

## Why Jesus Sends Us Out Onto the Lake

It was sunset on the evening of the day that Jesus fed 5000 families with a little boy's lunch. That day Jesus multiplied meager resources and provided for his people. He took five small loaves of bread and two small fish and performed one of his most famous miracles. Matthew tells us, **"He gave [the bread and the fish] to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied"** (13:19-20) – at least, physically satisfied. They were well fed. But instead of hungering for more Jesus, they hungered for more from Jesus. They thought they'd found the goose that laid the golden egg. They wanted a worry-free, laid back life of leisure with bread in abundance, free meals every day; and they saw Jesus as the source, not as the Savior. So by sunset it was time for Jesus to teach another lesson in discipleship, this time a lesson on faith. **"Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray."** Jesus needed some time alone; and so did the disciples. And so Jesus sent the disciples out onto the lake. He didn't go with them but sent them by themselves while he stayed behind to spend some time in prayer. And by doing so Jesus was teaching the disciples and us why sometimes Jesus sends out onto the lake.

**"Later that night, he was there alone, and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it."** It had been a pleasant afternoon and a peaceful evening; but now it was a stormy night. The winds were howling; the water was choppy; the waves were splashing violently against the boat. Now this, of course, was different from the time that Jesus was with the disciples, asleep in the boat, during that torrential tempest that probably would have capsized and sank the boat had Jesus not **"got[ten] up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; [and] the storm subsided, and all was calm"** (Lk 8:24). This storm wasn't quite as violent as that one. But it was still really windy, really stormy; it was a rough and rocky ride; and it was dark, pitch black out. Our lesson says, **"shortly before dawn"** – literally, **"during the fourth watch of the night,"** which is between 3 and 6am, when thick darkness covers the earth like a heavy blanket. So these disciples have been up all night; they're in the middle of the lake, in the middle of a storm, trying to stay alive, scared for their lives, not sure if they're going to make it, still several miles from safety, and there's no sight of Jesus; they're all alone, and they're terrified – out on the lake.

Do you ever feel like Jesus has sent you out onto the lake, where the winds are howling, the water is choppy, and waves are crashing against your boat? Do you ever feel like in your life you are riding out a storm, and you're scared, and you're not sure if you're going to make it; you're struggling, but nothing you try seems to work; and there's no sight of Jesus, and you feel all alone? Sometimes the storms of life pop up right after a time of multiplied blessings. One minute there's food for thousands; the next minute the waves are crashing over the boat. One minute everyone in your family is healthy; the next minute you're in the Emergency Room or at Children's Hospital or at Mayo Clinic or at the funeral home because disease or death came crashing over your boat. One minute you've got a good paying job and a comfortable benefits package; the next minute your company downsizes, and unemployment crashes over your boat. One minute you've got a happy family life with your spouse and your children; the next minute divorce is looming on the horizon, and your children feel like strangers in your own home. One minute you feel secure in your life and strong in your faith in Jesus; the next minute your future is uncertain, and your faith in Christ turns into doubt. You see, when the storms of life rage around us, there's always a storm of doubt that rages within us. And that rock-solid faith we had when the waters were calm slowly erodes away into a pile of dust. That's doubt, and that's what happens when you're out on the lake, and it's stormy, and it's windy, and it's dark, and your life is a rough, rocky ride, and you're scared, and you feel helpless and all alone, and there's no sight of Jesus.

But then, **"Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. 'It's a ghost,' they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: 'Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.'"** Jesus has a way of meeting people who are gripped with fear, who have real reasons to feel uncertain, and calmly telling them, "Don't be afraid." The shepherds on the night of his birth were surrounded by angels in the sky who told them, "Don't be afraid." On the morning of the resurrection the women at the tomb saw their risen Savior, and Jesus said to them, "Don't be afraid." On the day Jairus's daughter died, Jesus said to him, "Don't be afraid." Jesus has a way of meeting people who are gripped with fear, who have real reasons to feel uncertain, who are out in a boat rocked by the

waves, out on the lake in the dark of night, with the winds howling and the waves crashing, storms surrounding them, storms within them, and calmly saying, **“Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”** “I’m here, and I’m in control. I walk on these waters; I stand on top of these waves that batter your boat. They don’t control me; I control them. And they may be real and powerful and terrifying, but don’t be afraid. I’m here, with you.”

