

SERMON Matthew 14:22-33
(Parallel accounts Mark 6:45-52, John 6:16-21)
IN CHRIST EVEN "BAD" EXPERIENCES ARE GOOD!

Immediately Jesus made [constrained] His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there. But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary.

Now in the fourth watch of the night [3:00 – 6:00 a.m.] Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear! But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."

And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God!"

Have you heard the phrase "Experience is the best teacher"? To know about driving a car from reading a book is not enough. One actually has to drive a car to master the skill. The same with riding a horse I assume, enduring a blizzard, learning a new job, playing ball. At school, assignments are given so that the student has the opportunity to practice, to experience, to put to use, the truths taught in the lesson, making them his own. Sometimes it works in reverse, such as, "I had a bad experience with a dog; I don't care for dogs anymore." However, in Christ every experience is a good experience—even "bad" ones. Consider our text.

Jesus and His disciples had been on the east shore of the Sea of Galilee, a lake eight miles across and thirteen miles long. Several familiar Jewish towns were on the west and northwest side—Capernaum, Bethsaida, and others. Jesus had crossed the lake from there to get away from the crowds for a time. The crowds followed Him on foot. There, He mercifully taught them, healed them, and fed them—5000 men plus women and children using five loaves of bread and two small fish. John 6 tells us that thereafter the men wanted to make Him their king by force—after all, Free Food, right?! But He had not come to be any earthly king, any Bread King. Jesus constrained the disciples to get into the boat and cross back, He sent the crowds on their way. Jesus went up the mountainside alone to pray—to be refreshed with His Father's love, seeing again His role of serving as the world's Savior from sin.

When Jesus was sending the disciples on their way, do you suppose they were keyed-up? So excited! "Look at what we have just been part of—supplying food for thousands of hungry, but now very happy, people. The people looked on us with honor—Jesus' helpers and agents. It was great to be part of this, great to be involved with it! What else could be coming for us!" I do suppose they were on an emotional "high." They likely would have basked in the honor of the people a little longer. Maybe they even wondered why Jesus was so soon in sending them on their way. The text does not say. Maybe Jesus did not want them to get too full of the honor of the people, to stand in limelight too long. Human praise is misleading. "*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in Him.*" (I John 2:15)

Do you have days or a string of days when everything goes great. The equipment doesn't break down, the weather unfolds your way, you're happy at what you're doing, people are pleased with you, you're pleased with people. These moments are gifts from God. Thank Him for them. These are moments that are not owed you by God, or that you brought to yourself by your own hard work. But be aware, these days do not continue. God does not want you to get too comfortable in this world either. In this sinful world, things change. It's not heaven yet. Jesus had a greater experience awaiting the disciples, and you as well, experiences, although harder, much more valuable.

Smooth sailing that evening for the disciples soon disappeared. The wind turned contrary. Darkness fell. The boat was taking a beating and the disciples were struggling at the oars. This relatively short trip became a nightmare. By the early morning hours, they were still only half way and likely very tired. What were the disciples thinking now? "Jesus helped all those people, why isn't He here helping us? He sends us off to fend for ourselves. I think He loves them more than us. I think He's forgotten about us. Woe is me. What a rotten break. It's just our luck. Couldn't He have prevented this?" Do you ever blame God for your struggles at the oars and struggles against the winds of life? "What rotten luck! God, you have forgotten about me. You don't love me, do You!

You love the others more. I don't need this, God" Maybe it was when you broke your leg, when your field got hauled out, when your children got sick. It's easy to wallow in helplessness and self-pity.

