

Text:

Matthew 14.22-36

Big Picture:

Jesus once again shows his power over nature, but this time, the disciples confess: “Truly you are the Son of God.”

Preparing for the Lesson:

In some ways, the text for today seems very similar to the previous story in which Jesus calmed the seas (Matthew 8.23-27) with one notable exception. In the previous story, the episode is included in a collection of stories showing the power of Jesus. Specifically, he calms the storm, he casts out a demon, and he shows his power over sin—shown through the healing of a paralyzed man. When we get to today’s lesson, we should not marvel (nor should the disciples?) that he is able to calm this storm.

The context of this story is slightly different. Matthew begins chapter 14 with the recounting of the death of John the Baptist, followed by Jesus withdrawing to a solitary place. This is unsuccessful, for the crowds are to be found even there. After the feeding of the 5,000, then Jesus sends his disciples on ahead of him so that he can withdraw from the public eye once again. It is following a night in prayer that Jesus approaches the boat as the disciples attempted to row against the wind.

The main difference between these stories is the reaction of the disciples. In the first calming the sea story, the disciples respond with a question that Matthew continually comes back to answering: “What kind of man is this?” Although we assume that the disciples should know the answer to this, they seem to miss the answer more than discover it. We the readers certainly recognize that this Jesus is the Son of God, a fact that does not escape the disciples in our second story. We need to use care, however, not to assume that the disciples’ confession of chapter 14 automatically assumes they “get it.” While Matthew’s text affirms this truth through the mouths of Jesus’ closest followers, we will discover plenty of times where they still wrestle with this truth and certainly the implications of it.

Finally, a brief survey of commentaries shows the common understanding that the disciples in the boat are representative of Matthew’s (and by extension, our own) church. If our understanding of the situation surrounding Matthew’s church is correct, then they certainly faced “winds and storms.” At times, life felt (and feels) like rowing against the storm. Notice that Jesus’ presence in the boat calms the wind—and the storms we face. More than just a simple truth to put on a placard sold at your local Christian bookstore, Jesus is the only person who can create a calm in the midst of the storms.

Possible Lesson Outline:

I would begin your group discussion time with the following questions: Tell about a time when you were really, really afraid. Why were you afraid and what happened to resolve that fear? Was it resolved over time or was it an instantaneous resolution?

Ask discussion questions.

Close with a time of prayer.

For the Kids:

The idea of being afraid can be a great opportunity for children to share their own stories ... assuming that there has been a good resolution. My guess is, however, that most children will be able to share a story of fear that was resolved the moment a parent showed up.

Discussion Questions:

1. Our text today opens with Jesus sending his disciples on to the other side of the lake so that Jesus can be alone. Why is it important for Jesus to have some “alone time?” In what ways does your life have a rhythm of time with people, time with a select few, and also time alone?
2. How is Matthew setting up this story in the first few verses of our passage today? What do we need to be thinking as Jesus approaches the boat?
3. In the gospel of Matthew, Peter moves to the forefront of the disciples as both a leader and also as representative of the disciples as a whole. Why do you think Peter reacts in the way that he does when he hears/sees that this is Jesus? What is your impression of Peter based on this action?
4. The last time Matthew relayed a story of Jesus, his disciples, and a boat, the disciples ask a question that Matthew answers throughout his gospel: “What kind of man is this?” What is the answer to this question as found in our current boat story?
5. What is your impression of the disciples as a whole at this point in Matthew’s gospel? Why?
6. Many who study the gospel of Matthew say for his readers, this story would have resonated as symbolic of their own church and lives of faith. For them, being a community of faith entailed rowing against the storms. In what ways does this story also serve as symbolic for your own life and the life of South Plains?
7. In what specific ways does Jesus provide a calm for the storms of your life?

This Week:

I think there are a couple of implications that should shape how we live this week. First, the fact that Jesus attempted—on more than one occasion—to separate himself from the crowds and even from his disciples is significant. I probably do not have to mention how busy we have become as a society and the importance of creating space where we can be still and listen to God. If you do not practice this on a regular basis, find a block of time, say 30 minutes, this week to go to a solitary place. In that place, pray and listen to God.

The second implication is that Jesus provides calm in the midst of the storm. (Some of this is due to his ability to find space for solitude in his own life.) This week, when you seem “at the end of your rope,” ask yourself the question: How does the presence of Jesus change this situation and my perspective of it?

Prayer Ideas:

As you pray with your group today, I would focus on prayers that request an understanding of the peace that comes from the presence of God with us. Cognitively, we understand that God is with us, but too often, that makes no difference in how we understand or live our lives. Our perspective needs to be

changed so that we know that peace that passes all understanding and helps us realize that as big as an issue may seem to us, it is not insurmountable in the perspective of God's reality.

What's Next:

Next week's section is Matthew 15.1-16.28. One Groups will be looking at 16.13-28.