If your life is stormy right now, then listen to these words of Jesus, because he is speaking to you when he says, **“Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”** If you’re losing your health or your friends or the love in your marriage and family; if you’re losing your job or your financial stability or your sense of security; if you’re losing your faith because the winds are howling, and the waves are crashing, and you’re just trying to ride out the storms of life, then listen to Jesus say, **“Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”**

These are powerful words, for every one of us, because we all experience the storms of life. Jesus knows that. And not only does Jesus know our storms, he also purposefully uses them to strengthen our faith in him. I believe that Jesus sent those disciples out onto the lake, he put them through that storm, in order to strengthen their faith in him. And I believe that Jesus does the same thing for us. He sends us out onto the lake in order to strengthen our faith in him.

Take Peter, for example – bold Peter, the leader of the apostles. Peter is the one who looked out over the boat, saw Jesus walking on the water, and said, “Jesus, if that’s you, then tell me to come out to you on the water.” Jesus said, “Peter, yes it’s me; come on out.” And Peter – and you’ve got to hand it to him, because it’s not every day you see someone standing on top of the water, walking on the water – Peter swings his feet over the edge of the boat, steps down onto the water. And I don’t know what it would have felt like to actually stand on water. But in that moment, Peter is walking on water, looking at Jesus, trusting in Jesus; and in the middle of that storm, Peter is okay.

You know what changed? He took his eyes off Jesus. He started out with a strong faith. **“But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and [began] to sink.”** When confronted with a powerful storm, he underestimated the power of his Savior. That’s doubt, and that’s what sank Peter. And maybe you can relate. Maybe Jesus has sent you out onto the lake, in the middle of a storm; and you have faith in Jesus; but this storm is powerful! It’s rocking your boat and threatening to capsize confidence in Christ. So you begin to doubt and underestimate the power of your Savior, and your faith begins to sink. Do you ever feel like Peter? One minute you’re walking on water; the next minute you’re sinking. How do you handle this doubt-faith tug-of-war that wages within you? If you’re a Christian and you want to have a strong faith but you don’t always feel like you have a strong faith, how does your faith get stronger?

Here’s how: **“[Peter] cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’ Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him.** When you feel weak in your faith; when Satan uses the storms in your life and the doubts in your heart to make you second guess the love, care, and concern of your Savior God; when your faith begins to sink beneath the waters of doubt toward the dark depths of unbelief, what do you do? Cry out, “Lord, save me!” and Jesus will be there! The same Jesus who endured the storm of crucifixion and hell in your place, who bore your sins on the cross and sank them into the depths of the waters of your baptism, who rescued you from the storm of God’s righteous wrath – he, Jesus, will be with you and will save you from this storm, too. He’ll reach out his hand and pull you up from the depths. And with a gentle rebuke he’ll say, **“You of little faith, why did you doubt?”** And that’s a question that must always remain unanswered, because with Jesus there, there’s never any reason to doubt.

**“And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God.’”** That’s why Jesus sends us out onto the lake, out into the storms of life, and sometimes even lets us begin to sink – so that in the end, we, with a stronger faith, may say, **“Truly you are the Son of God.”** If Jesus has sent you out onto the lake, and right now the storms of life are raging around you, and the storms of doubt are raging within you, there’s a reason he’s putting you through this. Storms make us appreciate the multiplied blessings we enjoyed the evening before. They make us realize our complete dependence upon God. They make us realize our complete inability to walk on water without Jesus. And most of all, when Jesus puts us through a storm, he teaches us that he never really did stay behind to make us weather this storm alone. No, he’s always right there, treading our stormy seas, walking on water, so that when we cry out, “Lord, save me!” he’s always there to reach out his hand and pull us up and strengthen our faith in him. That’s his plan all along. And that’s why sometimes Jesus sends us out onto the lake – so that when the storm is passed, and we’re safely in the boat, and the only thing that’s drowned is our doubt, then with a confident faith we will say, **“Truly you are the Son of God.”**