But Jesus in love knew what was going on. He could see them struggling at the oars. He came to help them—true man WALKING on the water—true God walking ON THE WATER! He is the God-man. He knows and understands your every plight and knows the right way, for your sake, to help. The disciples must have been exhausted, frustrated, and worried—on the water, in the dark, fighting the wind and the waves, striving not just to make headway but to stay upright. Jesus did not come on a Coast Guard boat with lights blazing and sirens blaring. He came quietly. That's how He comes into your topsy-turvy life too—in the quietness of His Word. Here is your Rescuer, your Savior from sin, trouble, death, and hell. The disciples didn't recognize Him! Their sinful human reason overran any confidence they had, that the Jesus who fed 5000 people was true God who could do anything. They concluded that what they were seeing was a phantom, a ghost, an apparition from Satan to harm them. Do you understand, the spirit world is real?. *"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."* (Ephesians 6:12). But in Jesus you are safe. Without Jesus there is no help. The disciples cried out in fear. "Cried out" the same word used in Greek to describe frogs croaking! They cried out in panic. Some of them were fishermen, well experienced on the water and with sea craft. Perhaps the weather didn't bother them, but this phantom!—they all cried out in fear! When was the last time you cried out in fear? not pain, but fear? Desperate fear? I don't just mean the children and ladies; but you men, grown men? Can you grasp their terror? What the disciples saw was real. They had no logical explanation for it, and assumed the worst. You may ask, How could they see at night, during the storm. If it was a storm, perhaps there was lightning. But none of the accounts say anything about clouds and rain. Perhaps the sky was clear, lit by starlight or some moon light.

In their worst fear, Jesus was with them. Immediately He spoke; He didn't play them along. He doesn't play games with you either. He spoke His calm assurance, no shouting or yelling, *"Be of good cheer--take heart, take courage! It is I--your friend, your shepherd, your Savior, Do not be afraid--I'm here to help."* Can you imagine the flood of relief that washed over them? Jesus was there to save them.

Do you realize your real predicament is even worse? I don't mean on the farm or at work. I don't mean vs. the weather, the prices, or the politics of the day. You face the real foe, Satan, a roaring lion seeking to gobble you up! You have walked after him when you knew you shouldn't. You have preferred him to God. And now in God's anger, you are dangling over the abyss of hellfire. Only a fool would not be crying out in fear! But take heart, be of good courage. Jesus is right at your side. He has walked in your shoes. He has suffered on the cross the punishment of hell for you, He says to you, "It is I. Do not be afraid." A flood of relief is there to sweep over your sinful heart too. Saved in Jesus! from even the worst predicament.

But how easy is it to walk in that faith and confidence day by day?--that confidence of "Saved by Jesus; He will never let me down. Forgiven. Righteous in His blood. Death? Swallowed up in the Resurrection from the grave. Eternity in heaven." What a confidence! But it's not easy to hold on to that. The sinful flesh, wants to look to self, not Jesus. And so you see in our text, Peter, sure of his rescue from the wind, knowing that Jesus could help vs. anything, asked to meet Jesus on the water. Jesus consented. But Peter's walk in faith did not last very long. He began to walk by sight not by faith. He saw what the wind was doing to the surface of the water. How could he walk on such a sea? He let go of his faith in Jesus, was afraid again, and began to sink. Do you try to go it on your own? Does Satan plant in your head the ideas, "I didn't need God today and I'm going to do that again tomorrow. My life goes just fine without Jesus week after week. Why bother sitting at His house to hear His Word of rescue?" When you think like that, then you are sliding into the devil's clutches.

As Peter slipped down into the water, he cried out in fear a second time, *"Lord, save me!"* And Jesus did. Jesus caught Him by the hand and pulled him up. Jesus is there to catch you too. Trust Him. The problem is thinking you don't need Him—"Someone else will save me," "I can do it on my own." It's a sure recipe for disaster. The sinful heart does not want to go to Him, because faith is a humiliating thing for the proud heart. Jesus addresses Peter's pride. *Why did you doubt, O you of little faith?* Faith is hard for those with human experience. "Such and such won't work. This is impossible. There's no way to fix this. One year to live." But your experience with Jesus overrides whatever this life has to offer without Him.

When Jesus and Peter got into the boat, another miracle. *The wind ceased.* Now, based on this hard but blessed experience, *those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God!"* A truth they could cling to! A truth they would see many more times. I pray it's a truth you learn often—from the Bible, and from your "experience" in Christian life as well. In Jesus, every Experience is valuable! It points you to Him!

Amen! So be it!

Pastor Kanzenbach---