

Stormy Weather Faith

Matthew 8:23-27

It was in 1950 that comic strip artist Charles M. Schulz introduced the world to a lovable little dog named Snoopy in his comic strip *Peanuts*. Before he died in February 2000, Charles Schulz depicted Snoopy in many roles, including a world-famous astronaut, a world-famous ice-skater, a world-famous surgeon, the Easter Beagle, and even as Santa Claus. But perhaps the one we remember most is of Snoopy sitting atop his doghouse, pecking away on a typewriter, in hopes of one day having a novel published. Do you remember the words with which Snoopy always began his novels? “It was a dark and stormy night.” We were always guaranteed a laugh whenever we saw a *Peanuts* comic strip with Snoopy sitting at his typewriter.

In real life, though, it is an entirely different matter. Does your life story always seem to begin with “It was a dark and stormy night”? At least there are chapters in our life stories that seem to begin that way. And it most certainly seemed that way to the disciples one night in a boat crossing the Sea of Galilee. Many of these men earned their living on that very body of water, but when the squall broke, and the waves began to toss their boat and literally sweep over them, they found themselves in a situation that even they didn’t know how to handle.

They did what we would have done had we been there. They applied all their skill and experience to a desperate situation which only grew worse by the minute. They did everything they knew to do, but it just wasn’t enough. Have you ever felt like that? Perhaps you feel that way right now. It may be your personal health. It may be the uncertainty of the stock market. It may be the specter of unbridled government spending, and what that will mean for future generations. It may be any number of things, and like the disciples in that boat, you feel helpless. You’ve done everything you know to do, but the waves keep washing over your boat.

Where was Jesus when the disciples were dealing with all their problems? Asleep on a cushion! In your situation, does it seem to you that Jesus is sleeping? In His human body, Jesus was exhausted, and sleep washed over Him as the waves were washing over the boat. But in His Divine Being, we are told in Psalm 121 that “*He who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep*” (vv. 3b-4).

Psalm 121 gives us other wonderful assurances: “*My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth....The Lord watches over you....The Lord will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life.*” And of course there are many, many others throughout Scripture. But even with all the assurances of Scripture we still reach those times in our lives when the storms of life seem to swamp our lives, and nothing we do makes any difference.

What can we do? The disciples give us a very good example: Verse 25 reads that “*The disciples went to him and woke him, saying, ‘Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!’*” Oh, that we would learn to do that, that our first reaction in the storm which hits would be to go to Jesus, to seek His face and His help and direction! In doing this, the disciples did a very good thing.

But in verse 26 when Jesus woke, the first words from His mouth were, “*You of little faith, why are you so afraid?*” He was not scolding them for waking Him; He was rebuking them for having such a little faith. He was saying to them “Your faith is underdeveloped.” I wonder sometimes if Jesus would not say the same to me—is that what He would say to you? *You of little faith, why are you so afraid?* Yes, there are times when our faith is huge and can meet any situation. And yet the fact is that each of us falls into that “little faith” category far too often. What was it about the disciples’ reaction to the storm that caused Jesus to say they had “little faith”? Take a closer look at the story and you’ll see several characteristics of “little faith”:

Little faith is overcome by surprising things, v. 24

Little faith assumes the worst things, v. 25

Little faith forfeits the surest things, v. 26

Little faith questions the eternal things, v. 27

Obviously Jesus was not impressed with the disciples’ “little faith.” Their “little faith” wasn’t going to get them anywhere. It wasn’t going to solve any problems, make any advances or bring anyone into the Kingdom. Didn’t He know when they got into the boat that they would be heading directly into a storm? Yes, and He led them into it anyway. This incident on the water in the storm was a classroom, where Jesus was preparing His disciples for what was ahead of them. He knew that their faith would need to be stronger if they were going to survive.

So let’s turn this story just a bit. Instead of talking about the characteristics of “little faith,” since we know all too well what that’s like, let’s instead think about the kind of faith that will take us through the stormy weather, the kind of faith that will help us land safely on the other shore.

