

As we begin our study of this text today eager to learn the lesson the Lord has brought us here to present, I should begin with a confession. I love thunder storms. When they come in the night I always get up to watch. I love the lightning as it flashes across the sky. I love the thunder that follows, the louder the better. And I love the way the wind sounds in the trees as the storm approaches. But the thing I really want to share as we begin our study, is that loving thunder storms was not natural to me. I was not born with this love. In my life this is “learned behavior.” I learned to love thunder storms because my mother taught me to love them when I was very young. You see, when I was very young, perhaps six to eight years old, my family used to spend summers at a lake south of Milwaukee. My Grandfather had some land there and some cottages on the land and we would stay there all summer. The cottage we stayed in was huge. It had two floors, no running water, no indoor plumbing or heating. I loved it. My father would stay in the city and work during the week, so my mother was alone with my brother and sister and me. Sometimes in the night a huge thunder storm would come. My mother would wake my brother and sister and I, and we would go to the living room of the big cottage where through a huge window we could see the storm. The lightning would come, and my mother would tell us how beautiful it was. Then we would all count together to see how long before the thunder came. The louder it was, the more my mother would encourage us to be amazed at the sound. The house would at times shake with the thunder, and my mother would smile and laugh with us. The point here is that my mother taught me not to fear the storms. As we begin to study this event in Jesus life on this earth, it strikes me that Jesus recorded this truth in the Bible for exactly the same purpose. He intends to teach us not to be afraid when storms come into our lives. Each week in worship here at Mt. Olive, we are noting the power of the Word of God as it works in our lives. Today we will continue that study by learning that *“the Word Work .... Especially When It Rains!”*

Our text begins with Jesus finishing a time of teaching and healing in the area around Capernaum in northern Galilee. At Jesus’ suggestion, his disciples secured a boat to cross the Sea of Galilee. It is on this crossing that Matthew tells us this. <sup>24</sup> **Without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping.**

To learn the lesson Jesus wants to teach today, we must make sure to notice some “storm truths” evident in this event. First of all, note that **Without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake...** This storm was fully unexpected. No one saw it coming. There was no warning. There was no chance to prepare. That is often how it is with storms of nature, and metaphorically, with storms of life. One minute we are traveling in bright sunshine and calm seas, the next moment we are standing in the middle of a dangerous and threatening life event. Hardship, sickness, disaster, loss – these things can and will suddenly appear in our lives, just like this storm.

A second thing to note on the surface might seem surprising. When that storm hit with all its fury and danger, Jesus was sound asleep in the back of the boat. I know this fact is not a surprise to you. When storms come in our lives and the danger is great, it often feels to us like Jesus is sound asleep. How else would you explain the presence of the storm? Had Jesus been awake, surely, he would have prevented things from getting that bad. Remember, that is the way Mary and Martha both thought when their brother Lazarus got sick. Jesus delayed in coming for two extra days after he heard the news of Lazarus’ illness. In that time, the man died. When Jesus finally came, both Mary and Martha said to Jesus, **“Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died.”** Maybe if you enter God’s house today in the midst of some storm raging in your life, you know what this feels like.

The disciples reacted to this storm as any of us would. These were experience fishermen. They attempted to handle it on their own. However, this proved to be no normal storm. The more they tried to deal with it, the stronger the storm grew. We are told it reached the point where the **“waves swept over the boat.”** Now I do not have that much experience with boats. But in my experience, when the waves are crashing over the boat and the water is swamping the craft, that is not good.

It was at that point, when there was nothing more they could do, that they decided to awaken Jesus. <sup>25</sup> **The disciples went and woke him, saying, “Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!”** So far the story that Jesus is sharing with us contains no real surprises. We may not have sailed on the Sea of Galilee, but we have all encountered storms in our lives and in those storms, we have all felt the fear the disciples felt here. So it does not surprise us that the disciples were afraid in the storm, and it does not surprise us that they turned to Jesus as a last resort.

