

Father may these spoken words be faithful to your written word and lead us to the living Word, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

You might remember the phrase from the film Forrest Gump, "Life is like a box of chocolates...you never know what you're going to get. Life is anything but predictable. Our circumstances can change with a blink of an eye, and in the process our whole world can turn upside down. Life is not always pleasant and it's not always what we want it to be...we never know which way the wind will blow and what storm it will bring with it.

In life, no matter the forecast there is always a chance for rain. How we react to those unpredictable disturbances will either make or break us in our Christian life. This dramatic incident on the Sea of Galilee teaches us some valuable lessons about life and some basic principles about God's protection in life's storms.

The first lesson is that everyone experiences storms, even if they have Jesus in their boat. Having Jesus in their boat didn't exempt the disciples from being battered by a serious gale. And just because we are Christians doesn't mean that we are exempt from the problems of life. A preacher once said that there are three kinds of Christians: Those coming out of a storm, those in a storm, and those going into one. Every one of us fits into one of these categories.

Sometimes the storms come from our own bad choices, but not always...at times they come even when we are doing the right thing. Unlike the storm that hit Jonah because he disobeyed God, these disciples were not being punished for an act of disobedience. In fact, they were doing exactly what Jesus had asked them to do...they were going to the other side of the lake, and yet they still had to endure a storm. Matthew 5:45 reminds us "for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous." The rain falls on us both, even as Christians the storms will come. God does not exempt us from pain.

Jesus told a parable about two builders who built their house on different foundations, one was on solid rock and the other was on sand; in that parable the storm came and hit both houses, the only difference was in the type of foundation on which the house was built. Being a Christian doesn't exempt us from accidents or difficulties; but it does give us a foundation to withstand the storm. In John 16:33 Jesus says, "...In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." We mustn't be discouraged when we face

storms but realise that it is a normal part of life and that God is with us during them.

The second lesson is that the storms often come unexpectedly. These disciples were expert fisherman and even they were caught off guard by the storm. Storms in the Sea of Galilee are especially rough. The Sea of Galilee is more than 600 feet below sea level. It is surrounded by tablelands beyond which the configuration of the surrounding mountains cause the winds to be extremely strong, stirring up violent storms. Waves can be as high as 20 feet. And the storms are sudden. One second it can be blue skies and within 10 minutes a strong thunderstorm will fill the sky. So, this was a fierce storm for which the disciples were unprepared.

The storms of life can come upon us when we least expect it; life is going well and suddenly a bomb is dropped. Without warning, a routine examination reveals a tumour. The phone call in the middle of the night telling us a loved one has died. It happens so suddenly we can't believe it.

For many, when those storms come, their first instinct will be one of panic and fear, just like the disciples. Luke 8:23-24 reads, "and while they were sailing, he fell asleep. A gale swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger. They went to him and woke him up, shouting, 'Master, Master, we are perishing!'

Now these disciples had reasons to fear yet at the same time they had plenty of reasons not to be afraid. Jesus Himself was with them, so what was there to fear? They had already seen his power demonstrated in his miracles, so they should have had complete confidence that he could handle the situation. They could see that Jesus was perfectly at peace, even amid the storm. This fact alone should have encouraged them. Jesus was in God's will and knew that the Father would care for him, so he took a nap. We can have the same confidence that God will always take care of us; in Jeremiah 29 we read, "For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you."

The third lesson is that Jesus will accompany us through the storm, even though at times it may seem that he is unconcerned. Here the disciples were fighting for their lives, the huge waves were crashing over the sides, and over in the corner lay Jesus, exhausted from a long day of preaching taking a nap. In Mark's gospel

it reads, "The disciples woke him and said to him, 'Teacher, don't you care if we drown'" Isn't that how we feel sometimes, "God do you care?" "Are you out there God?" "Can you hear me?" But even when we don't feel God, God is still there. On a wall in a cellar in Cologne, where Jews hid from Nazis, this inscription was found. The anonymous author who perished with his fellow victims left behind these words, "I believe in the sun even when it's not shining. I believe in love even when not feeling it. I believe in God even when he is silent."

This is an important lesson for us to learn. Sometimes God won't calm the storm, but he'll calm us. We can be confident knowing we are not going through it alone. He has promised us that he will never leave us or forsake us. He doesn't always bring peace to our circumstances, but if we allow him, he will bring peace to our spirit. If we understand that truth, we can be spared some major disappointments in the Christian life. He is always there, even if we can't see him.

Whether our storm is a simple shower or a violent hurricane, in Isaiah 41:10 it says, "do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand." As that lovely old hymn "What a friend we have in Jesus" tells us, "Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged, take it to the Lord in prayer." In Jesus' name. Amen.