

When Trials Reveal Misplaced Faith (Luke 8:22-25)
Faith Evangelical Free Church
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Continuation of the Series, "Growing in Faith"

There is an old saying, which has been attributed to a dozen or so different people in history, that goes a little something like this: "a place for everything, and everything in its place." Perhaps some of you have heard it before. Maybe you grew up with it as mantra of tidiness in your homes, a small reminder to put your clothes in the hamper, pick your shoes up from the hall, or take take your dirty dishes to the kitchen sink when you were done with them.

My mother would have very much enjoyed that to be the reality in our home...I seem to remember her even trying to make that the gold standard. But with 3 kids, countless pets, both parents working, and the fact that our home was often the staging or gathering area for camping, scouting, book clubs, band camp lunches, sleepovers, church youth group hijinks, and about a hundred others daily activities, things could get a little chaotic and the house a little out of control.

We did our best, and when my brother, sister, and I kept up on our chores you could usually find at least one room in the house free of dirty socks and mostly dusted. The craziness was just part of growing up in the Creagar family household, and while I wouldn't change a thing about my home or family, I will confess that "a place for everything, and everything in its place" turned out to be a whole lot more like, "Everything is in *a* place...now I wonder if I can find it..."

Sometimes, when life gets chaotic and things don't go the way we'd planned, it feels like we could say the same thing about the state of our faith, doesn't it?

We're going along, enjoying our relationship with Christ and feeling as if things are in a really good place, when suddenly something major happens -- maybe a tragedy or unexpected change -- and we're left feeling a bit lost, perhaps even far from God, and not entirely sure our faith is where it's supposed to be. We really thought it had been in the right place, firmly fixed on Jesus, but sometimes things get tough and we feel like everything we knew and trusted about ourselves and our security starts slipping away.

Over the summer we've been studying the Gospels in order to learn more about what it means to grow in our faith, to become more sure of and confident in God and his character. Last week we looked at Luke Chapter 7 and were encouraged to pursue a life of great faith, trusting in the absolute authority of Christ.

This week we're going to take a look at what happens when we try to have great faith...but it doesn't turn out the way we'd hoped. We'll read about a time when the followers of Jesus were given an opportunity to express their confidence in Him, but instead revealed that their faith hadn't been in Christ alone.

We'll see that sometimes Jesus has to show us where our confidence has drifted away from him and been placed in other things. ***Sometimes to help us grow, Jesus has to expose our divided or misplaced faith.***

Our passage today begins in the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 8, verse 22.

[22] One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake." So they set out, [23] and as they sailed he fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in danger. (Luke 8:22-23 ESV)

After having spent several weeks teaching in and around the city of Capernaum, Jesus tells his disciples that it's time to pack up and set sail for their next destination, across the Sea of Galilee.

This was a body of water that many of the disciples knew quite well. Peter, James, and John had all grown up and made their living fishing off the lake's 13-mile long coasts, and navigating the little inland sea was second nature to a group with so many seasoned fishermen. Considering everything they had seen, heard, and been asked to believe and do since their decision to follow Jesus, perhaps a day on the lake was just what they needed to relax and enjoy something within their comfort zone.

So they probably didn't give it a second thought when an exhausted Jesus fell right asleep just after getting underway. [Quick sidebar: you've got to love the small display of Jesus' humanity and divinity in this story. He could heal people without even seeing them and walk on water and stop storms...but he also needed to nap!] Maybe they weren't even too concerned when the winds began to pick up and the waves began to beat at the sides of the boat.

However, the winds quickly grew stronger and their situation more dire. The disciples, skilled as they were upon the waters, were no match for the storm that broke out over the lake. The Gospels of Matthew and Mark also tell this story, and describe this as a "great storm" with waves crashing over the sides of the boat, swamping the small craft and filling it so rapidly that all the disciples were sure one thing: they were going to sink, and everyone was going to die.

Before we go any further I think it's important to ask a couple questions. First, whose idea was it to cross the lake? The very first detail Luke made sure to put in this story was that the disciples were only on the lake that day, attempting to cross it, because that's what Jesus had asked them to do.