1 First, Stormy Weather Faith stays calm in crisis, vv. 23-24

The Sea of Galilee is about thirteen miles long and eight miles wide. It was not unusual then, nor is it unusual now, for violent storms to sweep down with sudden fury across the water. And many of these men were seasoned fishermen, who had experienced the mood swings of that particular body of water many times before. Usually, though, they had stayed close enough to shore to make it back whenever a storm hit. This time, they are in the *middle* of the Sea of Galilee with one of those infamous storms launching its rage directly at them, “*without warning,*” as we read at the beginning of verse 24.

Mark tells the same story in his gospel, chapter 4. He wrote, “*A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped.*” Picture that: everyone of them is soaked to the skin, with the waves washing into the boat with such ferocity that it may have been difficult for them to even breathe. They found themselves in a crisis, and their little faith caused them to panic.

These men were disciples of Jesus; are we not also? There are times when we do exactly what we are supposed to be doing, when we follow Him exactly where He leads us, and we still find ourselves in bigger trouble than we can handle. Here is a fact that many modern Christians have not yet comprehended: all disciples go through storms sooner or later, and going through one does not mean there won't be more. Sometimes there's more than one at a time! There are times in our lives when we didn't see the storm coming, but all of a sudden there it is, and we feel as though our little lives are being swamped with trouble and turmoil. We're doing the best we can to keep everything afloat, struggling in our own might and power just to make it through another day, dreading to face the next one. Finally, when we are exhausted and our own resources have come to an end, we think, “Hey, wait a minute! Where's Jesus?” And it seems to us as though He's sleeping through all of it. And we go to Him, and we ask that question which is almost an accusation at the same time: “Lord, don't You care?”

When Jesus woke, He rebuked the wind and waves. Mark tells us that He said to them, “*Quiet! Be still!*” or literally, “*Hush! Muzzle it!*” Both Matthew and Mark include the words, “*It was completely calm.*” I can almost see Jesus pointing to the instantly calm water and saying to us, “Do you see that water, as smooth as glass? Do you see how calm it is? That's how I want *you* to be! Trust Me! Yes, this is a crisis, but I can handle this. Trust Me!”

Stormy Weather Faith acknowledges *first*, that God is in control and is perfectly aware of what is happening to us. Theologian J. I. Packer once pointed out “We should not be upset when unexpected and upsetting things happen. God in his wisdom means to make something of us which we have not yet attained and is dealing with us accordingly.” Stormy Weather Faith acknowledges, *second*, that when we come face to face with crisis, whether it sweeps down upon us with the fury of a storm on the Sea of Galilee or silently creeps up on us like a panther, that our safety and security do not depend so much on the circumstances in which we find ourselves, as in the fact that Jesus is with us in the boat! It is our relationship with Him that makes the difference!

2 **Second, Stormy Weather Faith keeps things in a proper perspective, v. 25**
What is perspective? Irving Becker helps us with that: “If you don't like someone, the way he holds his spoon makes you furious; if you like him, he can turn his plate over into your lap and you won't mind.” Or take this one: When Goliath came against the Israelites, the soldiers all thought, “He's so big we can never kill him.” David looked at the

same giant and thought, “He's so big I can't miss.” (Russ Johnston, in *God Can Make It Happen*) Perspective makes a difference.

In verse 25, the disciples wake Jesus, and give him their assessment of the situation: “*We’re going to drown!*” When Mark tells this story, he puts it in the form of a question: “*Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?*” Their little faith assumed the worst that could possibly happen. How like them we are sometimes! We see a situation and immediately make an assumption. This is how we do that: we take all the **facts** which are available to us, mix them together with our **experiences**, and toss in a generous dose of **emotions**. What emerges on the other side is a “conclusion.” But the problem is that we rarely have *all* the facts, that our experiences are very *limited* and that our emotions are so *unpredictable*.

