

9 April 2023

Come

Dear Sisters and Elders,

After feeding the 5,000, Jesus “departed again into a mountain himself alone.” (John 6:15). Just prior to his departure, He “constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away.” (Matt 14:22). Following the Savior’s direction, the disciples went down to the Sea of Galilee and entered a ship, intending to cross the water in their return to Capernaum. The record indicates Jesus then “went up into a mountain apart to pray.” (Matt 14:23). As the disciples rowed towards Capernaum, a great storm arose with a strong headwind that made it very difficult to progress. John’s record says the disciples were 25-30 furlongs away (5-6 km) from the shore from which they had departed. This would have put them in the middle of Sea of Galilee, fighting a ferocious storm. They must have been at this for some time, for Matthew and Mark both record that it was about “the fourth watch of the night” (Mark 6:48). At the time of Jesus, the night was divided into 4, three-hour blocks of time. 6-9 pm was the first watch; 9 pm – 12 midnight, the second watch; midnight to 3 am, the third watch; 3 am – 6 am the fourth watch. Even if they had set off between 9 – 10 pm, this means they had been rowing for 6-7 hours. We don’t know at what point the storm arose, but it was clear these men must have been fighting that wind for some time. The journey from where the 5,000 were fed back to Capernaum would have been perhaps 10 km. Fishing boats during the time of Jesus could travel about 6 km in an hour on calm water. The fact that the apostles had been on the water between 6-7 hours is an indication that they had been experiencing the storm for a significant part of their journey. They must have been exhausted!

It was during the fourth watch, perhaps just before the sun was preparing to break the horizon, that “they all saw him, and were troubled” (Mark 6:50) “saying, it is a spirit; and they cried out for fear.” (Matt 14:26). The disciples may have been aware of Jewish mystics who believed that during the fourth watch the veil between the spirit realm and the mortal world was very thin. Whatever they believed, they were afraid, and Jesus, seeing their fear, straightway (immediately) said, “Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.” What a relief it must have been to these men, exhausted from fighting the storm, to see Jesus. In Mark’s account, it says “he went up unto them into the ship; and the wind ceased” (Mark 6:51). In John’s account, it says, “they willingly received him into the ship: and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went” (John 6:21). In both of these accounts, miracles occurred: In Mark, the storm ceased. In John, they immediately arrived at their destination. It is, however, in Matthew’s account that we learn of one of the most often discussed and quoted miracles. It is Peter’s experience of walking on the water. In Matthew 14:28-29, we read, “And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.” “And he said, **Come**. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.”

You know the rest of the story. Peter began walking towards Jesus, but when he saw the wind and the waves surrounding him, he lost his focus on the Savior and started to fear. At this point he began to sink and cried out to Jesus, “saying, Lord, save me”. (Matt 14:30). “And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased.” (Matthew 31-32).

Jesus had power over the elements. He could have calmed the sea before the disciples had embarked on their journey. He knew what would happen. In Mark's account, we learn that he was alone on the land "And he saw them toiling in rowing" (Mark 6:48). Why did Jesus allow them to struggle against the storm for so long? What did he need them to learn?

As I have studied and pondered on this experience, I have made a list of 12 learnings we can take from Peter's amazing experience and 12 questions for us to ponder.

1. The Lord wants us to learn how to do hard things. It is amid difficulty that we are most prepared to come unto Him. Do we rejoice in doing hard things?
2. The apostles were rowing against the wind. They made very little progress, but they kept rowing. Sometimes we are "rowing" against societal norms. When we are obedient and following Jesus Christ, those in the great and spacious building mocking are like a wind blowing against us. Do we continue rowing?
3. The apostles believed their destination was Capernaum. But Jesus was trying to help them reach another destination. Him. He wanted them to trust in Him and to come unto Him more completely with greater faith. Do we see Him as our destination?
4. As the apostles were in the middle of the Sea of Galilee battling the storm, they thought they were alone, but Jesus could still see them. At times it may feel like we are alone in darkness, but we should take comfort in knowing that the Light of the World can still see us and is watching over us. Do we feel his gaze?
5. In Mark 6:48 it says that the apostles were worried that Jesus was going to pass by them. Do we feel that Jesus is going to pass right by us? Do we trust that He will stop and come to our aid?
6. Jesus wants us to get out of our comfort zone. The miracles happen outside of the boat. If Peter does not step out of the boat, the miracle of him walking on water and being rescued by Jesus never happens. Are we willing to step out of our boat?
7. Peter did not wait for the Savior to invite him to come to Him. He asked Jesus. Are we waiting for an invitation or are we asking? Do we hear his invitation to "come"?
8. Once Peter stepped out of the boat and walked towards the Savior, he was able to walk on the water, until he remembered that he didn't know how (Madeleine L'Engle – an American poet and author). He allowed his doubt to overshadow his faith. How strong is our faith?
9. When Peter allowed himself to be distracted by the wind and the waves (the world) instead of staying focused on the Savior, he began to sink. Are we walking or sinking?
10. The Savior immediately reached out to Peter - and Peter immediately reached up to grab Jesus' outstretched hand. Are we drowning or reaching for our Savior?
11. Christ will always push us to reach our potential and when we fall, He will come in the fourth watch and immediately save us. Are we willing to endure to the fourth watch?
12. Jesus wants us to become like Him and He provides all kinds of mortal experiences for us to learn that He will never leave us alone. Are we grateful for our challenges?

May we learn the lessons of Peter's experience. May our answers to these questions lead us to our Savior Jesus Christ, filled with faith, trust, and courage.

All My Love,  
President Kunz