



MINISTRIES

A Ministry of the Athens Universal Life Church
Dr. Rob White – Senior Minister
<https://aulc.us>

TITLE: Go Out Into the Darkness

SERMON IN A SENTENCE: Christ doesn't promise that we will not experience difficult times, but does promise that, if we walk in faith, he will redeem the difficult times.

SCRIPTURE: Mark 4:35-41

Today's scripture lesson comes from the Gospel of Mark, chapter 4, verses 35 to 41.

Starting at verse 35:

On that day, when evening had come, He told them, "Let's cross over to the other side of the sea."

So they left the crowd and took Him along since He was already in the boat. And other boats were with Him.

A fierce windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking over the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped.

But He was in the stern, sleeping on the cushion. So they woke Him up and said to Him, "Teacher! Don't You care that we're going to die?"

He got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Silence! Be still!" The wind ceased, and there was a great calm.

Then He said to them, "Why are you fearful? Do you still have no faith?"

And they were terrified and asked one another, “Who then is this? Even the wind and the sea obey Him!”

-- May the Lord add His Blessing to the reading of His Word!

-- I am Doctor Rob White with the A U L C Ministries with our message this week.

-- I am happy that you can take a few minutes out of your busy week to be with us today!

Do you like to watch storms form in the sky? Clouds develop and darken. Rain falls. It might be a light mist or it may seem like a hose has been turned on. If you are outside you might get wet.

Then there are snowstorms. The temperature drops, clouds form, and snowflakes fall from the sky. Snow is beautiful, but it can make traveling and walking difficult.

Where I live, we get some severe storms during the Spring and Summer. Sometimes, we even get Tornadoes. During the Winter, we may get a lot of snow, that causes some people to get stuck in their homes.

Where ever you live, you have probably seen or heard some sort of storm.

Today's Bible story tells us about a storm that Jesus and his disciples encountered while they were out on the water in a boat. We find that "a big wind storm arose" (as seen in Mark 4:37). Jesus was sleeping in the back of the boat. His disciples woke him up because they became frightened – waves were causing the boat to rock back and forth.

Jesus said to the sea, "**Peace! Be still!**". The wind stopped blowing and the sea became still. What a miracle.

If you have ever been frightened or angry you may remember that it felt as if a storm was swirling around inside of you. Your feelings became dark, just like storm clouds, and perhaps you felt as if you wanted to cry.

At those times it may help to remember how Jesus calmed the sea. He said, "**Peace! Be still!**". We can use His words to calm ourselves. Take a deep breath. Allow some time to become quiet and still. Think about God's love and let His Spirit bring peace.

It was evening on the Sea of Galilee. That little sea sits in a deep basin surrounded by steep hills and cliffs on three sides. I can imagine standing by the Sea of Galilee watching the sun moving overhead until it gets to the tops of the hills in the west. It would quickly duck behind the hills, and it would be night.

The western side of the lake was the Jewish side. The eastern side was the Gentile side—home of the Decapolis, a group of ten cities with a large Greek population. Jesus was going there to minister to these gentiles—something that few rabbis would stoop to do. In these Greek cities, Jesus had a truly amazing ministry—lots of miracles—lots of teaching—very little opposition. These Greek cities were a good place for Jesus.

But I'm getting ahead of my story. At Jesus' command, the disciples got into a boat and started their journey across the little sea. I say "little," because the Sea of Galilee is more like a lake than a sea—eight miles wide and thirteen miles long. Jesus and his disciples were probably going only five miles or so—not much of a journey it would seem.

A few years ago, archaeologists unearthed a boat from the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Carbon dating places it around the time of Jesus' life. It was 26 feet long and 7 or 8 feet wide. There's a good chance that Jesus and his disciples crossed the Sea of Galilee in a just such a boat.

The excavated boat was propelled by oars—four of them—two on each side. Four men would have rowed—two on either side. Five miles might not be far, but it would seem farther when holding an oar in your hand, getting ready to row.

But the disciples were used to rowing. At least four of them were professional fishermen. Men growing up in that region spent time in boats. Boats were very much part of their lives.

So they started their journey. The farther they went, the darker it got. The hills rising up around the sea blocked all light—except for the stars immediately overhead. If there were clouds in the sky, being in a small boat in the middle of the Sea of Galilee must have been a little like swimming in an ink-bottle—no light anywhere.

Then a storm struck. At the Sea of Galilee, cool air falling from the hills meets warm air rising from the sea, causing quick, violent storms. Just as these disciples got past the point of no return, the storm struck—high winds—waves much higher than their boat—a fisherman's nightmare.

The disciples panicked! I can't really blame them! I am a SkyWarn Storm Spotter and have been in a lot of severe thunderstorms, reporting details to the National Weather Service.

It can get pretty scary, especially when the storm turns into a full blown tornado. There's nowhere to go for safety, until the tornado gets too close, then I start going the other way! I can turn the spotting over to someone else.

The disciples were like that! They wanted to turn the task over to Jesus—their leader. The storm was beyond their abilities—the waves were so high that their little boat threatened to pitchpole end-over-end to the bottom—certain death for all aboard.

Maybe Jesus could help! They had seen him do some wonderful things! But where was Jesus? They looked around and found him asleep at the back of the boat. Asleep! They were astounded! How could anyone sleep through such a storm!

It made them angry! Jesus was their leader—the one in charge. Jesus was the miracle worker—the one with the answers. Now, when they needed him—really needed him, Jesus was asleep! What was wrong with him! Didn't he have any sense of the danger! Didn't he care! Would they all die because of his dereliction!

