

See Your Savior in Your Storm!

A sermon based on Mark 6:45-46.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I have this embarrassing confession to make to you this morning. Please don't let this affect the way you look at me. But I somewhat enjoy some of the music of the boy bands of the 90's. N'Sync. Backstreet Boys. 98 Degrees. Oh yeah...my sisters had the CD's...I could sing along to a lot of the songs...unfortunately, still can.

Alright, get your laughing out.

But there's one group (you're probably not familiar with) that I couldn't help but think of in light of a tragic event that took place a little over a week ago. I shared the story on our church Facebook page. To summarize:

Last week a 25-year-old man driving a pickup truck blew through a stop sign on an Illinois country highway and smashed so hard into an SUV that the impact flung both vehicles into the adjacent farm field. The pickup driver is still alive, but the 29-year-old pregnant woman driving the SUV, Lindsey Schmidt, her unborn child, and her 21-month-old child were killed instantly. Her 4-year-old and 6-year-old were rushed to intensive care.

For days the prayers for those two boys poured into heaven, and none more intense than those coming from a sad and terrified father. Their pastor and congregation held prayer vigils, imploring God to heal the boys. Alas, the injuries were too severe. The medical team couldn't save them, and both boys died a few days later.

And group I thought of...it's a Christian group called "Plus One." And the particular song is "I Run to You." The chorus goes, **"I run to you when I can't find my way, and I get lost in you when I don't have the faith. When I don't know what to do. I feel I can't make it through. I run to you."**

Is that what you do?

In our gospel for today, we see the disciples caught in yet another storm, the second or maybe even third such incident we've heard about in our sermons this summer. I'm sure the disciples, at this point, probably couldn't even look at a boat without thinking, "Oh great! What are we getting ourselves into this time??"

Maybe similar to what you've been thinking if there's been some recent storms gathering in your life...unless you don't have any troubles or struggles right now or aren't having to deal with any pain or suffering or loss or even stress right now. Then I thank God for that. But a lot of us are.

And it seems like the storm doesn't take a break. Even on my vacation, where family was all getting together for the first time in a few years, where I was expecting calm waters, I saw tension in relationships. I heard about health issues, stress wearing down those I love. There was an unexpected death in the family, just like there were unexpected and sad deaths back home here, with this family. So, I know I'm not alone.

The storms are real, and we can almost assume there's something waiting for us every day...again, maybe what was in the back of the disciples' minds as they climbed into the boat.

That's right. Sure enough, Jesus sent them out to cross the lake, the wind and waves picked up, and by the middle of the night, the disciples found themselves in the middle of the Sea of Galilee, having had to take down their sails because they simply couldn't fight the wind. They had to get the oars out to try to fight past the rolling waves and somehow make it shore. But that failed. They were getting nowhere.

And then they saw a ghost...a spirit. Oh, it was Jesus, but that's not what they saw. No, no, no, that would have made all too much sense. No, their first thought followed popular Jewish superstition, where seeing spirits appear at night meant disaster was coming...or, in their case, was already there.

So what did they do? Well, what would you have done? What do you do? There's usually two responses. You do what the disciples couldn't do at first, and you see Jesus. You see his hand in the midst of every problem, in the midst of every disaster.

Like with this young family I introduced you to a few minutes ago...such a tragedy. A husband and father, in less than a week, lost his entire family. And where was Jesus? Taking a mother and her three children home to heaven in his perfect timing. Moving not just an individual congregation in Illinois, not just a surrounding community, but even our entire church body to express their faith in Jesus by offering their prayers to Jesus on behalf of the family. Working through his servant, the local pastor, to share the gospel to comfort so many hurting hearts (probably some that may have never even heard the gospel before)...the message that in spite of so significant a loss, Jesus won the victory, and now there's life.

Oh yeah, you can see Jesus...

Or, you can go the way of the disciples. Do you remember how they reacted? They cried out in terror. They were scared. And, then, even after Jesus spoke to them and performed this amazing miracle right before their eyes and calmed the storm, they still could not see him. They couldn't understand what was happening. Their hearts were hardened, as in, their attitude paralleled that of Jesus' enemies.

In the midst of life's storms, it's easier to have that reaction, isn't it? Like, getting mad. My grandpa passed away when I was on vacation. My brothers and I were planning on making the drive over to visit him and my grandma...to see him for what I was assuming would be the last time. We didn't make it. 6 days. He passed away six days before we would have gone. And you can bet I was hurt and frustrated. "God, why couldn't you wait a few more days...let me say my goodbye?"

It's so easy to default to that emotion and constantly question God with your "why?" when in the middle of the storm. "Why, God, did it have to be such a tragic way that you took this family away from this father...and with his wife being pregnant?" "Why God can't you make it so I go to work at least one day and not feel stressed out, like my boss is constantly breathing down my neck or overwhelming me with all these extra projects." "Why God, when you know the health issues I've had to deal with, how wearing they are on my body and on my relationships with others (because I always seem to be moody), why can't you just take it away?" "Why God, does my family seem to be the only family I know of that is so dysfunctional...the backstabbing, the fighting, the lies...the kids who are just so naughty...why can't we be normal?"

