

“Jesus, Take the Wheel”

Matthew 8:23-27

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Country singer Carrie Underwood has a song called, “Jesus, Take the Wheel.” It tells the story of a girl with a young baby in the back seat, driving home to Cincinnati to see her momma and daddy, when she spins out on an icy road. She sees her life flash before her eyes, and this is what she prays in just a flash:

“Jesus take the wheel, take it from my hands,  
‘Cause I can’t do this on my own, I’m letting go,  
Give me one more chance,  
Save me from this road I’m on,  
Jesus, take the wheel.”

I think that describes the disciples in our story from Matthew this morning, and I think it’s a pretty good prayer for us, too. When life’s out of control, give it to Jesus.

Chapter seven in Matthew ended with,

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law. (Matthew 7:28-29)

Now, chapter 8 continues the themes of surprise and authority. That is, Jesus is surprising because he has authority over sickness, over his disciples, and over demons. The healing stories from chapter eight show that because Jesus has authority, he can save anybody—outsiders, lepers, Gentiles, women, and demonized men.

The setting for today’s story is in a boat on the Sea of Galilee.

The boat is an ancient symbol for the church. It floats through the rough wind and waves of the world. That seems appropriate to me, because sometimes we’re like Jesus’ followers in the boat: scared, fearful faith. It’s not just outsiders who need Jesus’ help. His followers do, too.

The disorder of the natural world is a picture of the problem of sin in the world. And that problem is fierce. That’s where we need to know he’s there, not just when it’s smooth going, but in turbulent water. When life is scary, and the boat’s rocking, and thunder cracks across the air, and flashes of lightening. When you panic, and try to hold the ship together. We face storms, and that’s where you need to know God is there.

Sometimes, we forget. We think he's not there, or if he is, he doesn't care. That's what the disciples say in the way Mark records it in his gospel: "Lord, don't you care we're going to drown?" (Mark 4:38). I think that's very poignant, because nobody cares like Jesus does, but sometimes when we're in pain or afraid, we feel that way, and sometimes we cry out, "Jesus, don't you care?"

It's the same for our personal lives. Every Christian finds out sooner or later that the devil is real, and he attacks, just like the waves that beat against the ship. You face temptations. The devil strips away your courage, or he throws your failures in your face, and you're tempted to despair.

But this story shows us that Jesus Christ is with us in every situation. He's in the boat, and he cares, and he isn't panicked. He tells us like he told his disciples, "Don't be afraid." After all, Jesus is the one who called us into his family, the church. The devil and the world rage against the church and against God's people, but that doesn't unsettle Jesus.

Let me list some things that come out of this text that help us in the turbulent times.

First, Jesus is truly human (vv. 23-24).

Sometimes we think Jesus is impervious to human needs, but he felt everything we do. He felt sad and angry and frustrated. He had all the bodily limitations we do. He got tired and had to rest. Earlier in the chapter (verse 20), Jesus had already said "the Son of Man"—his term for himself—"has nowhere to lay his head." It's no wonder he fell asleep in the boat with the disciples. He must have been exhausted after the demands of ministry we read about in chapter 8.

But that raises a question: if he's asleep in the boat, then what about the passage in the Psalms where David wrote,

Indeed, he who watches over Israel  
will neither slumber nor sleep. (Psalm 121:4)

That is to say, nothing is beyond God's attention, and nothing "gets by him." But in his earthly career, subject to all the needs we have, Jesus wasn't impervious to hunger and fatigue. You could say, his human nature slept, but his God nature never did.

In fact, isn't it true that sometimes when we pray we *feel* like we're trying to wake him up? But the fact that he slept shows that Jesus was at peace. The Lord in heaven never sleeps, but on earth, he had to. We want to say much more about Jesus, but we have to start here: he didn't simply pretend to be human, but he really was fully human. As the letter to the Hebrews said,

We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:15-16)

Jesus didn't simply put on human nature like a set of clothes that he could later change out of. He fully took our nature on himself. The story of the storm shows his real humanity and his real human limitations.

Second, Jesus has all the authority of God, and that means we're secure.

The gospel writers don't often come right out and say, "Jesus is God," but that's exactly the conclusion this story points to.

Have you ever heard someone say, "I believe Jesus was a great teacher, but I can't accept that he was God's son"? But that isn't good enough. When trouble comes, we don't just need a teacher, we need a Lord. In verse 18, a scribe addressed Jesus as rabbi, "teacher." Again, the writer to Hebrews expressed this,

Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.  
(Hebrews 5:8-10)

He understands us because he suffered everything we do in this fallen world. He can save us because he is not only human, but he is also Almighty God in the Second Person of the Trinity.

