

Thank you, worship team.

I was telling a couple people this, earlier this weekend, we went back up to Omaha because I did a wedding for a young couple.

And it was just a great privilege because it was Matt and Meg, and I got to be Matt's pastor when he was born, and Meg when she was a girl.

And now to see them grown up and perform this wedding was just, it was beautiful, it was great.

It's a joy of every pastor's heart, right?

But it reminded me about how quickly time passes, yes?

And how comfortable we can become.

Maybe it's a favorite chair you sit in your home and it's your comfy chair or that couch and you just feel so comfortable.

Maybe it's your life stage right now and you're comfortable in that.

Maybe...

Churches can become comfortable.

Yes, I know they can because people are made of people and we like comfort.

We don't like things to change.

And today we're looking at a message because I think God would challenge us all from a very famous story in the Bible about what it means

to shed off just staying comfortable and maybe to take a step across the line and risk a little bit.

Maybe to get out of the boat.

And so that's the story we're focusing on this morning.

It's faith storms and stepping out of the boat.

Now, because we're jumping in to a passage of Scripture in the book of John, it would help us to just get some context, right?

It'll be more meaningful.

So what's been happening is this, chapter 6, I don't know if you know this, is kind of a hinge for the

whole gospel of John.

It's the hinge on which that gospel of John turns.

We'll see Jesus reach the height of his popularity where he's attracting not just the 12,

not just 120, but hundreds of people who want to hear Him preach and teach and of course do miracles, we'll see Him reach His height of popularity with thousands only to see most of them walk away in disgust.

And so this is an important chapter in the Bible.

We'll see Jesus, He's performed His 4th sign out of the seven recorded in the Gospel of John.

You know, the Gospel of John is about the seven I am statements and about the seven signs or seven miracles.

He has performed the feeding the 5,000 now, the 4th sign out of the seven.

Gospel writer John talks about turning water to wine, healing the official son, healing the crippled man at the pool, and feeding the five thousands.

Now, perhaps six months have passed since the end of chapter 5 in John.

And what John leaves out, because he's the different gospel writer, he's not the synoptic gospel writer,

But the synoptics include is the Sermon on the Mount, healing of the centurion's servant, raising the widow of Nain's son, calming the sea, sending the demons into the pigs, healing the bleeding woman, raising Jairus' daughter, sending out the Twelve, Herod beheading John the Baptist.

So John doesn't address those like the other three synoptic gospel writers do.

but instead he focuses on other things.

It's a more theological gospel.

Well, in our story today, Jesus instructs his disciples to go ahead and get in the boat and head for the other side of the lake.

This was after the feeding of the 5,000, because they were in danger of the crowds.

wanting to elevate them.

They wanted Jesus to be the king, not just the king, but the military conqueror to throw off Rome.

So you can imagine them probably wanting Peter to be the prime minister.

Can you imagine that?

Or Judas to be the treasurer, even worse.

And so Jesus sends them on, right?

And so they go from this mountaintop experience

where they get to see Jesus feed the 5,000, and Jesus goes up on the hillside further to pray, and they go into the valley, as it were, to the Sea of Galilee, and there they experience the struggle.

So this miracle we're going to read about is the fifth of the seven signs recorded by John.

It's also recorded in Matthew 14 with additional details.

And this is not the demonic storm that we can read about in Matthew 8 or Mark 4, where Jesus, asleep in the boat, calms the storm, commands it to stop.

In this event here, Jesus sends the crowds off, tells the disciples to row to the other side of the lake, home

back to home base in Capernaum and then Jesus goes up the mountain to pray.

But it's already getting dark and the wind is starting to pick up as it does on the Sea of Galilee.

So let's jump in there to John 6 and I'm going to start reading and then I'm going to skip to Matthew because he adds some more details.

So let's look at the story together and if

I didn't say it out loud, I don't think, but I think the slide is probably up there.

The big idea this morning is this, that when your eyes are on Jesus, circumstances cannot control you.

We're all surrounded by circumstances.

You've got circumstances today.

The question is, are you going to let those control you, or are you going to control them?

So that's where we're headed today.

So John 6, beginning in verse 16, when evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, got into the boat and started across the sea to Capernaum.

It was now dark and Jesus had not yet come to them.

The sea became rough because the strong wind was blowing.

When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat and they were frightened.

I guess they were.

Can you imagine seeing that?

If you turn over to Matthew 14, we pick up there.

gives more detail.

And in the fourth watch of the night, so what's that?

About 3 a.m.

