



MINISTRIES

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

TITLE: When the Storms Come

SERMON IN A SENTENCE: When we invite Jesus into our hearts he quiets the storms of our lives.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 14:22-33

Today's scripture lesson comes from the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 14, verses 22 to 33.

Starting at verse 22:

Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He dismissed the crowds.

After dismissing the crowds, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. When evening came, He was there alone.

But the boat was already over a mile from land, battered by the waves, because the wind was against them.

Around three in the morning, He came toward them walking on the sea.

When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified. "It's a ghost!" they said, and cried out in fear.

Immediately Jesus spoke to them. "Have courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

"Lord, if it's You," Peter answered Him, "command me to come to You on the water."

“Come!” He said.

And climbing out of the boat, Peter started walking on the water and came toward Jesus.

But when he saw the strength of the wind, he was afraid. And beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me!”

Immediately Jesus reached out His hand, caught hold of him, and said to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”

When they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

Then those in the boat worshiped Him and said, “Truly You are the Son of God!”

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

-- Hello, 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!,,,

You may not remember how it was when you learned to walk. First you crawled, later you took steps holding onto someone's hand, and finally you were able to walk by yourself.

You may have learned how to ride a bike in much the same way. First there are training wheels on your bike and an adult helps you learn how to balance. As you continue to practice you are, at last, able to steady the bike and ride without the assistance of others.

There are certainly times when we need the help of another: learning to skate or swim, and going down a steep slide for the first time.

Learning anything new can make us feel a bit fearful. We can also feel frightened when we encounter something we don't understand. At those times we may need someone to lean on; someone to hold us up until we and have become familiar with the new activity and are strong enough to do it on our own.

Jesus spoke to his disciples, teaching them about this very thing. His disciples were in a boat, far from land, when a strong storm came up and battered their boat. The story tells us that "Jesus came to them, walking on the sea" (14:25).

The disciples did not understand what was happening and became very frightened. Jesus said, "**Cheer up! It is I! Don't be afraid**" (14:27).

Jesus "stretched out his hand (and) took hold of" Peter, one of his disciples who was trying to reach Jesus as he came toward the boat.

When you feel frightened it may help to remember that God is with us, always. "**Cheer up! It is I! Don't be afraid**"

I wonder how Peter and the other disciples remembered this story after the fact. They had been frightened when they saw Jesus walking on water—and Peter made a fool of himself by stepping out of the boat and sinking.

While I was thinking about this story, I came across an article by Philip Yancey where he talked about his grandmother's tendency to recall difficult times "with a touch of nostalgia." Yancey then mentioned polls that suggested that the London Blitz, where London was on the receiving end of German bombs, was, for many Londoners, one of the happiest times of their lives. It might not have been happy at the time, but they remembered it happily, because "a new spirit of community and patriotism sprang up to eclipse even the horror of bombs and V-2 rockets."

Yancey went on to tell about elderly people who happily swap stories about the Great Depression and World War II—two of the most terrible times of the past century. Yancey noted, "They speak fondly of hardships such as blizzards, the childhood outhouse, and the time in graduate school when they ate canned soup and stale bread three weeks in a row" ("Happy Memories of Bad Times," *Christianity Today*, March 8, 1993, p. 88).

I think that Yancey has something there. I have recounted hardship stories to my children often enough that they roll their eyes when I start on a new one—or an old one retold too many times. "Yeah, Dad, we know," they say. "You walked five miles back and forth to school every day—uphill in both directions!"

I think that their mother taught them that last line—uphill in both directions.

So I can imagine that the disciples would remember this story of Peter and the storm fondly. "Hey, do you remember the time that Peter stepped over the side of the boat and sank like a rock!" And they would all laugh.

They wouldn't laugh in Peter's presence, of course. Peter was the Alpha Male in that group, and you had to be a little careful. But that's what made the story so delicious. Here was Peter—strong Peter—tough Peter—stepping out of the boat and sinking like a rock—Hollering, "Lord, save me!" I am sure that every now and then the disciples would resurrect that story—and a few more like it—just for laughs.