Psalm 121 addresses the theme of the Lord's great care of his people, and of our consequent security. It says,

My help comes from the LORD,  
the Maker of heaven and earth. (verse 2)

The LORD watches over you—  
the LORD is your shade at your right hand; (verse 5)

The LORD will keep you from all harm—  
he will watch over your life; (verse 7)

the LORD will watch over your coming and going  
both now and forevermore. (verse 8)

One day, the earth will be changed, and there will be a new heaven and a new earth. That has to be accomplished by somebody far greater than any human being. We can't imagine the kind of power it will take to overcome death, any more than we can imagine the kind of power that God had to have had to create all things in the beginning and uphold His creation. Scripture tells us all power belongs to God:

Psalm 62:11: "power belongs unto God."

Job 26:14: "But the thunder of his power, who can understand?"

Psalm 79:11: "...the greatness of your power..."

Nahum 1:3: "The Lord is great in power..."

That's the same power of God that brought order to the chaos in creation, when

"the the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. (Genesis 1:2)

God told Job he has power even over the chaos of the seas,

I enclosed the sea with doors  
 When, bursting forth, it went out from the womb;  
 When I made a cloud its garment  
 And thick darkness its swaddling band,  
 And I placed boundaries on it  
 And set a bolt and doors,  
 And I said, 'Thus far you shall come, but no farther;  
 And here shall your proud waves stop'? (Job 38:8-11)

All that power is perfectly revealed in Jesus, the Savior of the world, and he brings order to chaos still. The miracles he did were just hints of his kingdom that is coming.

When he healed the sick, it was a picture of the coming glory, when there will be no sickness or brokenness or tears any more.

When he raised the dead, he was giving a preview of a glory, when there will be no death at all.

When he cast out demons, he was showing us a kingdom where there will be no evil.

All this was just a taste of the power to come. He can reverse the curse of sin and wrongdoing, and restore us to God. That's his awesome power. He is the Lord, and he's in charge. This is the only kind of Savior we want, one with all the authority of God.

### Third, faith is a choice.

Jesus says, "You have so little faith!" In other words, you're acting like cowards. Faith is a form of courage, and when we fail in faith, we're giving in to fear. Faith isn't just passively accepting truths, or just resigning yourself to your fate. It's a courageous confidence that Jesus is equal to all our challenges. That he's in control. He's behind the wheel. We need to know that when we give in to despair or fear, it's giving in to cowardice. How should followers of Jesus Christ respond when the storm comes? Sometimes, it's just to lie down and go to sleep, and to have confidence he can handle it.

### Fourth, Jesus takes us as we come.

Jesus' response is challenging, because he seems annoyed with his disciples. Maybe his answer would have hurt your feelings. After all, he seems to criticize his disciples

when they went to exactly the right source with their problem. But I think that along with the challenge, there's also comfort. He could have answered, "Fix it yourselves!" or "Come back later when your faith is a little stronger, and I'll help you then." He takes us as we come, like the song they sing at every Billy Graham Crusade, when he makes the altar call:

Just as I am, though tossed about  
 With many a conflict, many a doubt,  
 Fightings and fears within, without,  
 O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, thou wilt receive,  
 Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;  
 Because thy promise I believe,  
 O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

That's grace. It's not because our faith is strong. If we come with hardly any faith at all, Jesus still helps us however we come. Just come! Big faith, little faith? It's not the point. Strong faith, weak faith? Not the point—don't look inward, but look to Jesus. "Who is this, that even the winds and sea obey him?" It's the one who created the heaven and the earth, the wind and sea, and he still is in charge today.

So, Matthew has shown us in chapter four how the first Christians were called to be Jesus' disciples; then chapters 5 to 7 showed how they were supposed to live as disciples; now, for the first time we see how they do in action, and they don't look too impressive. But they learned they could put their confidence in Jesus. Through the storms of life, no matter what the dangers, we know he's in charge. Storms may rage. Water might rush against the boat. But even the wind and waves obey him.

So, Jesus' followers didn't have to keep the boat from breaking up. And you can give Jesus the wheel. It's his job to drive. Let's not live any more as if Jesus hadn't died. Let's not live any more as if Jesus wasn't raised from the dead. The same voice that spoke over the deep in creation, the same voice that calmed the storm, that voice is called you by name. The storms may rage, and waters may crash. But they've been calmed already. Don't be afraid. The Lord hears your cry.