With the disciples in that boat, there was more emotion than anything. It was *fear*. But they didn’t have all the facts, or consider all the facts they had, and their previous experiences with Jesus had been limited up to this point. What was left was a skewed understanding of the real situation they were in. Their perspective was out of focus.

Sometimes that is what happens to us. We allow fear to guide our understanding of what we’re facing. So, instead of giving Jesus *our* assessment of the situation, wouldn’t it be much better to say to Him, “Jesus, things look mighty bleak from my perspective, but I know You can see things that I can’t. I know You know things I don’t. You can do things which are not in my power. So help me, Father, to trust You in all things. Help me to have faith in You especially in the storm, that we together will make it to the other side.”

I read about a painting of an old burned-out mountain shack. All that remains of the shack is the chimney. In front of this destroyed home stood an old grandfather dressed only in his underclothes with a small boy clutching a pair of patched overalls. It was evident that the child was crying. Beneath the painting were the words which the artist felt the old man was speaking to the boy. They were simple words, yet they presented a profound theology. Those words were, “Hush, child, God ain't dead!” (Story modified from James DeLoach, *When God Was Taken Captive*, Multnomah, 1989, p. 24.)

That’s perspective! Stormy Weather Faith helps us to keep everything in focus. God ain’t dead.

3 Third, Stormy Weather Faith focuses on the certainties, v. 26

Verse 26 tells us that Jesus rebuked the wind and the waves, and they became instantly calm. But Matthew’s version tells us that before He said anything to nature, He spoke to the disciples. He said to them “*You of little faith, why are you so afraid?*” In other words, He was saying, have you forgotten so much so soon? You see, when our faith is little, we tend to lose sight of the certain things, things which we know to be true, things which have been tested through the ages and are still just as true in our modern age as they ever were.

The disciples were still growing in their faith and in their understanding of Who Jesus is. They didn't have the advantage that we do, of looking at the whole story and knowing that Jesus had the power to calm the wind and waves with a word. But there were some certainties that, if they had just remembered them in the moment of crisis, would have encouraged them and bolstered their faith.

One of the certainties which they had forgotten was that they were in that boat in the middle of the Sea of Galilee in the middle of a furious storm because that is *exactly where Jesus wanted them to be!* They had already forgotten the healing of a man with leprosy, vv. 1-4. They had forgotten that Jesus had healed the paralyzed servant of a Roman centurion, without even being anywhere close to that servant, vv. 5-13. It had already slipped their minds that Jesus had healed Peter's mother-in-law, vv. 14-15, and many who were demon-possessed, vv.16-17. They forgot that Jesus had amazing power to do anything!

But the most important thing they failed to remember was that Jesus had said to them, *"Let's go to the other side of the lake."* The Lord of Creation had *already* told them they were going to the other side. We need to keep this perspective as well. Since we already know that our own assessment of the situation is usually limited, and therefore faulty to a certain degree, we should instead trust what our Great and Loving Heavenly Father has already told us. He has already told us that He would never leave us or forsake us. He has already told us that He knows the plans He has for us, plans to prosper us and not to harm us, plans to give us a hope and a future. He has already told us that He has gone ahead of us to prepare a place for us. There will be storms of furious magnitude between here and there, but keeping Stormy Weather Faith means that we stay focused on what is really true.

As believers, there are several things that we can depend on as being true and certain. We may be in the middle of a storm, but we can be certain of God's great and incomparable love. Paul wrote about this certainty: *"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Romans 8:38-39)

We may be swamped with waves of an angry sea, but we can be certain of an eternal anchor. We read in Hebrews 6:19 *"We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure."* The winds may be howling around our ears and whipping our lives into a frenzy, but Psalm 34:9 tells us *"Those who fear him lack nothing."* While serving in another church, one Sunday morning I walked out of the parsonage to go turn on the heat in the church. Our cat Mickey decided he was going with me, and he went ahead of me a few steps. But the March wind was stronger that day than usual, and the space between the parsonage and the church building acted

almost like a wind tunnel. When Mickey and I stepped into that space, the wind picked poor Mickey up and tossed him a few inches. It wasn't far and it was only for a second, but when Mickey's feet hit the ground again, he took off! Sometimes we may feel as though we've been tossed by the wind of our circumstances, so that we can't touch solid ground. Little faith says, "I'm being tossed around by my circumstances." Stormy Weather Faith says "On Christ the Solid Rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand."