The next question gets to the heart of what might be going on here -- did Jesus know the storm was coming and could he have stopped it before it arrived? The text does not tell us, but I would like to suggest that everything we know about Jesus from the rest of Scripture makes it highly unlikely that he was unaware of what the weather would be like that day, or that he was powerless to stop it.

This is a man for whom the world holds no secrets. He knows the minds of men and women before they speak; he tells his disciples all the ways they will betray and abandon him in his most desperate hour, and he's able accurately predict not only his own death, but his resurrection as well. Furthermore, Scripture is full of praise for Jesus as the ruler over all creation. In Colossians 1:15-16 Paul writes that by Jesus all the things in heaven and on earth were created and are held together and sustained by him. Psalm 135 leaves no doubt to the power and authority the Son of God has over the earth:

[5] For I know that the LORD is great, and that our Lord is above all gods. [6] Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps. [7] He it is who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth, who makes lightnings for the rain and brings forth the wind from his storehouses. (Psalm 135:5-7 ESV)

So I would argue that the disciples were exactly where Jesus wanted them to be -- in the middle of a storm that had the power to claim their lives. Why would Jesus do something like this?

I think it's because, at times, in order to expose our misplaced faith, Jesus may lead us into circumstances that are beyond our control. The Bible often speaks of this at a time of testing, the purpose of which is to strengthen our trust in the Lord, to know that God really can and will see us through whatever we might face in this life.

In James Chapter 1 we find the go-to passage for understanding why, at times, Jesus lets us experience trials and tests. It reads,

[2] Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, [3] for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. [4] And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2-4 ESV)

The setting for spiritual growth is often in situations and circumstances that leave us feeling uncomfortable, unsure, or even a little helpless and overwhelmed. It is in these moments we get the opportunity to discover if our faith is really, truly, and totally in God, or if there might be other things we tend to depend on before we give in and rush to him. The testing of our faith is never easy, but the results are often tremendous growth in our love for God. I agree with what author Mark Sayers once wrote when reflecting on the trials and challenges of our faith. He writes, *"In the storm, God shreds you of those parts of you that battle him. Those who avoid God's holy storms fail to feel their pain, but they also fail to grow."*

So, I think what the disciples are experiencing on the Sea of Galilee is a test of their faith. We'll read on in just a moment to see how things go, but I want to be sure to make a brief, clarifying point.

Last week Pastor Steve taught that not all trials can be traced back to a lack of faith, and that is very true and very important to remember. In the same way, not every trial or hardship we experience should be thought of as something sent by God to test our faith. Sometimes pain and sickness and loss and persecution are just realities of living in a world still plagued by sin and in desperate need of Christ's return. In a few weeks we'll look at a passage to help us understand faith and suffering, and sometimes our struggles really are more about enduring and persevering than they are about our need to mature and grow.

Today, however, I do think this passage leads us to consider that sometimes our hardships are indeed trials meant to help us grow, and one of the ways they do that is by helping us to see the ways in which we've misplaced our faith, sharing it with something or someone other than Jesus.

So, we return to the text and pick back up with where we left the disciples -- getting battered and beaten by storm. And remember, Matthew, Mark, and Luke all describe it as a tremendous and violent storm. It may not have reached "sharknado" proportions, but in the Gospel of Matthew the storm is described as *"seismos"* -- a Greek word meaning "earthquake" and often associated with storms in apocalyptic stories. So the disciples may very well have been dealing with wind, waves, and the land all around them shaking as if the end of the world was upon them. It's hard to imagine anyone who would not have been at least a little bit scared by being caught in something like that.

Well, I guess anyone other than Jesus. As the disciples battle to keep the boat afloat, Jesus remains blissfully and peacefully snoozing. Eventually, someone realizes it might be a good idea to wake Jesus and let him know that, while it's been really swell to be his disciple, they're in a bit of a situation here that maybe he should be paying attention to. In Luke 8:24 we read,

[24] And they went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" And he awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm. [25] He said to them, "Where is your faith?" And they were afraid, and they marveled, saying to one another, "Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?" (Luke 8:24-25 ESV)

I don't know about you, but "Where is your faith?" is not the first thing I would have wanted to hear from Jesus after such a crazy and terrifying experience.

