

“The Perfect Storm”

Matthew 14:22-33

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It has been labeled “The Perfect Storm.” On October 30, 1991, three hurricanes merged off the coast of Cape Ann, Massachusetts leaving a path of destruction that demolished homes and devoured waterfront property. Witnesses said the shoreline looked like it had endured a military invasion.

In 2000, Wolfgang Petersen brought this storm to life in a movie titled, “The Perfect Storm.” This movie chronicled the journey of the six crewmen on the Andrea Gail, a commercial sword fishing boat that was lost at sea. Before communication was lost, the crew reported thirty-foot waves and winds up to eighty knots. For seven days, the Coast Guard unsuccessfully searched for the men.

I’m sure the storm that the disciples were in on the Sea of Galilee was not as severe, but it was hazardous nonetheless. Storms were not that uncommon on the Sea of Galilee but this one caught everyone by surprise. After feeding the five thousand, Jesus sent the crowd, along with his disciples away. He needed to spend time alone with his Father in prayer, so he insisted that the disciples spend the night in a boat on the sea.

Sometime after three o’clock in the morning, a storm swept down from the hillside onto the sea. It was raging enough to scare the disciples, some of whom were seasoned fishermen. Realizing they were in danger, Jesus descended from the mountain and walked on the water to where the disciples were located.

They thought he was a ghost until he spoke and told them not to be afraid. Thinking it was the Lord, Peter replied, *“Lord, if it is you, tell me to come to you on the water.”* *“Come,”* Jesus said. Immediately, Peter got out of the boat and started walking toward Jesus. When he saw the wind, though, he became afraid and started to sink. He cried out for Jesus to save him, which he did. Jesus reached out his hand, caught him and helped him back into the boat. As the wind subsided, the disciples in the boat said, *“Truly you are the Son of God.”*

I am fascinated by Peter’s request in 14:28, *“Lord, if it is you, tell me to come to you on the water.”* Perhaps no incident better reveals Peter’s impulsive nature.

Was he wise or foolish to get out of that boat at such a dangerous time? I think an argument could be made either way. He did it, however, and this is what I want to focus upon. I think there are times when we need to stay in the boat and times when we need to get out of the boat and wise is the person that does what is best. Let me explain.

First of all, there are times when we need to stay in the boat. Let’s go back to the question I asked earlier. Was Peter wise or foolish to crawl out of that boat and into a raging sea? Perhaps the best way to answer this is by noticing what the other disciples did. How many followed him out of the boat? None. Isn’t that interesting. Either they lacked courage or had more common sense than Peter. Quite frankly, I think they had more common sense.

I think there are times when we need to stay in the boat. When our world is being turned upside down and life is filled with chaos and confusion, we all need what John Claypool refers to as “a soft place to land.” There are times when we need to be in familiar territory surrounded by family and friends. This is why God has given them to us and we need to pull them close to our side.

I’ve never been a part of a church that did a better job of nurturing its wounded and hurting members. When a Smoke Rise member is being tossed by the storms of life, this church surrounds him or her to act as a buffer and help minimize the damage. I love and appreciate this about our church. This is the church at its best, providing a safe haven for those that would otherwise be lost.

So, yes, there are times when we need to stay in the boat and this may be one of those times for you. You may be reeling from the loss of a loved one, a divorce, a bad medical check-up, the loss of a job or a bankruptcy. The waves are high and the winds are fierce. It's time to stay in the boat and ride out the storm with the help of friends and family.

On the other hand, there are times when we need to get out of the boat. A boat can be a very confining place. While it provides security it limits mobility. I enjoy relaxing on a boat, but I don't want to live on one. I believe it could become a floating prison.

I believe this has happened to many people. At times I have let it happen to me and embraced a narrow comfort zone out of fear or complacency. I wonder what I missed during those times?

Perhaps this is why this part of the story fascinates me so much. Peter got out of that boat when it would have been much safer to stay in it. He attempted to do something he had never done, nor anyone else for that matter other than Jesus.

What would you like to do that you have never attempted? What do you need to do that you have been afraid to try or others have discouraged you from trying? What dreams have you buried in the cemetery of doubt and fear? Is it time to dig them up and let them live again in your heart and soul? Is it time to dream new dreams that you or those around you do not kill? Is it time to get out of your boat?

Five years ago this week, Jackie and I visited Smoke Rise for the first time. We were willing to stick a toe out of the boat but fairly sure that we would not give up our seat in the boat. We spent seventeen years building a comfort zone at another church that we thought was impenetrable. After much discussion and prayer, we decided to get out of the boat and leave that safe comfort zone.

Did we make a wise or foolish decision? I have no doubt it was a wise decision, very wise. Both of us have grown in ways I could not number or describe. Our circle of friends is much larger, our worldview is much broader and our faith is much stronger.

Is it time for you to get out of your boat? Is it time for you to follow your dreams or the ones that God gives you? Is it time for you to go back to school, pursue a different career, cultivate a new relationship, go on a mission trip, volunteer at a ministry center, write a book, develop a hidden talent, become more vocal in the pursuit of justice, share your faith or change your hairstyle? Again, is it time for you to get out of your boat?

If you think it is, let me share some guidelines with you that emerge from this text. **First of all, don't get out of your boat until you hear Jesus say, "Come."** Peter waited for permission and we need to, also. Pray and ask God to give you direction.

Secondly, after you get out of the boat, keep your eyes on Jesus. You know what happened to Peter when he took his eyes off Jesus. He started sinking. Don't let this happen to you because terrifying threats distract you.

Thirdly, when you feel overwhelmed, and you will, ask for help. If you feel like you are sinking, call out to Jesus. He will be there with a helping hand.

I don't know if Peter would refer to the storm he was in that night on the Sea of Galilee as the Perfect Storm, but perhaps he would regard it extraordinary. He learned some things about Jesus and himself during that ordeal that changed his life. I hope our study of it has had the same impact upon us.