

Sermon Notes – July 25, 2021
(John 6:16-24)

You know some people would read this story and they would say that this must be just a miracle story about the miracle of the power of God over the wind, waves, and the storm. But, I want you to know that miracles and miraculous experiences are still part of our contemporary, modern society. I want you to think of these examples: A couple has been having trouble with infertility for 5, 10, 15, 20 years, and they've been wanting a child. They've done everything they know and tried every drug they know, but nothing has worked. All of a sudden, the wife gets pregnant. Have you ever noticed that these children are often called "miracle babies"? Have you ever driven by a car accident that was so tangled and mangled that you didn't know how anyone could possibly survive that? Yet, you could overhear somebody say, "It was a miracle that somebody survived that crash." Have you ever met someone that has had quadruple bypass surgery? One kind of blockage can be on the backside of the heart (called a "widow-maker" because they may not get to it fast enough), and the person has a high probability of dying on the operating table. They don't know if they'll survive that surgery or not, but they come through it. I have met many men and women who have gone through that surgery, and guess what they say? "Ms. Peggy, I'm a walking miracle." By some of these examples we know that miracles and miraculous happenings still occur today. There are things that happen that we can't explain. We don't know how it happened or even what happened.

I wonder if that isn't what happened to the disciples that day. Jesus not only walked on the water, but he saved Peter and the disciples. A great storm had come up; the ship was tossing back and forth; the waves were coming on board; the wind was so strong, and they just knew that they were going to die. They were going to drown. But, Jesus comes to them in the storm. I wonder if the point of the story there that day wasn't about just Jesus walking on the water, but Jesus showing his compassionate concern for his disciples and for us. Maybe that was the point of the story that day - his compassionate concern for us when

we're going through the storms of life. The storms come to all of us, don't they? Have you ever had one of those days, or weeks, or months where you feel as if it's one thing right after another? It's just coming at you and you wonder, "where are you, God?"

Alexander Solzhenitsyn was a Russian novelist, a historian, and a political prisoner under Stalin. He died in 2008. He was put in prison by Stalin because he offended Stalin by something that he said. He had to serve eight years in a labor camp, and during that time he wanted to give up and commit suicide. He said, "One day, we were outside on work detail and I could care less whether I lived or died. In fact, I wanted to die. At lunch time, I went over and sat on a stump. I was away from everybody else, and all of a sudden, this stranger came up and sat beside me. I had never seen the man before - he was not a guard or a prisoner in our camp. I don't know who he was or where he came from - and I never saw him afterwards. He sat down beside me and he never spoke. But it was like he knew that something was going on with me. He picked-up a stick and drew a cross in the dirt. He looked at me, got up, and walked off. I looked at that cross and I kept staring at it. All of a sudden, I felt the presence of God with me. God gave me the strength and courage to want to live that day. I want you to know that my storm didn't end right then, but I had the hope and the courage to go on because I knew Jesus was with me." *Maybe the greatest point of that story today is that when we go through the storms of life, Jesus is with us.* I want you to think about what he said to those disciples. They are out there in the storm; they're hungry, tired, and a little disappointed in Jesus because after he fed the 5000 (according to John's gospel), the crowd wanted to make Jesus their military king so he could override the Romans and put the Israelites back in power. Jesus knew what they were thinking. He also knew that his disciples were getting caught up in that because they wanted to be officers in his kingdom. Jesus put them in the boat, told them to go on, and he would meet with them later. Jesus went to the mountain to pray. The disciples are in the water about four miles away and Jesus is on the mountain. Whether he could see them or just read their mind, he knew they were struggling. It says, he came to them and they thought it was a ghost. Jesus says, "**It is I. Do not be afraid.**" Now, "It is I" is translated

as “deity” in their language. In the Old Testament, when God sent Moses to the Israelites, he said to tell Pharaoh to, “Let my people go.” Moses asked, “Who am I supposed to say told me that?” God said, “Tell him ‘I-am’ sent you. I-am-Yahweh. I-am-God.” Jesus came to them and wanted them to remember the scriptures of the Old Testament -- “It is I; I am Yahweh. I’m in control and I am with you. I will see you through. Take comfort, I am here.” **You know, we often find that when storms come, we get so caught up in trying to get through the storm that we take our eyes off of the one who can help us through the storm – and that’s Jesus.**

