

[OPENING SLIDE]

"Setting Sail with the Savior"

"Immediately Jesus spoke to [His disciples], saying, 'Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.'"

"Who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb, when I made clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band, and prescribed limits for it and set bars and doors, and said, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed'?" [Job 38:8-11]

Introduction

[SLIDE # 2] Who of us doesn't like a good sea story? *The Perfect Storm, Master and Commander, Greyhound ...* or, not for the faint of heart, Herman Melville's tale of the Great Whale. Where, in one of the classic illustrations on Baptism, Ishmael, pining too much time spent on land and in his own head, remarks:

"Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet ... then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can. ... With a philosophical flourish Cato throws himself upon his sword; I quietly take to the ship."

Yes, to get back to the water – the source of our lives in Christ.

Main Point: Wherein, to answer the call of the Savior to step forth as His disciples is never without His enduring promises to back it up. Living a life of faith comes with risk ... yet, it also comes with the assurance that 1) Jesus intercedes for His own, 2) will meet us where we are, and 3) will see our ship safe to the shore.

THEREFORE, let the Pentecost people of God face life's unpredictability with confidence and faith. Let us be of good cheer, taking courage in the Savior's abiding Word: *"It is I. Don't be afraid!"*

[SLIDE # 3]

FAITH FIRMLY FIXED ON OUR SAVIOR WILL NEITHER FALTER NOR FAIL.

Amen.

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[SLIDE # 4] **Risk averse!** That's me. As I have shared, when it comes to going out on a limb, you will mostly find me with my feet fixed on the ground, hugging the tree. Yes, there is no "sky diving, Rocky Mountain climbing, or 2.7 seconds on a bull named 'Fu Man Chu'" for this disciple! My life verse? When Jesus says to His disciples, "*Lo, I am with you always.*" **Low!** 😊

How about you?

[SLIDE # 5] I suspect not that different, especially when it comes to times of uncertainty ... when we long for certitude and surety in life, but can't see the road ahead; when the road we're on is full of twists and **hair-pin turns**.

Yes, regardless of age, sex or social standing, being in those "liminal" moments can cause our souls unrest. "'What job should I seek? What decision should I make? ['Should I stay or should I go?'] How can I be sure? What if I fail?' Our lack of faith manifests itself in doubts about career, marriage, guilt, finances, and [maybe] even eternal life. The effects of [which] include anxiety, depression, and even emotional paralysis. Doubt immobilizes families, and even congregations. It stifles growth ... weighing us down so that we sink into the murky waters." [Case, CPR, 3:3, 43]

[SLIDE # 6] But have **no fear**. Jesus, our Savior is nearer than we think ... tirelessly interceding for His own ... on the waves, and in the wind with a saving presence. What's more, He's in the boat with us ... seeing us ever forward in faith.

Yes, the Lord's absence is not an absence. Though seemingly out of sight, HIS EYES ARE STILL ON YOU.

²² **Immediately** [that's because following the feeding of the 5,000, the satisfied mob now wants to make Jesus a king by force¹] **he made the disciples** [a fitting portrait of His Church²] **get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds.** ²³ **And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray.** *When evening came, he was there alone,* ²⁴ *but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them.*

¹ John 6:14-15 // "One ring to rule them all!"

² "The eleven disciples are treated with one voice in Matthew's account. ... Between their fear and worship is one disciple's risk and security in the arms of grace. The trust and risk of one follower of Jesus has an effect on the whole community of followers." [Hollingsworth, *Feasting on the Word (A)*, 3:333, 335]

[SLIDE # 7] JESUS ON THE MOUNTAIN.

With the disciples in the boat, where is Jesus? Let's not miss the obvious. While the disciples may not know where Jesus had gone off to, He most certainly knew where they were. Where, both Jesus' need and desire to pray always accompany His work ... "it is the prayer before the storm" that allows Jesus to meet the disciples in theirs ..." [Hollingsworth, *Feasting on the Word (A)*, 3:333]

Before the Savior meets and speaks to us He has already talked it over with His Father. [Adapted from Thielicke, *How to Believe Again*, 68]

With this assurance, OUR FAITH, backed by His presence, BOTH DISPELS OUR FEAR, AND ENABLES OUR HEARTS TO TRUST FIRMLY IN HIM.

