

That Sinking Feeling

I once experienced a terrible storm on Lake Michigan. I was about 13 years old, and we were returning to the mainland from Mackinac Island on a ferry. It was a rather large boat, but when the storm hit, the ride became scary. In truth, we were being tossed around by the waves, and the captain was trying to reassure us.

Obviously, we made it back to shore that evening, but not without a few people gasping in fear, and a few other people crying. I would say many people on the ferry had what we might call that sinking feeling, meaning they feared something terrible might happen to us, as we crossed the lake in the storm.

Life is full of stormy days, so I am sure you too have experienced that sinking feeling. Maybe you were given some bad news, like the loss of a job, the diagnosis of an illness, or news that a loved one has died, and you could literally feel your heart sink. Fear, sadness, and anxiety often dominate such moments.

The disciples had such a moment too, as is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 14. Jesus had just sent a crowd of people home, and the disciples had set sail for the other side of the sea. Jesus, on the other hand, having stayed behind to pray, went up a mountainside where he could be alone with God.

Then a storm hit, and the disciples struggled against the wind and waves, fearing they would sink. Later, Jesus came walking to them on the water, and they were even more afraid. They cried out in fear, thinking he might be a ghost. Yet, the Lord spoke to their fears, saying, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

You see, Jesus' disciples too, literally experienced that sinking feeling. They were scared by the storm. They were scared their boat would sink. They were scared they would drown. It's amidst those fears of sinking, that the Lord Jesus Christ miraculously came to be with them, to help and save them.

Peter also more dramatically experienced that sinking feeling. He asked Jesus if he might also walk on the water toward him. Jesus, in the language of his day, said, "Go for it!" And Peter was actually walking on water, when suddenly his fear of the storm overtook him, he lost his focus on Jesus, and he started sinking.

But as he was sinking, as Peter experienced that sinking feeling, he found the courage amidst his fears to pray to the Lord, to beg to Jesus for help. He said, "Lord, save me," and Jesus did just that. Jesus pulled Peter out of the water, set him back into the boat, and as if that weren't enough, he calmed the storm.

It seems like this miracle story is also a parable which teaches us a couple important things. First, the disciples are finally convinced Jesus is the real thing, the Son of God. They see him walk on water. They see him calm the storm. So, they say, "Truly you are the Son of God." This is an important moment in Matthew.

Here the disciples and us with them see the divinity of Jesus. We see Jesus is in charge. We see Jesus as Son of God, who has authority over sea and storm, wind and waves. We see Jesus as Son of God, who has authority over all the personal storms, struggles, fears and hardships we face in life.

Second, Jesus, the Son of God does not leave us alone to face the storms, struggles, and fears in life. The disciples were afraid they were going to sink, yet Jesus came walking on the water to save them. Peter was afraid he would drown in the sea, yet Jesus took him by the hand and to save him from his struggle.

So, whenever we face our greatest fears in life, we are not alone either. The Lord Jesus comes alongside us with his divine power to help and save us as well. The one who has authority over sea and storm, wind and waves, comes alongside us, takes us by the hand, to lift us from our struggles and fears.

The first time experienced this was when I was just 16 years old. My mom was had a hysterectomy because of a growth on the outside of her uterus. When they opened her up and took a sample of the growth, they knew immediately what it was. She had cancer, and inside me I could feel my heart sink.

The diagnosis was rare, aggressive uterine cancer. She was going to need several different kinds of treatments. I was beside myself, but had learned from my parents and pastor, to pray to God in such times. So, I got home from the hospital one night, went to bed, and prayed for healing for mom and peace for me.

When I woke the next morning, I really felt different. I was still very concerned about mom, but I had a strange sense of calm. I stopped by our church later that day to talk to our youth pastor. He even read this very Gospel lesson to me, and he said, "You know Tom, Jesus saves you just like he saved Peter."

So, after experiencing that sinking feeling in life, that somehow this cancer was going to harm my mom and in turn hurt me, I prayed to the Lord, and Jesus came alongside me. He calmed me amidst my worst fears by giving me his peace. I believe Jesus personally reached out to me in the storm and saved me.

Whenever you are experiencing that sinking feeling, I want you, my friends in Christ, to know that Jesus comes alongside you too. If you are really afraid and it seems like Jesus is not there amidst your storm, then call out to him as Peter did. He will come to you to address your fears, and to personally save you.

Jesus will lift you and set you back into your boat, into your life, and your storm will be calmed. Of course, more storms will come, and there will be more fears to face, and that sinking feeling will return. But Jesus, the Son of God, will come to you over and over again, so that you will never be alone in such a time.

You will never be alone. Jesus Christ is coming to you every day to be with you in stormy times when you have that sinking feeling. Yes, Jesus is coming to you; Jesus is coming alongside you; Jesus is with you in your boat; Jesus is with you in your life. He is there to personally help you and yes, save you in every way.

One last thought: This coronavirus pandemic is a new and strange storm, and I find myself asking, "Why does such a thing have to come along and change our lives, and in many ways, change the world. While churches and media will provide all kinds of answers, no ungracious or worldly answer should satisfy us.

Instead, for us who believe in God and in the Lord Jesus, this is a time to get out of our boats. I don't mean be unsafe, or take off your mask, or disrespect social distancing, or venture outside if you are a high-risk person. No, I think you should protect yourself. Still, this is a time for us to get out of the safety of our boats.

In other words, this is our time to trust that the Lord Jesus, even if we get sick, even if we die, is in charge of this storm too, and he close. He is so close to us that he will save us. So, when you are outside your boat, ask the Lord to save you if you are sinking, and do not forget to help your neighbor if they are sinking.

Lord, save us! Amen.