But they weren't laughing that night. They were in a storm in a small boat in the middle of the Sea of Galilee. They had been with Jesus all the day before and had been rowing against the wind most of the night. They were wet, exhausted, and far from home. I can't imagine circumstances much more miserable.

But then one of them spotted something odd. It looked like a man walking across the water. The disciples were fishermen, and they knew where they were—in the middle of nowhere. The only thing that they could imagine was that they were seeing a ghost.

A problem with seeing a ghost, of course, is that you don't know what to expect. You don't know whether you are really seeing a ghost or simply going mad. The most frightening thing, of course, is that the ghost might be coming to make a ghost of you.

It is worth noting that the disciples had not made the decision to cross the sea at night. Jesus told them to cross the sea, and they were simply following his orders. Did you ever feel like you were doing what Jesus wanted you to do—only to find yourself in trouble?

That's happened to me more than once. My throat tightened up and I had to force back tears—you've been there—you know how I felt. Some years later, I found a story about Mother Theresa, who found

herself stuck in mud on one of her journeys for Jesus, and she expressed it perfectly. She shouted at God:

"If this is the way you treat your friends,
no wonder you don't have many!"

Exactly!!! If I had had my wits about me that night, I would have shouted:

"If this is the way, you treat your friends, God,
no wonder you don't have many!"

At any rate, I can appreciate how the disciples felt in their little boat in the middle of nowhere with a storm raging around them—doing what Jesus had told them to do. Matthew doesn't say that they were afraid. There are other stories where they were afraid, but in this story they were just tired and miserable.

Until they saw the ghost! When they saw the ghost, they pretty much came unglued. These tough fishermen had faced death more than once without flinching—but they flinched when they saw the ghost. I'm sure that in years to come they would nudge each other and tell their ghost story and laugh. But they weren't laughing that night. They were wet and exhausted and miserable—and scared! And I can't say that I blame them.

But in preparing for this sermon, I came across a quotation that fits—a quotation that we all ought to learn. The quotation is by a man named Cranfield, who wrote a commentary on the Gospel of Matthew. Cranfield said:

"If it is a result of obedience to Christ's command
that the church or the individual Christian
is in a situation of danger or distress,
then there is no need to fear."

Isn't that good. Cranfield says:

"If it is a result of obedience to Christ's command
that the church or the individual Christian
is in a situation of danger or distress,
then there is no need to fear."

What that means is this: If we are doing what God wants us to do, by the grace of God, it will come out O.K.

That quotation reminded me of the late Henri Nouwen. Nouwen was a Catholic priest, an author, and a much beloved man. When he visited Rome, he had the privilege of conversing with Mother Teresa. He told her of some of his problems, and asked her advice. She replied:

"If you spend one hour a day in contemplative prayer
and never do anything which you know is wrong,
you will be all right."

Some people would be put off by that answer, because it seems simplistic—but Nouwen was not put off—not at all. He said:

"With those words
she answered none as well as all of my problems at the same time.
It was now up to me to be willing to move to the place
where that answer could be heard."

Once again, Mother Teresa said:

"If you spend one hour a day in contemplative prayer
and never do anything which you know is wrong,
you will be all right."

What she was saying was simply that, if we are doing what God wants us to do, by the grace of God, it will come out O.K.

It came out O.K. for those disciples. Jesus told them who he was and joined them in the boat. When he came to them, the storm stopped.

When Jesus comes to us—when we invite him into our hearts—the storms stop.

That's not a promise that you will have no problems if you follow Jesus, because that isn't true. The disciples had plenty of problems after they began to follow Jesus. Nouwen had problems. Mother Teresa had problems. I have problems. You have problems.

But when Jesus comes to us—when we allow ourselves to be quiet for a few minutes and invite him to guide us—the storms abate. When we know that Jesus is with us, we find that we're no longer afraid. When we're doing what Jesus wants us to do, we can be sure that everything will come out O.K.

In the days ahead, you will face many storms. Some of them will be little squalls that pass by quickly, but others will be full-blown hurricanes. Get ready! Invite Jesus to join you—to come into your heart—to direct your life—to guide you day-by-day and moment-by-moment. If you will do that, when the storms come, you will be O.K.

By the grace of God, you will be O.K.

Whether in life or in death (PAUSE), you will be O.K.

-- 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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