²⁵ [Where] **in the fourth watch of the night** [sometime between 3:00 – 6:00 a.m. – often our own foreboding moment] **he came to them, walking on the sea.** ²⁶ **But when the disciples** [again, read the church] **saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear.**

[SLIDE # 8] JESUS ON THE WAVES ...

This is not the first time the Lord of heaven and earth has been about the water.

"In the creation of the world (Genesis 1:2), in the covenant with Noah (Genesis 9:8-17), in the mighty act of deliverance from Pharaoh's army at the Red Sea (Exodus 14:21), and in the miraculous entry into the land of promise through the swollen River Jordan (Joshua 3:14-17), the Lord triumphs over the waters." [Russell-Jones, *Feasting on the Word (A)*, 3:334]

It is something of which Job, in his distress, needed to be reminded [Job 38:8-11].

We, too! When, the word arrives: "dad's in the hospital" ... "a certain company keeps leaving threatening messages on my voice mail" ... "the doctor called, and the tests are positive" ... "someone from human resources wants to see you." [Me and/or Lucado, *On the Anvil*] The waves loom large. With water pouring in. The ship ... sinking. Fear abounds. Do you hear it? That cry in the dark! Where, caught between fear and faith, that faith sometimes wavers.

But then ... the Savior comes ... Jesus on the waves ...

[SLIDE # 9] ... WITH A SAVING WORD.

²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I [lit. "I AM"]. Do not be afraid."²⁸ And Peter answered him, "Lord, if [since] it is you, command me to come to you on the water."**²⁹ He [to Peter, He] said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus.**³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me."³

The antithesis of faith, Peter, instead, "stands as the "example of one who does not fully recognize or appreciate Jesus, until his own personal agenda and purposes fail ... and he is brought to say, '[Lord] save me!'" [Bartelt, *CJ*, 37:2, 161]

And Jesus comes ... not in the cascading waterfall, but in the simple water of our Baptism ... not in a four-course meal, but in simple bread and wine ... not in tomes of rhetoric, but in the simple text of His Word ... all to strengthen and assure.

"[Yes!] The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" ... if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." [Romans 10:8b-9]

"Do not be afraid" ... a truly Gospel Word ... with the very power to accomplish the very thing it asks. "The unveiling of God's majesty is not intended to terrorize or diminish, but to save, uphold, and establish ..." [Russell-Jones, 336] Which it does!

[SLIDE # 10] Bringing, at last, JESUS IN to THE BOAT ...

³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand [as He will on the Calvary's cross] and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"
³² And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

"Stepping out in faith is not a guarantee that we will [never] face troubled waters or be filled with fear, but it is always accompanied by the assurance that Jesus will not abandon us. That when we need Him most, He will extend His arm to lift us up and get us back in the boat." Where, one commentator says: "The reason that

³ "Short prayers are long enough. There were but three words in the petition which Peter gasped out, but they were sufficient for his purpose ... Verbiage is not devotion as chaff to the wheat. Precious things lie in small compass, and all that is real prayer in many a long address might have been uttered in a petition as short as that of Peter." [Spurgeon, in *SSoG (A)*, 281]

we seem to lack faith [at times] is that we are not doing anything that requires it. ... "Being a disciple is a risky and exciting business, but that is exactly what God calls us to do and to be." [Ernest Campbell, in Kirkpatrick, 334, 336]

[SLIDE # 11] ... IN OUR HEARTS, AND ON OUR LIPS.

³³ *And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."*

Wherein, "a little faith may be all that is needed to transform a story that starts in terror into a story that ends in worship." [Hollingsworth, 335]

What might that faithful worship look like in your life this week?

[SLIDE # 12] STAY WITH THE SHIP ... in the midst of the storm. Where, "when all human help and strength have been abandoned, the only recourse left for the sailors is to cry out to God." Having set sail with Him, He will not abandon you, seeing our ship safely to shore. [Augustine, Sermon 75.4]

[SLIDE # 13] Second, PRAY. Wherein, "things are never so turbulent or so urgent as to take us away from the necessity of [our own] prayer." [Kirkpatrick, 332] Jesus show us how to weather the storms of life. He shows us that before we launch *out*, we need to launch **up**.

