

Calm in the Storm and Calming the Storm

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle



Prayer of Illumination

Jesus, Savior pilot me
Over life's tempestuous sea
Unknown waves before me roll
Hiding rocks and treach'rous shoal.
Chart and compass come from thee
Jesus, Savior pilot me. Amen.

Background

This scene of Jesus and the disciples on the Sea of Galilee is one of my favorites. It never gets old. It grows with you over the years and comforts us through countless storms we face in our lives. It's amazing how much is going on in these four verses.

So before we dive into the story, there is some helpful background information to help us appreciate the story even more.

First, notice the **similarities of Jonah and Jesus**.

Both fell asleep on a ship during a storm. Both were involved in bringing calm to a storm—
Jonah by being thrown overboard and Jesus commanding the wind and wave to be still by his powerful word.

Jonah was in the belly of the whale for three days; Jesus was in the belly of the earth three days after his crucifixion. Both received new life—

Jonah being spewed on the shore of Ninevah and Jesus being resurrected. Both were rescued to proclaim the power of God.

Second, **the Sea of Galilee**.

This lake is notorious for its sudden and intense storms. One person described the face of the lake as a “huge boiling caldron.” Here’s why: the lake is more than 600 feet below sea level. The hot air ascending from the basin colliding with the cool air descending from the hills creates instantaneous storms almost out of nowhere.

Finally, our scene takes us back to the **Hebrew Scriptures** (Ps. 107:29),

“He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed.”

There is something different, very special, about Jesus. What God did then, Jesus does now. When we encounter Jesus, we encounter the living God, and all we can do is join the wind and wave and obey and worship the Lord in hushed reverence.

Let’s hear now the word of the Lord from—

Scripture: Luke 8:22-25 (NRSVue)

²² One day Jesus got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side of the lake.” So they put out,²³ and while they were sailing he fell asleep. A windstorm swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger.

²⁴ They went to him and woke him up, shouting, “Master, Master, we are perishing!” And waking up, he rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm. ²⁵ Then he said to them, “Where is your faith?”

They were terrified and amazed and said to one another, “Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?”

***The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.***

SERMON – Calm in the Storm and Calming the Storm

We've been getting a lot of storms this monsoon season. Remember a few weeks ago, the hail storm? It was surreal seeing the golf balls from heaven pinging off our roof and plopping in our grass. Earlier this week, Brandon and Caroline Nelson from Immanuel, their truck got struck by lightning while camping on Mount Lemmon. Thank the good Lord they're okay, but the truck needed to be towed down the mountain. You don't want to mess with Mother Nature, especially in monsoon season. Now there are also figurative storms we go through in the various seasons of our lives. And these are just as intense. In fact sociologists use the storm metaphor for the natural cycles of human relationships: groups, organizations, and even society

FORMING, STORMING, NORMING, PERFORMING & REFORMING.

But even if we know in our minds storms are inevitable in our lives, we still find ourselves jolted, even panicked when they hit, because they often come out of nowhere. Or maybe they've been looming storms in the horizon, but we thought they'd never arrive.

So like the disciples, when that storm hits, a lot of emotions swirl inside us. We feel flooded by fear, panic, surprise, uncertainty, anger, dread—just to name a few. We wonder if we're going to go shipwreck.

A lot of us are weathering different storms right now. Many of us are going through some serious **health storms**—tests, treatments, injuries, hospital stays, and surgeries. In these moments, we grapple with our mortality—the aging process going on inside of us, the weathering of time and age on this bag of bones of ours. Others of us are experiencing **grief storms**. Loved ones in hospice, loved ones recently deceased. This last Wednesday was the six-month milestone of my dad's passing. Grief storms can also include the loss or change of something dear to us that we've enjoyed for a long time, that's now concluding. Children leaving for college, cross-country moves, retirement, the toll of the pandemic that's totally changed everything. This loss hurts because we really care and we love. And life feels so incredibly fragile and fleeting in these moments.

This passage is just what we need to help navigate life's storms.

First, **Jesus is in the same boat with us.** He gets in with us. Jesus is with us on this extended "three-hour tour" we're still on. We're not alone. And we have our fellow disciples with us too. We're in this together. Second, **Jesus wants to take us to a new place.** "Let us go to the other side of the lake." Jesus and the disciples knew the west side of the Sea of Galilee like the back of their hand. Their families were there. They grew up there. They fished there. It was comfortable and familiar. But not the other side. The east side of the lake was *very* different.

The journey to the other side was unfamiliar. For Jewish people at that time, crossing the deep watery abyss represented fear, chaos, and dangerous sea monsters. There were the Sea of Galilee's sudden and dangerous storms. Plus, the far side, the east side was populated with Gentiles. The storm god Ba'al was worshiped there.

When Jesus and the disciples actually made it safely to the other side, the first person they confronted was the man oppressed by demons from the Gerasenes, who said, "I am Legion; for we are many." The dark side of the lake was very scary.

This is the thing, **Jesus sometimes takes us to new places** that aren't comfortable or even enjoyable. The new place might be fraught with risk. But Jesus has a purpose for breaking through "to the other side." It tests us, stretches us, forces us to be more resilient—tougher. We're sent out to new mission fields and ministry opportunities.

And here's the big one—it deepens our trust. If life were always smooth sailing or just a lazy river, would we ever really have to trust in God? **Jesus wants our faith in him to grow.** And being comfortable is, unfortunately, way down on Jesus' list.

