

WELCOME 25th October 2020 – Reformation '20 A

Matthew 8:23-27 & John 20:30-31

Welcome again this morning! I'm glad you're here. I pray you experience God's grace in abundance in this brief time together. Please check our website for our weekly Zoom Bible Study times & other important information & updates.

We're continuing w/ our adapted worship...so as usual there are Group Study/Discussion resources right there in your hands. *Special welcome to those who have jumped in on-line. Please make your way through the songs we've linked to this morning so that you experience at home what we're experiencing here. Our aim is to equip you so God leads you into the fullness of His word & his work in your lives & then out into the city to share what God has done for you.*

Remember all the great things we need to do to keep each other as safe as we can in this unending season of "the virus." Hand sanitizer. Masks. Sign in. Distance. Offering. Communion. We'll clean everything afterwards so you don't have to ;-)

As we move into this week...

Storms happen. In all shapes and sizes. Some we see coming...like that big green blob on the radar this week. Some mash us from out of nowhere. We get blown off track into dangerous territory. Sometimes they hit w/ unrelenting ferocity & cause us to feel like we're going under for the 3rd time. Maybe you're feeling blown about right now...health security finances life transitions/changes...That's what storms do. They expose us as vulnerable & powerless. They drain our energy & leave us afraid.

But you don't need a storm to be afraid...When Penny the spider emerges from hiding around here on a Sunday... When your body does something it didn't used to do...or doesn't do something you used to do easily...the other driver does something...I've never met a truly "fearless" person...they just don't exist...everyone's afraid of something sometimes

When the winds are howling & the waves are crashing & "seasick" would be a step up from how you really feel...God wants you to know that Christ "*in you*" is stronger than any gale-force blast; His Spirit *in you* is more powerful than any battering wave; & God's love for you & his presence w/ you deeper & truer & sturdier than anything that might capsize your life or pull you under. Because Jesus has already written you into his story of eternal life & unfailing love & abundant joy; his protection is assured & you can live w/ peace beyond human comprehension.

We'll explore & experience that together today.

Let's pray...then we'll get stuck into it.

PRAYER OF THE DAY:

Almighty & always-gracious God, our salvation depends upon you & you alone. So set us free from worldly things and worldly worries so we can truly hear & obey your Word. Release us from our anxious moments and fear-bound living so that by your Spirit we discern and obey your will for us. Let our lives be lived to offer witness to your saving power and redeeming love; through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Let's sing & then we'll hear God's Word...

FAITH CHAT:

1. When were you last afraid? Why? What'd you do? How'd it turn out?
2. How is your faith in Jesus a weapon or a guard against fear? Have you ever shared that with someone who does not yet trust in Christ? Can you share that in 1 minute or less?

BIBLES

Reformation '20 A – His STORY – YOUR LIFE: His PROTECTION

I was absolutely terrified. For a few seconds I was sure I was not going to make my 18th birthday. I was in the rain-swollen Guadalupe River w/ a submerged overhanging boulder pressed against my chest. I was stuck in a battered old aluminum canoe w/ the river flooding over the top of my life jacket & the water level just beneath my chin. We probably shouldn't have been on the river...but it had stopped raining & when do teenagers ever do risk assessment? But God used the river to spin the back end of the canoe around the rocks & when it rolled over & bent into a c-shape I popped out grabbed one of the crossmembers & dragged the misshapen canoe & my buddy in the back downriver where we stomped the boat back into usability, added some duct tape for good measure & set off again.