So they woke Jesus! Waking, he looked into the storm with a steady gaze and said simply, **"Peace! Be still!"**. And the wind stopped! A great calm settled on the waters!

The disciples were so afraid! They were stunned by Jesus' power—not sure what to make of it. They were as afraid of his crazy power as they had been afraid of the storm. Only God has that kind of power, and they were frightened to be in God's holy presence!

These were men who, out of reverence for God, would not even call God's name. These were men who knew that to look on God's face was to die. Now they were looking at Jesus and wondering if they had been saved from the waves only to be consumed by God's fire. "Who then is this," they cried, "that even the wind and the sea obey him?". But they already knew the answer—and the answer scared them.

When I first read this story, I was critical of the disciples. They had heard Jesus teach. They had seen him heal. They should have known who Jesus was. They should have known what to expect.

But then I had to admit that I have known what Paul Harvey called "the rest of the story." I know where Jesus will take them from here. I know about the cross, but I also know about the open tomb. I have quite an advantage over the disciples.

Nevertheless, I am often so afraid. I'm a member of the Three O'clock Club. Is anyone else here a member of the Three O'clock Club? Members of the Three O'clock Club wake up at three in the morning—suddenly panicked over some problem that was of only mild interest during the day—certain that the sky is about to fall.

When that happens, I wake Jesus up. I ask, "Don't you care that I'm in trouble down here!" Sometimes I read a story or two from *Guideposts* magazine. *Guideposts* has lots of stories about Jesus redeeming people from bad situations. I pray. I try to turn the problem over to Jesus. Finally I go back to sleep.

So how can I criticize the disciples? I'm no better than they are!

Whether or not you're a member of the Three O'clock Club, you probably have moments when you wonder if God has abandoned you—when it feels like the sky is falling—when it seems that everything precious is in jeopardy—when you feel like crying out, "God, don't you care that I'm in trouble down here?"

It's in those moments that we especially need faith. It's in those moments that our faith is severely tested.

In moments like those, a great deal depends on whether we have nurtured our faith in good times so that we can draw on it in bad times.

Even more depends on whether, once the crisis is upon us, we choose to honor our faith or our fears. We have a choice, you know. When the tough times come, we can choose to be fearful, full of fear—or faithful, full of faith. A great deal hangs on our decision.

Christmas Day, 1939, was a dark day in England. England had declared war on Germany when German invaded Poland four months earlier. The nation had instituted a military draft. They had evacuated one and one-half million children from their cities to protect them from enemy bombs. They were building over one million bomb shelters. They had ordered more than a million gas helmets for babies. Many people found themselves unemployed as retail sales slumped and businesses closed.

If you had been the King of England, faced with giving a Christmas Day radio address to a nation in those circumstances, what would you have said? What the king chose to say on that Christmas Day brought great hope and strength to his people. He acknowledged the great crisis that was upon them, and then he quoted these words:

"I said to a man who stood at the gate of the year,
'Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.'

And he replied, 'Go out into the darkness
and put your hand into the hand of God.
That shall be to you better than light
and safer than a known way.'

"So I went forth,
and finding the hand of God trod gladly into the night.
And He led me toward the hills
and the breaking of day in the lone East.

"So heart, be still, God knows His will is best.
The stretch of years which winds ahead,
so dim to our imperfect vision,
is clear to God.

Our fears are premature;
in Him all time hath full provision."

Those were good words for the darkness of that day, and they are good words for our darkness today.

"Go out into the darkness
and put your hand into the hand of God.

That shall be to you better than light
and safer than a known way."

We think that we have more to fear today than ever before—terrorists—nuclear proliferation—war—global warming. But people have always had plenty to fear—and we live longer and more securely today than ever before.

But it's also true that the dangers that we face threaten to swamp our little boats, and we cry out, "Lord, don't you care that we are in trouble down here?"

We cry, "Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown." Then the voice replies:

"Go out into the darkness
and put your hand into the hand of God.

That shall be to you better than light
and safer than a known way."

William Barclay was a biblical scholar who wrote a series of commentaries on the New Testament that many people find very helpful. Some of you may have read his commentaries, and can appreciate his contribution to the cause of Christ.

What is less well known is that Barclay's twenty-one year old daughter and her fiance were drowned in a boating accident. Of the various things that we might fear, the death of a child is probably the worst.

Barclay wrote a book that he entitled, *Spiritual Autobiography*, in which he talked about that terrible experience. He said:

"God did not stop that accident at sea,
but he did still the storm in my own heart,
so that somehow my wife and I came through that terrible time
still on our own two feet."

As Christians, we are not exempt from the storms of life. Sometimes the waves THREATEN to swamp us, and sometimes they DO swamp us. The promise is that, if we walk in faith, God will bring us through the terrible times still on our own two feet.

Let me close with a poem by Annie Johnson Flint. I find it helpful, because it acknowledges our troubles—and speaks in faith of God's help in times of need:

God hath not promised
Skies always blue,
Flower-strewn pathways
All our lives through;

God hath not promised
Sun without rain,
Joy without sorrow,
Peace without pain.

But God hath promised
Strength for the day,
Rest for the labor,
Light for the way,

Grace for the trials,
Help from above,
Unfailing sympathy,
Undying love.

-- That's our Lord's message for this Lord's Day and I hope you got a blessing out of it!

-- Go out this week and be a blessing and be blessed! -- For the more you are a blessing, the more you will be blessed!

-- Thank you all for watching and listening and we will see you all next week!

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