

“Immediately [Jesus] made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds.” 1. (oops!) What was Jesus doing leaving the disciples alone?

Jesus had just fed the 5,000. He was being followed by crowds from here to there. They were looking for healing. They were looking for food. They were looking for teaching. Hours earlier, Jesus just heard John the Baptist, His cousin, was beheaded. **“And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone,”** Jesus needed some time to recharge and reconnect with His Heavenly Father.

“but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them.” Literally, the waves were torturing them. Peter and Andrew, James and John were all professional fisherman. This wasn't their first rodeo. Nonetheless, this was a difficult storm to navigate.

Sometimes we treat prayer like sleep. A popular sign reads, “Coffee! Because you can sleep when you're dead.” Just as we forego sleep when there are more pressing matters, so too we forego prayer when other more pressing matters are at hand. You'll have a long time to talk to Jesus in heaven. Why waste your time now? Perhaps we think the same thing of Jesus. He'd be better off with the disciples in the boat rather than on the mountain alone.

I think this becomes more personal because we ask 2. (ugh!) What is Jesus doing leaving me alone? In the storms of life, it may seem like we're utterly alone. Likely, the disciples felt abandoned and alone as they battled against the wind and the waves in the Sea of Galilee.

What about you? When have you felt alone? Perhaps it was a long night at the hospital after family left for the day, and you were too uncomfortable to sleep, and when you did sleep, the nurse came to check up on you and woke you up.

Perhaps it was after an argument with your spouse or children. You hear the door slam and the car drive off, and you don't know how long it'll be before they're back.

Maybe it's when you're holding the hand of a dying loved one. When he or she dies, a wave of sadness washes over you as your friend and companion has finally gone. We ask, what is Jesus doing leaving me alone?

Every pastor in our church body has to do a year long internship called a vicarage. Mine was at a church in Racine, Wisconsin. Within the first month of my vicarage, my supervising pastor called me into his office. He said, “Tim had a stroke and is at All Saints hospital one and a half miles north. You're going to go visit him.”

Tim had suffered a severe stroke and could barely put together a sentence. His tattoos from his earlier life as a detective were wrinkled. By many accounts, he looked like a rough around the edges man. What do you say to a man who is dying

of a stroke? As a pastor-in-training, I was certainly a bit nervous in that hospital room. In that moment in the hospital room, I felt utterly alone and wondered what my supervisor was doing that was so important that he couldn't have come with me!

As the disciples are making their way across the Sea of Galilee. They may have been nervous or on alert, but it's only once Jesus comes to them that they get scared. **“And in the fourth watch of the night—that would be between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m.—he came to them, walking on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, “It is a ghost!” and they cried out in fear.”** They don't see Jesus in front of their very eyes, they think, “It's bad enough that our ship is going to sink, but now we're being haunted!”

How many times have we pushed back at the presence of Jesus seeing a ghost rather than our Savior? We were lonely in the hospital, but we asked the hospital chaplain to leave, and we didn't want to bother our pastor. When we got into that argument, and when our Christian friend called to check in, we said, “I'm fine” and ended the conversation abruptly. After our loved one died, we pretended we weren't home and let the couple from the church leave the casserole on the porch instead of letting them in and letting them pray with us.

We sleep at night so we can be awake during the day. When we pray throughout the day, the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to see Jesus walking to us on the water. We need Jesus in the storms. Why? 3. (aha!) Jesus alone shows us His power in the storms.

Despite the initial fear of the disciples we read, **“...immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.””** **“Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.”** The same God who spoke the universe into being. The God of whom we sang earlier in the service, **“The sea is His for He made it, and His hands formed the dry land.”** This is the God who speaks to the terrified disciples in the boat. And in his saying “take heart,” the disciples do actually take heart.

So also, JESUS ALONE GIVES YOU THE COURAGE IN THE MIDST OF LIFE'S STORMS. We all come here with heavy laden hearts: maybe it is health problems, relationship problems, or the loss of a loved one. But we know we can find the solution to life's problems in hearing Jesus' calming voice in the worship service as we join our voices in prayer and praise to the One who controls all things in the universe.

4. (whee!) Because He is Yahweh, Jesus alone casts out fear. Jesus doesn't just say take heart, but He says, “Take heart. It is I.” In saying “It is I.” Jesus is saying I am who I am. I am Yahweh, the Great I am. Later on the disciples worship Him saying He is the Son of God.

It was eight years ago; I can't remember exactly what I said to Tim back in that hospital room. But I can tell you I shared the comforting good news of Jesus who forgives sinners, who is with the suffering, and who rose again on the third day.

Tim was released to home hospice and eventually died around Christmas. I became more comfortable visiting him. One thing I remember to this day was that Tim and his wife had a crucifix in their kitchen, but Tim when he was healthy had used a little red paintbrush to paint the wounds of Christ on Jesus to remind him how much Jesus suffered for him.

Throughout my visits with Tim, I grew out of that sense of being alone because I knew I wasn't going alone. I took heart because I was bringing the word of Christ with me. We had the chance to talk to Yahweh, the Great I am and bring our concerns and cares to Him.

When you suffer your storms in life, know that you're never alone. In the midst of health scares, relationship problems, death in the family—whatever it may be—remember the Words of Jesus, “**Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.**” Call out to God, and He listens to your prayers. He comes to you, even in the storms through the person of Jesus Christ.

Like that crucifix in Tim's kitchen which he painted with little dots of red, remember how much Jesus has suffered for you. If He suffered all that for you, you can know for certain He isn't going to leave you in the midst of your storms in life. You are not alone.

5. (yeah!) As we walk through life, we set our eyes on Jesus alone. But wait, there's more. We have this episode only recorded in Matthew's Gospel of Peter walking on water to come to Jesus. Everything goes smoothly until Peter looks at the wind and the waves and he begins to sink and cries out, “Lord, save me.” At which point Jesus reaches out and rescues Peter.

The text goes full circle. The very thing that Jesus did at the beginning of our account from Matthew is what Peter needed to do. When Peter kept his eyes on Jesus, everything went well. When you feel alone keep your eyes on Jesus alone! Jesus took time to pray, even at a time when the disciples were in danger. Jesus took time to pray because He needed to focus on the Father alone.

Later on in vicarage my supervisor let me know why he didn't go with me on those visits. It's not that he was too busy, but it was because he wanted to give me chance to learn. I forget his exact words, but he knew that I would be a pastor one day, and I wouldn't always have him to rely upon.

JESUS ALONE GIVES YOU THE COURAGE IN THE MIDST OF LIFE'S STORMS. Jesus can use the storms of life—when you feel the most alone—to make you realize you were never alone the whole time. And more than that, He

invites you to set your eyes upon Him in prayer and His word, and leave the boat to follow Him.

In my ministry alone, I know many people for whom a tragedy or storm in life was enough to wake them up again and get them to follow Jesus in a new way. In your storms in life, take heart. Jesus is with you. Be not afraid. You are not alone. Amen!