Imagine that.

They had been rowing for almost, well, from evening till then, so almost nine hours, they had been rowing against the wind and the waves.

I mean, that's a whole other sermon.

But if you feel like you've been rowing lately and getting nowhere, join the crowd.

God doesn't promise

to make life easy for you.

In fact, the Bible says that he will discipline you and me as his children so that we can get stronger and better.

Well, the Bible says that in verse 26, when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified and said, it's a ghost.

And they cried out in fear.

But immediately Jesus spoke to them saying, take heart, it is I.

Do not be afraid.

We're going to unpack that in just a moment.

And Peter answered him, Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.

So he, Jesus, verse 29, says, come.

So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus.

But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried out, Lord, save me.

By the way, I hope you've said that prayer.

Lord, save me.

Jesus, save me in every way.

Save my soul from the punishment of sin and hell.

Jesus, save me emotionally.

Save me mentally.

Lord, save me.

What a great prayer.

And you can say that prayer today and mean it with all of your heart, and Christ will do that.

Well, Jesus said, Come.

And here's the thing.

Peter got out of the boat, as we've said, and of course his circumstances were there.

O little faith, why did you doubt?

Verse 31.

In verse 32, notice the proclamation.

He got in the boat, the wind ceased, and those in the boat worshiped him, saying, Truly you are the Son of God.

Now, if you go back to John, we get more of the story.

It is not, he said to them, it is I, do not be afraid.

Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.

So that's another part of this miracle, is when he gets in the boat,

and they're still far away from the other side, immediately the boat is there.

And on the next day, the crowd that remained on the other side of the sea saw that there had only been one boat there and that Jesus had not entered the boat after the feeding of the 5,000.

He didn't get in, but now he was there.

How did this work out?

Other boats from Tiberius came near the place where they had eaten the bread of the Lord and given thanks.

So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there,

Lord, His disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum.

So they wanted to hurry on ahead to meet Jesus.

Why?

They wanted to see another miracle.

They wanted more food, perhaps.

And so they were seeking Jesus.

So we'll finish the story in just a minute, but as we unpack this, I mean, there's like many sermons in this story, right?

And here's the first one, that you can be in a storm and in the center of God's will.

The disciples, get this, the disciples were obeying Jesus.

He told them to get in the boat and go to the other side, to row the other side.

They were in complete obedience.

They were in the center of God's will, and yet they got caught out in a storm.

And they were not making progress.

And they thought they were in danger of their lives.

you can be in a storm and still be in the center of God's will.

My oldest son, Matthew, happened to pop in and surprise us last Sunday.

He was sitting right over there next to Susan.

It's great to catch up with him.

But he and his wife are strong believers.

But here's their journey over the last couple years, right?

His wife is infertile, and they've been trying for, I don't know,  
over a decade to have a baby.

Did in vitro twice.

Didn't work, right?

And then a couple years ago, he was sitting at a stoplight in his car and wham, the lady wasn't paying attention and just creamed him from the back and he had a traumatic brain injury.

And he's much, much better.

The doctor said, you'll never be completely over it, but you're much better.

So he's pretty normal now.

That goes on.

Then down in Arkansas where they live, there was a tornado that came by, lots of tornadoes in Arkansas.

This is like, I don't know, two or three years ago, however long it was.

And the tornado didn't destroy their home, but they thought it probably messed up their roof and they had it checked out.

And the individual said, no, it's fine, just perfect, no damage at all.

Well, he was wrong.

And so over the summer with the rains and the heat of Arkansas, what was happening is water was coming in and the insulation and just turning everything into black mold and going down the sides of the house in the insulation into the sheetrock.

And my son and daughter-in-law started to get sick.

And they couldn't have got what was happening.

They finally went to the doctor and they had blood workup done and they both had mold in their blood.

and it was causing them to be very ill.

They had to leave their house and they were gone for almost a year.

By the time it could all get fixed and they could fight with the insurance company who didn't want to cover anything.

And so that was going on.

And then there was other couple traumatic things that went on.

And it's like, enough is enough, right?

And he was faithful to the Lord.

He was still every day spending time with God and involved in church and helping lead a young men's group and doing all the right things.

And it just wouldn't stop.

Maybe you guys are in a type of a storm right now.

Not with those exact circumstances, of course, but maybe you've got stuff going on and you're saying, God, enough is enough.

I don't need any more rain.

I don't need another storm in my life.

I'm trying to remain in the center of your will.

Well, severe storms are a part of life, yes?

