

One time Jesus' disciples were out on a boat and a storm came up. The wind was blowing hard. The waves were crashing this way and that. For the people of the ancient world, the turbulence of the waves reminded them of the unsteadiness and the unpredictability and the scariness of life. The disciples were right in the middle of that. And then they see Jesus literally walking on the water. For a normal person the laws of nature would have demanded that he fall right through the water. For a normal person the waves would have blown him over. But Jesus is the Son of God and if he has the supernatural ability to literally walk on the water, doesn't he also have the supernatural ability to control the unsteadiness and the unpredictability and the scariness of life? Peter saw this and in a rush of boldness he said, "Lord, let me come out to you on the lake!" And Jesus said, "Come!" And then Jesus gave Peter the ability to walk on the water. But then Peter got distracted by the waves and he took his eyes and his faith off of Jesus and he started to sink. And he called out, "Lord, help me!" And Jesus reached out his hand and grabbed Peter. Today in Isaiah, we see God promising to give us a helping hand. Our text today says, **"I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."** (Isaiah 41:10) Today we see that the Lord Jesus gives us a helping hand.

Now we don't want to misunderstand this analogy of Jesus giving us a helping hand. Most of the time when we say, "Could you give me a hand with this?" we mean that we can do most of it or at least some of it by ourselves but we just need a little bit of help. But the Bible says that our situation by nature is much more desperate than that. When we say that Jesus gives us a helping hand we don't mean that we reach up our hand and Jesus reaches down with his and we meet in the middle. No our situation is more like a cat who falls down into a deep dark hole and the owner reaches down and scoops him out. Jesus reached down and rescued us and brought us into his wonderful light.

The Bible says, **"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ... But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ... while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son."** (Romans 5:6, 8, 10) We didn't deserve it, but God loved us so much that he sent Jesus to die for us and now, instead of being God's enemies, we are God's friends. Our passage says: **"you descendants of Abraham my friend."** Friendship, especially in the ancient world, means that you share your heart, your deepest feeling with that person. You tell your friend what is really on your heart and on your mind. The Bible several times calls Abraham "God's friend." Jesus' brother James wrote: **"You see that Abraham's faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. <sup>23</sup> And the scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,' and he was called God's friend."** (James 2:22-23) The Bible calls Abraham God's friend because God shared his very thoughts with Abraham. Abraham and God talked like friends. There's one place in the book of Genesis where God says, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?" (Genesis 18:17). Abraham and God were friends. God shared things with Abraham. And you might think, "Well, that's Abraham. God couldn't possibly call me His friend." Ahh, but one time Jesus was sitting with his disciples and he says to them, **"<sup>13</sup> No one has greater love than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. <sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you do what I command. <sup>15</sup> I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."** (John 15:13-15) You are God's friends and so that means you can share with Him what's on your heart. That's what prayer is: telling God what's on your heart. And God shared with us what was on his mind and heart when he sent us Jesus. Jesus came from the heart of God to us to tell us how much God loves and cares for us. God loved the world so much that he sent his one and only Son so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. By his death on the cross, Jesus took away all our sins so that we could be with him in heaven.

And if Jesus has taken care of our greatest need then he will also take hold of our hand and lead us through all the other things in life as well. Our passage says: **"For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you."** (Isaiah 41:13) No matter what you are going through in

your life, Jesus takes your hand and says, “It’s going to be ok. I’m your friend. And I’m going to lead you through this.”

Jesus came to help those who were in need. It says **“I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10)** The word “righteous” means “to do what is right” and part of what is right is to help those who are in need, so when the Bible talks about God’s “righteous right hand” it means that God helps those who are in need.

Jesus came to help those who needed help. He came to help the helpless. That’s one reason Jesus blessed the children in our Gospel for today. If you are the parent of a little, little child, think of how often your little child needs help. He needs help tying his shoes. He needs help getting his sippy cup off the table because he can’t reach it. Jesus blessed the children to show that he came to help those who need help. But when we grow up, we often fool ourselves into thinking that we don’t need help. That’s why Jesus said **“anyone who will not receive the kingdom of heaven like a little child will not enter it.” (Mark 10:15)**. The kingdom of heaven belongs to those who need help. We might fool ourselves into thinking that we are powerful and self-sufficient, but then something happens to us in life that reminds us that we might be older than little children, but we need just as much help. But then the good news is that the kingdom of heaven belongs to those who need help.

The trials in our lives are terrible. But if there is one good thing about them it’s this: they help us realize that we need Jesus. They bring us to the reality that we are just as helpless as little children and they make us cry out like Peter, “Lord, help me!” And then Jesus hand grabs ours and pulls us up. And Jesus says, “I have helped you. I took away all your sins by my death on the cross. I’ll hold hand through all the trials of life. And in the end the kingdom of heaven belongs to you.”

It was a busy subway station in New York city and little Betsy had never been there before. She was scared. But then her dad said, “It’s ok. Take my hand” and her dad led her through the crowd. Life can be a lot like that crowded subway station, or the swirling wind and waves that Peter saw. But Jesus says, “It’s ok. Take my hand. Follow me.” Amen.