[SLIDE # 14] Finally, out of the Savior's undying desire to be present with you ... BE THAT LIFE-GIVING PRESENCE TO OTHERS ... in their storms of life.

"How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching [heralding His life-giving Word]? ... As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" [Romans 10:14-15]

Conclusion

[SLIDE # 15] In his book *The Perfect Storm*, Sebastian Junger concludes: "Anyone who has been through a severe storm at sea has, to one degree or another, almost died, and that fact will continue to alter them long after the winds have stopped blowing and the waves have died down. Like a war or great fire, the effects of a storm go rippling outward through webs of people for years, even generations. It breaches lives like coastlines and nothing is ever again the same." [219-220]

OR ...

This week, one of our members found themselves caring for a sick bird, bringing to mind the assurances of a robin's nest I keep on a shelf on my workbench. Where, Luther once remarked that birds are among our greatest preachers, trusting the Father implicitly that they are never outside His watchfulness and care.

For a few anglers on the Sea of Galilee one morning, faith was sorely tried ... where after the storm, nothing was the same. For it was then that their confidence and faith were placed squarely at the feet of Him who is the Son of God.

May our confidence and faith also find such safe harbor ... in this One who watches over and prays for us ... in He who comes to us in the storm with His saving presence and life-assuring Word ... in Him, who willingly climbs into our little skiff and pilots it safely home; which, in the end, may not elicit an extravagant confession or prayer, but Jesus would hear it nonetheless. For Him it would be enough ... enough to hear *you* say, "I believe!"

[SLIDE # 16]

FAITH FIRMLY FIXED ON OUR SAVIOR WILL NEITHER FALTER NOR FAIL.

Amen.

+SDG+

[Friday e-mail:] Sitting at the kitchen table Tuesday evening – watching the Red Sox lose – my bride called out from the living room, “Ed, come quick.” Making my way into the next room, she pulled me to the front door and showed me one of the brightest rainbows I’ve seen in a while. We both just stood there, taking in the grace of God, along with the Lord’s Word to Noah, when God first hung His “fighting bow” in the clouds saying, “Never again. Never again. The rainbow will be for you an everlasting sign; you have my Word, world. You still have my Word.”

It’s a message that Jesus speaks into His disciples – even you – and especially you when it is choppy waters and stormy seas. Where, we get a glimpse of that saving presence and promise in our Gospel reading for this Sunday from **Matthew 14:22-33**. Coming to His terrified disciples on the water, Jesus speaks a life-saving Word: “*It is I* [literally “*I AM*”]. *Take courage!*” Where, most every time that this word – “courage” – is used in the New Testament, Jesus is the author, making that Word, what one commentator calls, a “gospel imperative ... an efficacious word,” one that has the very ability to accomplish what it commands. It’s that familiar voice, calming us in the dark. It is Elijah’s “gentle whisper.” It is Jesus calling out to His own, “I’ve got this.” More importantly, “I’ve got you!”

Indeed, He does, child of God. Indeed, He does. O I know that at times in life it may not seem like it. As per C. S. Lewis’ *A Grief Observed*, you may wonder if God is even at home, if He’s changed addresses. But He is there, coming to us in our darkest and most confusing hours with His saving presence, and His life-saving and life-affirming Word. Bidding us to trust Him in all things, even when our eyes cannot see. Even – and especially – when our hearts threaten to fail. To these ones, the LORD of wind and wave, says: “*A bruised reed he will not break, and smoldering wick he will not snuff out.*” [Isaiah 42:3]

A pair of hands, reaching into the deep ... a pair of hands, still upholding your little ship of faith ... a pair of hands stretched out *for you!* Praying hands. Extended hands. Saving hands. Where, after so great a Savior resurrects and rescues so small a sinner ... do we come to faith once again ... do we come ... to worship!

In his commentary on this text, David McKenna says, Jesus “doesn’t start by overruling the forces of nature, but by telling us to look up, see the reality of His presence, and calm down. Of all the miracles, His presence is first and foremost. If we know that He is personally present with us in the middle of the storm, the stilling of the sea and the stopping of the winds are incidental.” Got any incidentals to give Him this week? SYOS!