And they're a part of the Sea of Galilee.

We've been on the Sea of Galilee there.

Fortunately, it was a calm day, but you can imagine what was going on.

Severe storms sweep down the hillsides and the mountains around the lake, which is a deep depression some 600 feet below sea level.

And even to this day, there's some days that they advise power boats not to go out on the sea, on the lake, and you can imagine how much worse it would be for a small fishing boat that was being

rowed.

One of my favorite commentators, Warren Wiersbe, says this, did Jesus know that a storm was coming?

Of course.

Fully God, yet fully man, then why did He deliberately send His friends into danger?

Well, quite the opposite is true, He writes.

He was rescuing them from greater danger, the danger of being swept along by a fanatical crowd.

But there was another reason for that storm.

The Lord has to balance our lives, otherwise we will become proud and then fall.

See, the disciples had been part of a thrilling miracle, the feeding of 5,000 men plus women and children from those few loaves and fish.

And they had been the ones who were passing it out and, I mean, seeing it being multiplied.

And so they had a, they were part of a miracle, not just seeing Jesus do it, they were part of a miracle.

And yet, they were let down into the sea and were facing a storm and had to learn to trust the Lord more.

See, the feeding of the 5,000 was the lesson, but the storm was the examination after the lesson.

So are you willing to be tested?

Are you willing to have an examination?

God has done great things in your life.

He's saved you.

He's changed you.

He's working.

But that doesn't mean He's stopped examining you.

He hasn't with me.

And He might be working on you today.

But here's the thing.

There's two types of storms, and I love this.

There are storms of correction and storms of perfection.

Have you heard this before?

You don't want to mess with storms of correction.

You know what those are, right?

You intentionally, you know what you're doing.

You step out of God's will.

You disobey Him.

Maybe it's out of fear.

Maybe it's a favorite signature sin of yours.

Maybe it's an addiction.

Maybe it's a root of bitterness or lack of forgiveness.

Whatever it is, you know you're out of God's will and you begin to face a storm of correction.

Those aren't any fun.

Those storms that we bring on ourselves through disobedience.

Let me advise you, and I'm talking to myself here too, don't bring on storms of correction.

The safest place to be is in the center of God's will, trusting Him daily, obeying Him, asking Him to help you.

But there are storms of correction that God will bring.

And you might say, Well, I've not really been walking with the Lord lately, and I haven't seen anything.

Well, just wait.

Some of them are invisible for a long time.

You could be in a mighty gale right now and you don't even feel it, you don't notice it.

What you're going to see is the consequences next week or next year.

Because sin always kills something.

Wages of sin is death.

It's always going to kill something.

A relationship, your joy, it's going to kill something.

Your health.

So fear the storms of correction, but there's also storms of perfection.

That's what the disciples were going through.

And there's nothing you can do about the storms of perfection.

A good, good Father will let you go through those because He wants to perfect you.

He wants to make you fully grown up and mature in Christ.

Be perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect, said Jesus.

That perfection means being grown up in the language.

It doesn't mean be morally perfect.

You can't be.

Sinless.

But it means get mature, grow up.

And He will send storms to perfection to strengthen us and sanctify us.

See, some of you are storm survivors.

I wish we had time today to hear your story.

I'm getting to know some of you and hear your stories.

But some of you are storm survivors, yes?

I mean, it might be cancer.

It might be going through a divorce that wasn't your fault.

It might be the loss of a loved one, a husband.

a wife, a child, a parent.

You're storm survivors.

Financial loss, maybe bankruptcy.

You're storm survivors, and you're still trusting in the Lord.

And He will use those storms of perfection, as I said, to strengthen you and take care of you.

You're storm survivors, and that's a good thing.

And here's the thing.

Why should you not fear storms of perfection?

because they are arranged by the sovereign, I am God.

See, John 6:20, if you look at that again, Jesus says, It is I.

Do not be afraid.

You know in the Greek what that says?

I am.

No fear.

Who is the I am?

God.

The I am.

It says, Don't be afraid.

Don't worry.

Don't fret.

Don't fear.

I am there with you.

This is not one of the seven major I am statements in John, but it's the same language.

And notice the progression here.

And I love this.

First of all, in this story, so Jesus is up on the mountainside.

Jesus watches.

That's the progression.

See, Passover, we know, Passover means it was a full moon.

So with the silvery light of the full moon, Jesus could watch the disciples.

He's up on the mountainside.

He could watch over the lake, and He could see.

He knew that they were struggling to try to row across the lake.

