



A note from LCMS Missionaries, James & Christel Neuendorf

Jesus doesn't need you.

Did that sound a little bit mean? Maybe it did, I know we often like the idea of someone needing us, our contributions to a relationship and all that. We like to think of our relationship with Jesus as something that goes both ways. Our work is important and necessary for Jesus. It is certainly tempting to feel that way as a missionary.

We sometimes think, Jesus is doing the really important and difficult work, but He needs me to do the rest. If the Gospel is going to cross into new places, I need to carry it there. At least, I feel that way sometimes.

Then I hear the clear witness of Jesus, "I don't need you to get where I am going." Lately I have been thinking of the story of Jesus walking on the water in John 6 from a different perspective than before.

The disciples thought they needed to bring Jesus across the lake; that was their role. How else would He get to the other shores? Jesus stayed behind and perhaps said He was going to walk, the disciples probably thought that was a bad idea, it would take Jesus days to reach the other side by walking. If He would have just come with them in the boat, He could be there the next morning! The disciples may not know about healings and miracles, but they know boats! Jesus would really benefit from having their help!

But then, halfway across the lake, the wind picks up and pushes against them. They realize, they cannot even cross the lake themselves, let alone bring Jesus. For all their experience, if the wind is against them there is nothing they can do.

Prayers:

- Visitation
- Advent and Christmas outreach activities
- Continuing of rebuilding the church on Calle Salud

Maybe this is why Jesus wanted to walk, He knew this would happen and that His useless disciples would be of no help at all. Jesus doesn't need His disciples... even worse, if He had relied on them, Jesus would be stuck in the middle of the lake too!

And then... they see a terrifying sight across the water. As though things weren't bad enough, now the very spirits of chaos on the storm are coming towards them. They are powerless to defend themselves, powerless to even cross a lake despite years of experience on that very same body of water. They feel the waves closing in on them.

During the recent struggles of moving our church once again, trying to solve the new administrative challenges,, ever changing rules and executive orders and church members in crisis, I often feel like a disciple stuck in the middle of the lake. I can't keep up, I need to drop something, but nothing can be dropped. No matter how hard we row lately, we can't seem to move forward, only keep things afloat and try not to backslide. That's when I hear clearly again the message of this old story.

Jesus doesn't need you or your special talents. He doesn't need your boat.

But Jesus wants to be with you. He wants to come with you anyway. He wants to sit in the boat with you. He wants to use you, even though He doesn't need you. In the end, Jesus will get where He is going, and if you are coming along, you will get there too.

Amazingly, Jesus doesn't need any of the things that we are so worried about solving, He doesn't need our strategies, but He will work through them anyway, especially if we use the means He gave us. The Means of Grace are things Jesus chose, and they will work because He works. Even though we feel stuck, Jesus isn't going to stay in the middle of the lake, because little things like winds and waves don't pose an obstacle to Him. The Greek text of John 6:21 even emphasizes that as soon as Jesus got into the boat, it immediately arrived at its destination.

It's as though Jesus is saying to His disciples, "you are not taking me across the lake. I am crossing over to the other side, and I want you to come with me. I will even go in your rickety little boat because I want to be with you. I want you to be a part of my work, because even though I don't need you, you need me."

As a missionary I often feel like I am in a tiny leaking boat in the middle of a huge storm. It has been hard, the wind pushes against us and sometimes I lose hope, or at least I become discouraged. I feel like no matter how hard I try, we don't make progress. The wind is always pushing back. Sometimes I feel stuck. You may feel the same way in your own situations. You might feel like the waves just grow higher, and the work gets harder and harder. How will we ever bring Jesus to that distant shore? Do these Means of Grace really work? Will anyone ever listen to this Gospel?

So look with me across the waves, across the chaos that pushes against all of our hard efforts. Do you see that shape on the horizon? It's Jesus, who says to us,

"I don't need you. But you need me, and I want to be with you. I am not coming with you; you are coming with me. The chaos cannot keep me from you, these obstacles you are struggling with are not obstacles for me. Here, I will come and sit with you for awhile. Be at peace." Yes we are struggling, but Jesus doesn't need our struggles to advance the Kingdom. Yes we are giving, but Jesus doesn't need our gifts to accomplish His work. Instead, He gives us the privilege of riding in the boat with Him, of working beside Him, and of giving to further the Gospel in joyful response to His gifts for us.

Jesus is going somewhere, and He wants you to come along. Jesus doesn't need your boat, but that doesn't mean He won't come and sit in it with you.

May the blessings of the ever-present Jesus be with you as you row against that fierce wind wherever you are today.



First Sunday School lesson in person since the pandemic.



Thanksgiving dinner after church.

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