I have been afraid other times...when family members were sick/near death...during the birth of our children...when I was sure I'd never have a paying ministry gig again...when the smoke got thick & the fires got close...car spinning on rain-soaked/ice-slicked street...You could make a similar list...those moments or days or seasons when whatever storm was rocking your boat was giving you all it had. 2020 has been that kind of stormy year for most of us...I mentioned the fires...who could ever forget those...preceded by drought but straight after parts of Oz caught up to 700mls of rain in a week & of course there were floods...Since April we've been under a virus-storm system & those clouds aren't lifting yet. Maybe like our Premier you've experienced a storm of scandal, embarrassment, shame, & mockery. Might've been waves of doubt or bitterness or grief or betrayal that shook you. Howling winds of unpayable debt & joblessness might have knocked you over a time or two. That's what storms do: Expose us as vulnerable & powerless. Strip away the illusion of control/mastery. Drain our energy & leave us afraid. Knock the supports out from under us. The disciples knew what that felt like...out on the Sea of Galilee w/ a storm unleashing its fury on their small boat.

But let's see how they got there & what that means. Our reading started w/ vs 23: *Then Jesus got into the boat & started across the lake with his disciples.* See that? "Then" "Then" means something happened 1st **THEN** (Sue – insert Mt 8:14-22 here please)

What happened ^{b/4} the "Then"? Jesus has spent the whole last day teaching & as he walks away from *THAT* he's surrounded by people seeking to be healed. He ends up at Peter's house where HIS mother-in-law is sick & Jesus heals her. *THAT* unleashes a flood of folks clamouring for their own brokenness to be made whole. So from the midst of the mob Jesus tells the 12 they're going to the other side of the Sea of Galilee/lake. But ^{b/4} they can set sail/start rowing a couple volunteers

emerge from the crowd who want to jump on board...& Jesus is clear about the risks & costs of following him...no guarantees of creature comforts & NOW not when it's convenient...**THEN**...

Why are they out on the water? Jesus said "go." 1st thing...being obedient to the will & command of Jesus does not ward off the storm. They are doing precisely what Jesus told them to do & the storm shows up anyway. Remember what Jesus just said about following him...foxes have dens birds have nests... no guarantees of comfort, ease or trouble-free living...exhibit 1...*Suddenly, a fierce storm struck the lake, with waves breaking into the boat.* The biggest lie satan tells is to get Xns to believe faith is some sort of magic wand that prevents mishap misfortune & misadventure. There are churches that actually say that...Hear me: Faith, more faith, better faith, stronger faith, the right kind of faith will not eliminate storms from our lives. Which is why some folks, when abject horror strikes their lives hang up their church membership...they act like God somehow reneged on the deal. There's no deal. Being obedient to the will & command of Jesus does not ward off the storm...& *SOMETIMES* it takes you where the storm is most likely to happen. Mt 7:24 rock/sand

I mentioned a few weeks back...the word Mt uses "fierce storm" isn't a nautical word...it's a word from geology not seafaring: *mega seismos*. Mt's not a sailor so he describes what it feels like...big earthquake...as if someone grabbed the Sea of Galilee like a bucket of water & gave it a big shake. I can show you what that's like w/ my waterbottle...And the word he chose for the waves *breaking into* means the waves are COVERING *kalyptesthai* the boat. Every time a wave hits it blankets the boat & they're all under water for a few seconds. No wonder they're afraid. I understand that kind of fear; that moment when you aren't sure you're going to emerge from under the thing that might kill you.

I'm convinced fear drives & controls a great deal of human living. I've experienced it in my own life. I've seen it in the lives of others. I've seen fear take hold & distort our vision, twist our perceptions, & drown our hopes. Fear often determines the choices we make, the words we say, the actions we take, & the prayers we pray. Look at the events of today's world & you'll see fear. It's one thing all the socio-political entities have in common. They want you afraid... especially of that other party/entity/candidate/policy/outcome. Read the headlines & you'll find stories of fear. We've even been told to be afraid of each other because I might infect you or you me...so we do stuff to reduce the fear whether or not it reduces the risk. Fear is a primal/primary response to being vulnerable, powerless, at risk, not in

control...Adam & Eve upon rebelling against God hide from each other & then from God & when God finds them; Adam says, *"I heard you walking in the garden, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked."* Dig into the scriptures & we find the most common command from God to his people is "Don't be afraid." 366X or something like that...1 for every day of the year +1 for all the things you're scared of that will never happen. And yet, most of us are afraid. We've seen the storm hit. We've seen the storm win. We've rowed the same boat as the disciples...give it all you got & you get nowhere...you're trapped in the perfect storm & there's no way out. We've been tossed about by the storms of life...fear touches every heart.