So, we read that they went for it. Jesus and the disciples put themselves out and went to the other side: risks and uncertainty and dangers and all. In other words, **Jesus wants to move us from fear to faith.** A life enslaved to fear is... no life at all. Fear of rocking the boat, fear of making waves, fear of venturing out into the unknown, it stunts our growth. Holds us back. It's like burying your talent, rather than investing it.



I never want storms; I don't like them. But when they come, which they always do, I've found Jesus does a "shake and wake" to my faith. I awaken to Jesus' glory and power to do the miraculous. I'm wide awake, sitting up, praying, and crying out to God.

There is often loss and disruption in storms. The torrential rains indeed destroy some things, but they also hydrate my thirsty soul. They wash us clean. When we're "at our wit's end" or "up a creek", we realize that there's nothing and no one to help—except Jesus and the mercy of God. There is a bonding that takes place, a deepened trust and reliance upon Christ, that only happens when we go through tough stuff together. We draw closer to Christ and to one another.

When we're in Class 5 white water rapids and uncharted waters, we *have* to trust—we're holding on for dear life. We're stretched and sharpened. We have to make new decisions, face new

situations. Our faith is made stronger when we are exposed to the elements. Storms test and purify our faith.

Now there is an interesting plot twist. Jesus is in the boat. But what is he doing? ...*sleeping*. Thanks Jesus, sleeping on the job! Or is maybe something else going on here that Jesus wants to teach us?

This is my thought: Jesus himself had calm amidst the storm. Jesus is fully divine, but let's not forget, he's also fully human. Just like us, he became tired. He needed rest and he took it. He trusted the disciples and their seamanship. He could let go and trust God—he's not a micro-manager. He knew God was just as near on the sea as on the land, that God is God of not only the Red Sea, but the Sea of Galilee. God is God in the storm and God is God in the calm. And Jesus knew who he was. He knew the authority given to him by God. He could not only multiply loaves and catches of fish, but he could stop wind and wave, all with his mighty word. Everything was okay. They would make safe passage.

Here's the takeaway: We've got to know deep down in our heart of hearts that, wherever Jesus is...the storm becomes a calm...eventually. And, just as importantly, Jesus calms us in the storm because he is calm. Sure, our adrenaline will be pumping, our emotions will be swirling. We may be scared...but we're not afraid. Christ has this. We're going to be okay no matter what. If wind and wave are calmed at his word. So I can be calmed by the word and presence of Christ. We can find and experience God in all things—even in windstorms. This calm, this stillness, this reverence helps us see the preciousness, the beauty, the fragility of everything and everyone around us. In the calm we sense that God is so big and so vast and yet so close.

So, we are gently asked by Christ: *Where is your faith?* He's saying, I know you have it—but don't forget it in storage, don't let it get dusty and unused. Keep it with you. Don't let it get misplaced.

Remember your faith is not in: "perfect storm-free" living. It's not in yourself. It's in Christ—Lord of wind and wave. It is in the Prince of Peace who gives us deep peace as we face storms and go to the other side. It's so much more than just a theoretical faith or intellectual faith. Storms give us an operational faith. A faith that's connected to real life—a faith that looks to Jesus and a faith that doesn't panic.

I'd like to close with a true story of a Priest's Sea Voyage. As a gift from his parishioners, Giang, a Vietnamese priest, went on not an 8-day but a 30-day [Ignatian](#) retreat.

The first few days, Father Giang spent his time simply praising God for his life, which was fulfilling and enriching. Good friends, good relationships with his congregation. His relationship with God had grown only stronger over the years. He thanked God for the privilege of being in the ministry.

But as the prayer retreat stretched on, Giang went further back in his memory to a time that wasn't so peaceful. As a child, he experienced with his family a violent and traumatic escape from Vietnam on a harrowing sea voyage to America. This experience at sea left a deep wound

in him that he knew he would carry to his grave. The more he meditated on this wound, the greater the anger he felt at God for letting him experience this. For two full days of prayer, God seemed to be silent while he asked, "why, Lord?" —over and over again.

Finally, on the third day of praying over his tragic experience he felt a strong sense of God's healing presence. God seemed to lead Giang in an imaginative exercise. God offered to give him a little peek at the divine plan played out in his life in ministry: he saw one scene after another of his ministering to God's people in extraordinary ways. He watched as he brought spiritual healing and relief to so many through the sacrament of reconciliation and pastoral counseling.

But then he felt God speak to him, how his tragic past on the sea voyage helped him care for others. He noticed how much he unconsciously used his painful past to get in touch with the pain of those he counseled. Every word exchanged with them, every tear shed, every prayer offered, came from God's steadfast love in the midst of his tragedy at sea. People in deep pain were drawn to Giang because they sensed the compassion in him.

As he continued to pray, he felt God speaking these words:

"I am Almighty and all powerful. If you ask me to, I will take you back in time to your birth and remove the entire tragic experience of your immigration to America. I will replace it with an easier, less painful past."

Giang thought about all the pain and all the ways it helped him touch others' lives. He turned to God, with tears streaming down his face, and said, "No, thank you, Lord...I'll keep it all." And it was one of the most joyful moments of Giang's life.

This is the good news Immanuel: Jesus can calm, transfigure, and use our tempests, our wounds, and our fears into something new and redemptive. Thunderstruck and awestruck, we say in his presence:

You are Jesus, the Prince of Peace, Lord of Heaven and Earth, Lord of Wind and Wave. My life is in your loving hands.

Amen.

Sermon Art: *Jesus Calming the Storm*, Pictorial Bible of Abbey of St. Bertin, French, 1190-1200;
Jesus Calms the Storm by Benedictine Sisters of Turvey Abbey

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