

Sunday School Lesson
“Stories of Faith” Series
Lesson 5: Jesus Calms the Storm

Opening Thoughts:

Today we shift from the Hebrew Bible to the Gospels in the New Testament, focusing on one of the great miracles: The Calming of the Sea. For the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) this is an important moment that clarifies Jesus' power and authority over not just evil spirits and physical maladies, but over the natural world as well. For the disciples, however, it is a moment in which their faith is put to the test, a test that for the moment, they fail.

1. When have you felt a storm? Were you worried?
2. The disciples have seen many miracles already, why do they struggle here?
3. Why is it important for the reader to understand Jesus' power over the natural world?

Please open with a time of prayer.

Background:

The Gospel of Matthew is traditionally the first listed work in the New Testament. While scholars now believe Mark was written first, Matthew has (in general) continued to be listed first. Part of the synoptic Gospels, Matthew focuses on Jesus' Jewish nature and proving that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. Matthew was likely written between 80-90 CE, though authorship is unknown it has traditionally been attributed to Matthew, an early disciple of Jesus. The gospel is most famous for the following:

- Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7)
- The Beatitudes (Mt 5:1-12)
- The Great Commission (Mt. 28)

The passage today occurs following both the Sermon on the Mount and a series of physical healings in which Jesus heals many people of their various ailments, including the servant of a Roman Centurion. After this, Jesus and the disciples begin to make their way across the sea. While the disciples man the boat, Jesus rests. However, a storm arises and threatens the boat. The disciples begin to panic, particularly when they notice Jesus has not awoken. Finally waking Jesus, the storm is calmed and Jesus questions them on their faith. The disciples, now transfixed by Jesus' power, remark that “even the winds and the sea” obey Jesus.

While the story itself is brief, it serves two purposes. First, it shows that Jesus' power is not limited to teaching and minor healings. Second, it establishes that the disciples, even as much as they have already seen and learned, have a long way to go to fully understand what is at work (an allegory for us as well).

1. Why do the disciples panic, failing to either calm the storm or seek God?
2. Why do you think Matthew focuses on Jesus' Jewish nature? Does that matter?
3. When have you found yourself panicking when others were calmly resting?

Main Passage: **Matthew 8:23-27**

And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. A windstorm arose on the sea, so great that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. And they went and woke him up, saying, “Lord, save us! We are perishing!” And he said to them, “Why are you afraid, you of little faith?” Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a dead calm. They were amazed, saying, “What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?”

1. What is the main point of this passage? What stands out?
2. How is Jesus' faith shown? What about the disciples?
3. How does Jesus calming the storm show God's power?

Reflection:

In reading the story of the calming of the sea, we learn not only the breadth of Jesus' power, but also the sometimes-fleeting nature of our own faith. Look back in the previous 22 verses. Jesus has already:

- Healed a leper (1-4)
- Healed the Centurion's servant (5-13)
- Healed many of various demons and illnesses (14-17)
- And given a lesson about the cost of following God (18-22)

Yet, immediately after all this, the disciples fold quickly when faced with a storm. There is perhaps no greater analogy or allegory for our own faith than this.

We too encounter storms. Some are small, passing showers that we quickly dodge or overcome. Others are a quick summer thunderstorm from which we take cover. And yet others threaten the boat we have made for ourselves. It is these storms that, when we do not keep the things of God first, threaten our very faith. Notice Jesus during the storm: he is resting. Taking a nap while the sea bobs the boat up and down. What can we learn from this?

Sabbath is our renewal. Study and worship our food. Prayer our salve and communication. Jesus rests to be ready for the next task while the disciples concern themselves with other things. They are not ready when the storm comes. Jesus is. Take time. Rest. Renew. The storms will come, but be ready.

1. When have you felt like a disciple? What happened?
2. Why is rest and sabbath important? How does it get pushed aside for other things?
3. How will you make time to care for your faith, even amidst the storms?