Evangelist Dwight Moody was once approached by a woman, who exclaimed, "I have found a wonderful promise!" She then quoted Psalm 56:3, "*What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee.*" Moody responded, "I have found a better one." And he quoted Isaiah 12:2, "*Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid.*" That is a certainty

Little faith has such a short memory! It forgets all the things God has done for us, how He has sustained us and nurtured us and guided us and protected us through all the things we've been through so far. We sing those words from the hymn *Amazing Grace*: "Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come," and our little faith prevents that certainty from sinking in. When we have Stormy Weather Faith, we are able to reach back into the vaults of our memory and remember all the help and hope and peace and strength we have received from His Almighty Hand. We have a Heavenly Father who has promised to be with us all the way, and take us all the way under His watchful eye.

4 Fourth, Stormy Weather Faith sees eternal things, v. 27

The Gospel writers use words that describe the storm as being like an earthquake at sea. The wind and waves were angry and furious, and the little boat was in serious danger, unless the One who made the wind and waves should step in and take control. He did, so in verse 26 we read that there was an absolute calm, and the word to describe that calm means "to smile." There was an instantaneous change in the situation.

"*What kind of man is this?*" That was the question the disciples asked in verse 27. They had looked around them and seen something which didn't make any sense at all. Under normal conditions, when the wind had passed, the waves would continue to be choppy for a while until things settled down. But that's not what happened here. Jesus was demonstrating for them that He was the Eternal One who had the waters of the sea in the palm of His hand.

So what kind of man is this? There is a white-hot truth that needs to sear our souls with its certainty: Who is this Man? He is Almighty God!" This God-Man who was so exhausted from His work with the sick and demon-possessed that He could sleep through waves washing over Him in a storm-tossed boat, is the One who from Eternity always is. This is the One Who is the Great I Am, who knows no equal, who alone is worthy to receive power and honor and glory.

This is the One, my friend, who walks with you and has promised to guide you through every narrow passage and across every slippery path.

How can I see the eternal? Start by understanding what God's Word says. Listen to the words of Psalm 89:8-9— "*O Lord God of hosts, who is mighty like You, O Lord? Your faithfulness also surrounds You. You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, You still them.*" The answer to the disciples' question had been provided long before in the Word of God. Stormy Weather Faith helps us to see the eternal, to know Who this Man is, by learning and understanding what the Word already tells us.

James Melvin Washington once wrote "My grandmother used to tell me that every boss is temporary, that every rainy day is temporary, that every hardship is temporary. She used to tell me, 'Son, every goodbye ain't gone. Just hold on—there's joy coming in the morning.'" Little faith sees only the temporary, and seeing the temporary causes us to fuss and fret and fume. But Stormy Weather Faith looks beyond what is immediately in front of us. It ignores the wind and rain and waves washing over us, and sees the Truth that Jesus is in the boat with us! And we are so closely connected with Him through the work of God's grace in our hearts that we are able to lift up our eyes and see eternal things.

Your dark and stormy night very likely doesn't look like a *Peanuts* comic strip. Instead, it may look like it did for the disciples. But it may also look like financial trouble, a health crisis, a marital breakdown, or just day after day of bleak hopelessness. But if you are in a dark and stormy night right now, stormy weather faith is the way to go. It begins with surrendering your life to the Lordship of Christ, by asking Him to forgive you of your sins and take control of your being. It continues as you walk with Him day by day, seeking His face and His presence with you. Are you ready to do that today?

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