And besides leading to anger, these storms, they get the best of us, don't they....where they drain us, even spiritually, to the point where you really don't want to fight anymore. Maybe you've seen the shirts or memes that say something along the lines of "I'm done adulting for the day." And that's what it can feel like. I don't want to be spiritually mature and be strong and weather those storms anymore. Have you ever been there?

Now you can understand why the disciples may have had a hard time distinguishing who they were seeing. It's hard to see Jesus in the storm...at least to see him as your Savior. Now, maybe as the bringer of doom and gloom...because we tend to have a lot of that in this life.

Is that fair for us to do? You know, our world is terribly broken...so sinful. We try so hard to get it under control. We want so badly to believe that doctors and hospitals and drugs can cure any disease and fix any injury...or, if we just stay positive, the storm will blow over and life will get better. And it's frustrating when situations don't bounce our way. And we become so focused on our problems, our suffering, our loss, that we stop looking at our Savior.

And he doesn't turn around and walk away or out of sight. Mark here is rather candid about exposing the spiritual weaknesses of the disciples (which are not unlike ours) and he's just as lucid and articulate in expounding the greatness of our Savior.

You see, our Savior has always had a different mission for us. We expect (or maybe not expect, but would certainly hope for) lots of bright skies and cloudless days in this life...where we didn't have to struggle or stress or worry or be sad or get angry, and God could do that for us, but his ultimate goal is to connect every person with the Savior...with Jesus, so that he can save them all. But, if life were roses all the time, would we need him? Would we see him?

If you look at the beginning of our verses, what did Jesus do? Mark writes, ***"Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat..."*** He "made" them. He compelled them to go. Jesus knew exactly what would happen to them in the middle of the Sea of Galilee, and he sent them anyways into the certain storm...so he could save them and show himself to be their Savior. He let them struggle for some time in order to show them, as he so often shows us, that he is able to help in the hour of need.

Now, they didn't see him, recognize him, at first, but that didn't stop Jesus from saving them. They cried out in fear. They were terrified. And, ***"Immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."*** And the storm was done.

Jesus knows what storms are waiting for you. He knows how frustrating and terrifying they are and will be. And he lets you go anyway...so that he can show himself to you and your Savior.

The apostle Paul reminds us, ***"We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God."*** This road you're on is filled with that...with pain and suffering and loss. But that same road is covered with the blood of your Savior...because Jesus has been there for it. He's felt every hurt, every hardship, every temptation, every sin, and he's carried it for you. Jesus experienced the darkest, scariest, deadliest storm on Good Friday at Calvary, as he suffered and died for you...for everything that's gone wrong in your life, Jesus died for you...so that through his life, his death, his resurrection, the kingdom of God – heaven – could be yours.

And through the message of the gospel, you've seen that. You've seen your Savior. Even when he lets us struggle through the storms, he's still there, ready to save us, ready to bring us safely through, ready to bless us and others in so many ways. His salvation and promises of forgiveness enables us to trust in him even more. The washing of baptism comforts you. Feeding on the Lord's Supper and inhaling God's Word gives you strength in the hour of need. And you see your Savior.

And don't only see your Savior in the storm. Seek him in the storm! You notice what happened after Jesus and the disciples crossed over safely to the other side of the Sea of Galilee? We're told the people recognized Jesus and came from throughout the entire region to have him heal their sick. In the midst of their individual storms, those people sought out their Savior.

No matter what you're going through, you don't only have a Savior in Jesus. Here's your friend, who cares, who loves you, who wants what's best for you. And instead of running away, which is the natural reaction of our sinful nature, we can do what we would do with our friends when times are tough. We run to Jesus. We seek him out in prayer, seek his promises in his Word, bring our sins and our worries and our fears to him, and what does he do? He calms them; he takes care of them. He may let us struggle for a while, but he's the bright light at the end of the storm. His never-ending, unchanging promise of eternal glory is the bright light at the end of our storm.

That song from Plus One I shared earlier, here's how it ends: **"So it goes, every life has some rain...Everyone's gotta deal with the pain...But I know how to make it ok...I tell You what I do...When my back's...Up to the wall you know I run to you...You are my light...You're my everything...In a place of chaos you're the One thing that brings me peace...I'll give my heart, I'll give my all...When I'm beat down...You're always standing tall...I run to you."**

That's this life. Unfortunately, those are the storms we face...we'll face. And dealing with them may not get any easier. But that's ok. We'll survive. We'll endure...because we see our Savior in every single storm. He's there, taking care of you, getting you safely through. And now, when those storms hit, and they will, we know what to do. We run to Jesus. We seek our Savior. And he saves! Amen.