He could see them struggling against the wind from His hilltop perch.

That's another thing I like.

You know what the names of God is?

Elroy.

Not Elroy, but L-R-O-I.

You know what that means?

He sees me, the God who sees.

Whatever storm you're going through now, Jesus sees.

Why?

Because He's not just man, He's God.

El Roy, the God who sees.

So Jesus watches.

Jesus waits.

The disciples would have to row about six miles across the lake, northeast to northwest,

Jesus waits for them to struggle like a good parent waits before bailing kids out right.

You got to watch them struggle a little bit and learn.

He watches them struggle for, like I said, probably almost 9 hours against the wind.

He waits for them to be afraid of capsizing.

He waits until the scariest part of the night, 3 A.m.

in the morning.

He waits for them to persevere before He shows up.

Has Jesus ever done that in your life?

Has the Lord ever waited?

And you're wondering, God, why?

I've prayed.

It's been a month now, God, just reminding you.

God, it's been a year now.

God, I've been praying for

My son now, for three years, I've been praying for my granddaughter, my daughter, my spouse.

For 30 years, still not a believer.

Sometimes God's patient is frustrating, isn't it?

Sometimes it's tough to realize that His timing is not your timing.

And you've got to trust.

You've got to wait.

And sometimes it's just discouraging.

We love the yeses, but we don't like the no's.

And we certainly don't like the not yets.

And yet, He asks us as His children to trust Him through all of that.

So Jesus watches, Jesus waits, and then Jesus comes near.

God will always come to the rescue if you watch for Him to show up.

And he does it in different ways.

Jesus shows up and get this, walking on the water.

Have you ever seen this cartoon?

We'll put it up there.

I just think this is funny.

Can you read it?

Young Jesus at bath time in, right?

Is that sacrilegious?

I don't know, but I just thought it was funny.

And how do we know this isn't just a cartoon?

How do we know?

Because the Greek wording here in the text can only mean literally walking on water.

Not near it, not by it, not pretending.

He identifies himself as the I am.

Again, no fear.

I am.

So you don't have to fear the periodic storms of a fallen world when you're in the center of God's will.

And you know that the great I Am is watching and He's waiting and He promises to come near to us.

So we understand this from the text, right?

That you can be in a storm and in the center of God's will.

We can understand this from the text.

Storms can't control you when your eyes are fixed on Jesus.

So let's keep going in this story.

We'll jump over to Matthew 14, verse 28.

Peter answered him, Lord, if it is you command me to come to you on the water, he said, come.

So Peter got out of the boat, walked on the water, came to Jesus.

But when he saw the wind, you remember this story, he was afraid and began to sink, he cries out, Lord, save me.

Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying, O you of little faith, why

Did you doubt?

So picture Peter here, and he's inspired, didn't he?

sees the churning water.

Could this really happen?

But he steps out.

I mean, lifts up his robe over the side of the boat, one foot, it's solid.

It's solid.

It encourages, gets the other leg steps over, he's on solid ground.

and he starts walking towards Jesus.

But again, what happens?

It's all about glancing versus gazing, right?

See, in life, isn't it true, we're tempted to really gaze at our daily affairs and gaze at our money and gaze at the things we want to do and the pleasures in life, or like I said, our signature sin, to gaze

at that, and, well, God, I'll glance at you for 5 minutes every morning.

Right?

It's easy.

So what does he do?

He takes his eyes off Jesus, stops gazing at Jesus, and he starts gazing at water.

And he's looking at his what?

Circumstances.

That's the danger.

That's part of the theme of this whole message.

What are you going to, what's going to control your life, your circumstances or the Creator?

Peter steps out of the boat.

And I like that.

I'm not judging Peter because he of all the apostles only had the faith.

He's the one who had the faith to actually do something and to step out.

And I commend him for that.

A lot of people beat him up because he sank, right?

No, he's the guy that got out of the boat.

He's the guy who risked it all.

Verse 32 says, and when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

as we continue this story, let's just think about the fact that there are circumstances out there and they're going to try to control us.

Like what about you?

What are your circumstances?

I'm telling you, everything is in circumstance.

Your family of origin, maybe it was great.

Maybe you were involved in abuse.

You can't change that.

I know it's huge, but it's circumstances.

Your health right now, it's a circumstance.

It shouldn't define you.

It's a circumstance.

Your abilities, your personality, your hurts, hang-ups, and habits are circumstances.

The question is, what are you going to focus on, your circumstances or on your God, your Savior?