However, on the surface, Jesus question to his disciples and to us may seem surprising. **“You of little faith, why are you so afraid?”** Here is a question the disciples were clearly up for. In fact, familiar as we are with storms in life, this is a question to which we all think we clearly know the answer. “Why are you so afraid?” That is an easy one from the disciple’s perspective. All you need to do is count the waves as they crash over the boat. “Why are you so afraid?” A wave is crashing over the boat! Why are you afraid? Another wave is crashing over the boat! Water is filling the boat! Drowning is imminent! It seems to us in this situation, if you are not afraid, you are not paying attention.

Here is where our lives coincide with the disciples. If you are like me, then you have superb “wave counting skills.” When storms come to my life, I can count waves with the best of them. I know the danger the waves represent. I know how long it will take before they overwhelm me. In fact, I am so good at wave counting that in my life I have faced many disasters, some of which actually happened. Sound familiar? We have such well-developed wave counting skills when the storms of life come, that we can imagine the terrible things that will come to pass when those waves get even bigger, and we just know they will. In the presence of such skills, fear is expected and considered normal.

So it was for the disciples.

Then Jesus did the unexpected. He did not argue with the disciples. He did not point out why their fears were irrational. He did not attack their wave counting skill. Instead we read, **then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.** The Lord spoke a word and the wind stopped blowing. The Lord rebuked the waves and the waves stopped washing over the boat. The Lord gave the command and the terrifying storm stopped. Suddenly there was no danger at all.

And as the disciples watched in amazement, they asked the second question in our text, a question whose answer so often eludes us in the storms of life. They said, **“What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!”** In the answer to this question lies the key to the learning the lesson Jesus is teaching us today. What manner of man is this? This is Jesus Christ, the Lord of heaven and earth. What manner of man is this? The is Jesus Christ who sits at the right hand of God and holds the power of the universe in his hand. He is the one who sends the lightning in a storm. He is the one whose voice you hear in the thunder of the storm. He

is the one who controls all things. There is no storm so powerful that Jesus cannot quell its waves and quiet its winds. But there is more.

What manner of man is this? This is Jesus Christ who is fully committed to caring for you and to blessing you. That love for you led him to the cross to take your place. That love for you led him to earn the favor of God for you when you could not do so on your own. That love for you causes this Lord to tend you every day and to provide for your every need. He is completely on your side and you can count on him to make every storm in life work for your good. This truth is the key to the lesson Jesus wants us to learn to day.

But this is a storm lesson we are not born with. It is a lesson we need to learn. I told you how my mother taught me. God blessed my wife and I with three sons and I wanted to pass on this storm lesson to them, as my mother did to me. So, when my wife and I were living in Rhode Island and I was starting missions in New England, one day a storm arose. As it approached, I took my three sons outside to watch the storm approach. My sons were 5, 4 and almost 3 years old. As the storm approached the lightening was flashing across the sky. The wind was blowing in the trees. The thunder was getting louder with each new flash. As the lightening flashed, I encouraged my sons to see how beautiful it was. When the thunder crashed as we counted the seconds, I urged them to be amazed at how loud it was. During the process, my almost 3-year-old son hugged my knee, for that is all the further he could reach, and he said, **“Yes daddy, it is beautiful. Can we go in now?”** My sons are all grown and spread out over this planet. But when the storms come in the night, each of them will rise to watch the storm approach and thrill to the power God displays in this storm. We can learn not to fear the storm.

And that is what the Lord wants to teach us this morning. To learn that skill, I encourage everyone here to travel this path. Tomorrow morning, if you awake to a storm in your life and to fear in your heart, whether the storm is in your life or in the life of someone you love, here is what you do. You open your Bibles to Matthew 8:23ff. You join the disciples in the boat and you count the waves crashing over the bow. Then listen to the voice of the Lord of heaven and earth as he speaks to the storm and to the wind and to the waves and watch as the storm fades away. Then compare. What problem are you facing that this Lord of heaven and earth cannot solve?

We are learning each week how the Word works in our life. The Lord uses this very word to calm the fear in our hearts and to teach us all is well, no matter what storm is raging in our life. The more contact you have with this word, the less fear you will have in your heart. If the fear persists into the next day, begin the day by joining the disciples in the boat again. The more you sit in that boat, the more you listen as the Lord calms the storm, the more your fear of storms will subside. My mother taught me not to fear thunder storms. The Lord of heaven through the power of the word will teach us that when facing a storm, there is no reason to fear. The word works, especially when it rains.