There’s a story told by Pastor Ralph Wallace (years ago) about a time when there were cotton mills still operating in North Carolina. He said a lady was working in the cotton mill on the loom, and her threads got tangled. She was trying to untangle the loom. The more she tried, the more it got entwined. There was a sign above her work area that said, “When the threads get tangled, call the foreman.” Finally, in desperation, she reached out to the foreman. Isn’t that just like us? He came to help her, saw her mess, and said, “Wow, what a mess.” She said, “Sir, I tried to untangle it by myself. I did my best.” He said, “No, you didn’t do your best” and he pointed at the sign. **How often we go through the storms -- we try everything and we get frustrated, but God wants us to call on him. He will be there to help us and see us through.**

Now, the storms come and we want God to take them away. God doesn’t always take them away immediately, does he? Sometimes they last awhile.

These disciples had left about sunset. In the scriptures, it said Jesus came between 3-6am. They had been struggling for four miles. Why does Jesus let us linger with the storm sometimes? I want you to ponder several reasons: 1) Sometimes the storms come to remind us that we don’t control all there is about life – God’s in control, not us. The storms also have a way of getting us to look up and say, “Lord, help me. Lord, save me” and realize our dependence on him. 2) Storms also open our eyes to the power and the compassion of Jesus Christ. 3) But, they’re

also used to help others. Sometimes when you go through a storm and you come through on the other side, God is able to use your storm to help somebody else and strengthen them -- for example: when you've lost a child, when you've gone through cancer, when you've gone through losing a spouse. All of those things God didn't send to you, but he can work through them to bring good. He can use them to not only help you and me, but to open others' eyes about God's awesome power and grace in our lives. When you've gone through something and they see God's grace strengthen you, it can also strengthen them. The storm is not always about you and me. I don't know what your storm will be, but I know God will be with you. I also know that we often take our eyes off Jesus when going through the storms of life.

In old sailing ships, they had a tall mast head with a crow's nest on top. They would send a sailor up into that crow's nest to see if they could see any dangers, hazards, or ships in the distance. The person in the crow's nest could see for miles, even in the foggy weather. The sailors didn't mind climbing to that Crow's nest if the water was smooth, but when the water was rough, climbing it was rough too. We (as instinct) tend to look down. The old sailors always told the one that had to climb, "Don't look down. Keep your eyes focused on the crow's nest. If you look down, you're going to fall. If you look out at the storm, you are going to get sick and fall. Keep your eyes on the crow's nest." ***When we're going through the storm, Jesus wants us to keep our eyes on him.*** We get so focused on what we're going through that we just want to make it through. Jesus said, "I'll carry you through. I am with you always." Remember his words: "I am Yahweh." Isaiah the prophet said that God gave him a message to give to the Israelites: "I am the Lord, God of Israel. I am your Redeemer. I am with you always even until the end of the world. Do not be afraid." Jesus may not take your storm away. He may let you walk through it, but he will give you the strength you need to see it through, just like he did Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

He wants you to know that he's always there and the storm is not always about you and me. It's about God's power and his concern for us, as his

people. Maybe this story is not just a miracle about walking on the water; it's a story about how much our Savior cares about us.

These disciples are much like us - when we take our eyes off Jesus, we start falling, doubting, and questioning God. We are strong in the faith one day, but can be in the bottom of the barrel the next, can't we?

God never gives up on us, even when we give up on him. God never fails us, even when we fail him. "It is I. I'm here. Do not be afraid." Your storm is going to come (if it hasn't already), but God will walk through it with you. He'll get you through to the other side -- may you know that. I hope that you'll go back and read this story in Mark 6, John 6, and Matthew 14. What does God want to say to you and to me in this story? May God bless the reading of his Word and its application to our lives. Amen.