In fact when God calls Abraham, the first thing God says; *"Do not be afraid, Abram, for I will protect you, & your reward will be great."* – Gen 15:1 *I am your shield, your very great reward.* – "My presence w/ you & my destiny for you are unassailable...I walk through life w/ you & I will see my plan for you through to completion." So what? So don't be afraid. To draw Abe deeper into the promise that is long in coming, God first addresses Abe's fear. Which is precisely what Jesus does in the boat. *Suddenly, a fierce storm struck the lake, with waves breaking into the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went & woke him up, shouting, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" Jesus responded..."*

NB: The howl of the wind did not wake Jesus. The drenching waves did not disturb his rest. The ferocity of the storm did not rouse him. The cries of his people received Jesus' immediate attention.

Whatever else you hang onto...hang onto that. When you cry out to Jesus you have his immediate undivided attention. Why is it like that? Why does it take the shrieking of the 12 to rouse Jesus? Because the real storm is not outside the boat but ravaging their hearts. The real storm is the fear that has caused them to forget just who is in the boat w/ them. The real storm is the fear that has clouded their trust in Jesus' power to save. The real storm is the fear that has focused their attention only on themselves...caused them to see only the threats to their safety. *Jesus responded, "Why are you afraid? You have so little faith!" Then he got up & rebuked the wind & waves, & suddenly there was a great calm.* The real miracle here is not that the *mega seismos* gave way to Jesus' command & became a *megale kalene* (great calm). The real miracle is that the storm in the disciples was stilled...that their hearts were calmed & their spirits refreshed...

The very elements that threatened to destroy the disciples became the environment in which they recognized the power & presence of Jesus ruling over all things for their good. What they first perceived as certain death they now recognize as new

life, hope, & salvation. Jesus invites them & us to live in such intimate communion w/ Him that nothing harmful/hurtful frightens you...God's very presence with/power in/love for you keeps fear contained even in difficult circumstances.

Here's the question: When fear strikes...Is Jesus enough? Are his promises enough? Is Jesus trustworthy? Is Jesus good? Is Jesus w/ you & for you & alive in you? Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes...That's what the disciples are learning...Who is this that even wind & waves obey...and stills the storm inside...

Faith trusts...

- When fear fills or surrounds you, Jesus is here.
- When confusion, anxiety & uncertainty assail you, Jesus is here
- When you feel most threatened or vulnerable, Jesus is here.

His love always protects, always provides, always calms & always restores. His love never fails. Christ *"in you"* is stronger than any gale-force blast; His Spirit *in you* is more powerful than any battering wave; & God's love for you & his presence w/ you deeper & truer & sturdier than anything that might capsize your life or pull you under. Because Jesus has already written you into his story of eternal life & unfailing love & abundant joy; his protection is assured & you can live w/ peace beyond human comprehension.

I'm going to bless you...assure you...remind you...then we'll pray...Psalm 121:5-8 *The Lord himself watches over you! The Lord stands beside you as your protective shade. The sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon at night. The Lord keeps you from all harm & watches over your life. The Lord keeps watch over you as you come & go, both now & forever.*

Let's pray w/ that in mind: **Lord Jesus you've done all that needs doing so we could be part of your family now & forever & delight in your love & power & presence all the days of our lives. You know our greatest fears...right now we give those to you...they're yours...We don't want them any longer. Replace those fears with faith...with the confidence & assurance only you & your mighty love can give. Fill our hearts with boldness to share with others what we have received in abundance from you. We pray in your mighty Name...Amen.**