I'd expect to hear something more like, "Hey guys, sorry about that, I guess this wasn't the best day for a cruise, eh?" or, "Oh man, I can't believe I almost slept through that, good call waking me up!" The self-centered and self-concerned parts of my heart would have expected a little camaraderie, and maybe even some accountability from Jesus for having led everyone into such a dangerous situation.

But that question, "where is your faith" is the very thing that helps us understand the real value of moments like these. It's Jesus inviting us to consider what our response to trials reveals about what we believe and where we may have misplaced our faith.

So...where was the the faith of the disciples? Was it in Jesus?

I'd like to suggest that while the disciples had some faith in Jesus, it certainly wasn't exclusive and when put to the test their faith was revealed to be not only in Jesus, but in themselves as well. This led to what such faith always leads to: panic, fear, and a desperate need to realign their faith fully and totally in Jesus alone.

All three accounts of this story in the Gospels agree that when the boat began to fill with water and the storm became too overwhelming, the disciples urgently woke Jesus and let him know they were all about to go down with the ship.

However...take a look at what exactly the disciples said.

In Matthew...

[25] And they went and woke him, saying, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing." (Matthew 8:25 ESV)

In Mark...

[38] But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" (Mark 4:38 ESV)

And as we've already read, Luke records the disciples rousing Jesus with a frustrated, desperate report of their impending doom. -- *"Master, Master, we are perishing!"*

The disciples did the right thing by turning to Jesus for help, but their divided and misplaced faith was revealed in that they waited so long to go to Jesus for help, and in their accusation and assumption that everyone was about to die. *In that moment, it no longer mattered to them that they were with Jesus.* They had personally seen this man perform incredible miracles and do things only God could do, but in their moment of need they waited until they'd waited until the last minute to run to him, and when they finally did it was with fear and bitterness in their hearts -- *don't you care, Jesus, that we're about to drown?!*

And then Jesus speaks. The Lord of all creation stands on a boat being tossed by the wind and the waves, and commands them to be still -- and everything immediately stops. Calm waters. Glass seas.

As the disciples looked out over the lake, dumbfounded by what they'd just witnessed, Jesus speaks again. "Where is your faith? "Why would you assume you were in that kind of danger? I am right here with you, and you know that I care for you...don't you?"

Now, I think it was reasonable for the disciples to be afraid of the wind, the waves, and the storm -- storms and trials in this life bring us face to face with our fears, our mortality, and our limitations. But time and time again what Jesus tries to help us understand is that our confidence doesn't come from how bravely or how courageously we can face those things on our own. **Our faith is not about us -- it's about Him.** He is strong, he is limitless, and as long as our faith is in him and him alone it is never in the wrong place.

But I think this story helps us see just how hard it is to really let go of the confidence we have in our own abilities and fully trust in the power and presence of Jesus.

As the storm got more serious, the disciples began to reveal that the faith they'd had in Jesus was, in some ways, a fair-weather kind of faith. When the world got ugly, they slipped back into having faith in what they could see, what they could feel, what they knew from experience to be true -- and perhaps that they had a little too much faith in themselves.

Again, most of the men on the boat were experienced fishermen and sailors. Maybe as the storm started to gather they thought, "I can handle this, I know what I'm doing, I don't need to bother Jesus with what's before me." Maybe that's why they waited so long to wake up Jesus -- the thought, "I'm just fine on my own."

Have you ever said anything like that before? Sometimes it feels like I say things like that **daily**. I get wrapped up in my strength, my experience, my discipline, my discipleship, my faith...and all of a sudden I'm thinking a lot more about myself and what I can do, and a lot less about Jesus and what he can do.

That day on the water and in the storm the disciples learned a very humbling and powerful truth: **You were never meant to be your own Savior.** You can't do it. You don't have it in you, and that's okay. The most common way to misplace our faith is take from Jesus and put it in ourselves. When that happens, it may work for a little while...but things when get ugly when the storm hits.

