us through. And we know that he will guide us without fail.

Jesus has seen storms. He has lived through difficulties. And by hanging on the cross he faced the most life-threatening storm of all. He looked death and damnation - our death and damnation - straight in the face and commanded, "Quiet! Be still!"

And for all time, that deadly storm was forever silenced.

We can be very sure that there will be rough waters in our future. We live in a world that is fallen and full of difficulties. But God is with us. We have hope in our victorious Savior that he will get us through the difficult times. And we have comfort that God chooses to use the difficult times in our lives to help us grow in faith and trust in his care.

Amen.