Well, let me share this illustration.

I think it's really fascinating.

It's from a long time ago, right?

July 4th, 1952, it was a fog-shrouded morning, and a young woman named, this is her, Florence Chadwick, waded into the water off of Catalina Island, off the coast of California, and her challenge was to swim all the way to the coast of California.

Long distance swimming was not new to her.

She had swum across the English Channel and on another occasion swam back again.

So she was successful to that.

But this day, the water was numbingly cold and it was foggy.

She couldn't see even the boats that surrounded her, but she swam.

They had to chase off sharks with a rifle and she swam.

History records that she swam for 15 hours.

and got within one mile of California, and she called it quits.

And her coach encouraged her, We're close.

Don't give up.

Don't give up.

But she has to be pulled out of the water, because she couldn't see her destination.

She couldn't see where she was going.

She didn't have the encouragement of that.

Later she said, I'm not excusing myself, but if I could have seen where I was going, if I could have seen the land, I would have made it.

wasn't the cold or the fear or exhaustion that caused me to fail.

It was because I couldn't see my destination.

Two months after her failure, she did it again, and it was on a clear day, and she set a new speed record because she could see the land.

What I'm saying, church, is you've got your destination.

It's Jesus.

You've got it.

Hebrews 12, 1 and 2, what does that say?

What a great passage to preach on, right?

Therefore, we'll put it up on the screen.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance.

Let us run with perseverance, the race marked out for us.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus.

He's your destination.

Not your circumstances.

He is.

And because of that, here's my last point.

Even in a storm, it's time.

It's time to step out of the boat.

Again, some ridicule Peter for sinking.

I praise him because he had the faith to get out of the boat, to do something he hadn't done before, to get out of his comfort zone, to risk a little bit.

He couldn't see Jesus clearly, but he heard the voice of Jesus.

Remember, Jesus is the one who says, My sheep, hear my voice and follow me.

Peter didn't wait for the sea to get calm.

He didn't wait for the wind to die down.

He didn't wait for it to stop howling.

To go to Jesus, he stepped out even in the midst of the storm.

Let me just ask you this morning, in what way, perhaps, do you need to be challenged to gird up your loin, so to speak, put one leg over, and step out with the boat?

What does that look like in your life, to step out of the boat?

See, here's the thing.

There's a snare of being comfortable, right?

Oh, it'll get you.

Whether it's that favorite La-Z-Boy chair,

Or that favorite food that you keep on eating after you're stuffed because it's so comfortable.

That favorite person or people that you're comfortable with that you don't want to meet anybody new.

You're needing more relationships.

You're afraid of people, perhaps.

You're shy.

You don't need to meet somebody new.

There's a snare being comfortable.

But here's the thing, if you're waiting for smooth sailing before you get serious with God and step out of the boat, I'm convinced God's just going to sail on without you.

God's going to sail on without me if I say, God, now I'm comfortable here.

He'll just keep sailing.

If you're waiting for everything to be calm before you can start serving God because you're just too busy right now or you're stressed out or something's going on, you're going to miss the blessing.

If you're waiting for the perfect time to trust Christ, yes, He's going to walk right on by.

See, that's why the gospel is such good news, right?

That today is the day of salvation.

That today is the day where anyone in any church today, any home today, anywhere, people online watching this, you know, in the next

next day or two, anyone can stop and say, Jesus, I trust you.

I need you in my life.

Jesus, in other words, come into the boat with me.

I need you.

I trust you.

I'm going to follow you, not my circumstances.

Well, what's your decision today?

What is it that God may be speaking to you in a still small voice about that would cause you to say, okay, I am, beginning today, I'm going to leave a little bit of comfort behind, and I'm going to risk just a little bit to take that step out of love for you, Jesus, and obedience to you, because you are the I am, and you're watching me.

You see me, you're coming to me, and I'm going to trust you.

this is a beautiful chapter that's inspiring to me, I hope to you.

And it's kind of cool that Jesus fulfilled the 23rd Psalm.

Most of you could quote to me the 23rd Psalm, The Lord is my shepherd.

My grandmother taught me that Psalm long ago.

But if you think about the words of that and you think about the context here,

Jesus had led his people to the green pastures of the mountainside and fed them.

That's what a good shepherd does, feeding of the 5,000.

And now he brought them into the waters that once were churning, but now are calm.

They're still waters.

What a good shepherd he is.

Church, I'm just saying, you can trust him.

You can trust him.

Don't trust your circumstances.

And I'll try to do the same.