Here's a question to help you consider whether or not your faith is misplaced: What do you sometimes put your confidence in, instead of Jesus? When things get tough...where do you first or most frequently turn?

I thought about this alot as I prepared to preach this week, and I determined that the top 3 for me: my education, my relationships, and my money. Far too often, when something goes wrong, my first move is

not to pray, not to cry out to the Lord for help...but to ask (1) can I think my way through this (2) do I know anyone who can help get me through this (3) do I have the resources to overcome this.

After exhausting that list, I might then go to Jesus. And when I do, it's not uncommon for me to have the same heart and attitude of the disciples -- *Lord, everything's gone wrong, I'm perishing, don't you care?!*

When this happens, I sometimes wonder if Jesus doesn't look at me and ask the same questions he asked the disciples: *"Where is your faith? I have everything you need and take great joy in giving it to you freely...why didn't you come to me sooner?"* **Why is it so hard for us to go to Jesus sooner?**

And that's really the remedy for reducing the faith we have in ourselves and increasing the faith we have in Christ -- run to him sooner. Don't wait for the boat to fill with water. Don't try and think your way out, pay your way out, or exhausting every resource you have before going to the one place, the one God who has promised to care for you no matter what. Your faith is safe in him. He cannot fail you and will never let you down.

Throughout Scripture one of the most frequently repeated promises *"Be not afraid, I will never leave you or forsake you."* (Seriously, it appears in some form or another over 150 times. God really wants you to get this)

Truth be told, I am always afraid when I rely upon myself. Maybe not immediately, but when things get rough and I realize who is calling the shots (and oh gosh oh no it's me) my anxiety, stress, and fear start to take over. But they each drop dramatically in those moments when I'm able to answer "Where is your faith" with an honest, "my faith, Jesus, is in you."

Take a moment to think about a difficulty you've either faced recently, or you're currently facing. Ask yourself, "where is my faith" and either truly enjoy or try to imagine the peace and power you might feel if your answer was, "my faith, Jesus, is in you."

Conclusion

Your trial isn't likely to be a literal storm -- it's no doubt a whole lot more personal than that. Perhaps it's a severe illness, a job loss, or an unexpected breakdown of a relationship. Christ's promise to you is that you are not without his care or his love, and you are not to be going through this alone. He certainly wants to see you place all your faith in him, but he's not going to stand there tapping his toes until you do. The last thing to understand from this passage is that when we need him, even if we don't fully trust in him, Jesus acts on our behalf.

Christ does not abandon the disciples when their misplaced faith is exposed. Even when they trusted more in themselves, even when they came to him panicked, frustrated, and scared, he helped them through their trial and used it not to push them away, but to encourage them to draw near. He didn't abandon them. He won't abandon you either.

When reflecting on how Jesus stands with us in the midst of our trials, author and pastor David Platt said,

"Faith is not confidence that trials won't come your way. Faith is the confidence that no matter what wind and waves come your way in this world, the God of the universe will be right there in the boat with you. His power and presence will see you through. Christian, you are not alone, and ultimately, you are safe in

the presence of the One who has ultimate authority over all disaster.” (Christ-Centered Exposition, Exalting in Jesus, Gospel of Matthew; p. 114)

Brothers and sisters, if you're going to walk away with just one thing from this morning, I pray you walk away knowing and cherishing, and praising God for this: Your faith, even when it's exposed as being a little divided or misplaced, is safe as long as it's ultimately in the love and authority of Jesus Christ.

I challenge you this week: Either think about a trial from your past, or consider something difficult you're currently facing, ask yourself...

- Do I trust in Jesus' promises to care for me, even in this time of difficulty?
- Have I brought my circumstances before him in prayer? If not, what might be holding me back?
- Is there any way that I am dividing my faith between trusting Jesus and trusting myself?
- What do I know to be true of Jesus that is greater than anything else I might try to trust in this situation, instead of him?

I encourage you all to spend time with God in prayer and in the word, considering these questions and seeking always to answer the question, “where is my faith” with the glorious response, “my faith, Jesus, is in you.”

Remember always that your faith has a place...in Christ and Christ alone.