

J.J.

IN THE MIDDLE OF DIFFICULTIES
Matthew 14:22-32; Mark 6:45-56; John 6:15-21

BIRTHDAY : Ate Nitz; March 7; Fiel Gallora, March 7, (was supposed to be Jannette's March 13)

Matthew 14: 22 Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. 23 After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, 24 and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

25 Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. 26 When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

27 But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

28 "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

29 "Come," he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. 30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

32 And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. 33 Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

PRAY

THE THREE PASTORS : So there were three pastors who went fishing on the lake. One was a Baptist, the other an Evangelical and the other a Pentecostal. While they a little off shore, the Baptist pastor said, "I forgot the bait." So he got out and walked on water and then came back to the boat walking on the water again. The Pentecostal pastor was amazed and wanted to do the same. But before he can do that, the evangelical pastor, said, "Oh, I forgot my hooks." So he got out and walked on water and then came back to the boat walking on the water again. The Pentecostal pastor was amazed again and he said to himself, I should show to them that I have the same faith as they have. So he pretended he forgot something and said to his fellow pastors, "Oh, I forgot my coffee bottle." So he got off the boat and he immediately sank and was almost drowning. The Baptist pastor and the evangelical pastor saw it and the Baptist pastor said to the evangelical pastor, "Shouldn't we have told him the rocks we stepped on?"

One of the things I realized, I always use this event in the life of Jesus' walking on water as an illustration but I never preached it as a sermon. By God's grace, I pray that we will be encouraged as we listen to God's Word today and get lessons from it specially during times of difficulties.

Please take note that we will also be referencing the narration of Mark and John also in this sermon as they also told the story from their point of view. (This will be a two-part series)

DURING DIFFICULT PERIODS

- Jesus allows struggles.
- Jesus sees.
- Jesus goes to our side.
- Jesus saves.

I. JESUS ALLOWS STRUGGLES

Matthew 14: 22 Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. 23 After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, 24 and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

As we can see here, it was Jesus who made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side

And while they were rowing, the boat was buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

Etymology: buffeted “basanizo” tortured, harassed, distressed
“Against”, contrary in KJV “enantios” opposed, hostile

Isn’t that what life is sometimes? It’s like whatever you do, there’s always a struggle or you’re having a hard time moving forward because something or someone is against you.

And we might even say, “Lord, I’m serving you.” or “Lord, I’m obeying you” and yet why have you placed me in this situation?

There are times in our life that God will allow challenges and it’s not particularly because of what we have done.

Illustration : I remember the time after God used Chicay to speak at a women’s conference in the middle of her 2nd or 3rd battle with cancer (I can’t remember specifically), she was thankful after her message but she was bothered by one of the things one of the participants said to her after the conference saying something like, “Sister, maybe because the reason why the cancer kept coming back is because God is punishing you for some unrepented sin.” I got upset but I encouraged my wife during that time.

Remember, sometimes, God will allow trials in our life.

Biblical example is Job.

It was God who even said to Satan that Job was blameless, upright, fears him and shuns evil.

Job 1: 7 The Lord said to Satan, “Where have you come from?”

Satan answered the Lord, “From roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it.”

8 Then the Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.”

And yet our Lord allowed Satan to take away his children, his wealth and eventually his health.

Why would God allow difficulties in our life? Based on the text, here are some of the reasons :

1. **He’s sparing us from temptation.**

Let’s look at the context :

22 Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd.

Why? Jesus fed five thousand men (not counting the women and children and so he must have fed at least 15,000 to 25,000 people) by multiplying two fish and five loaves of bread.

It was a difficult time during those days. It was hard to mouth existence (isang kahig, isang tuka) and so here is someone they saw that can feed them. **What's the natural thing that they wanted to do?**

John 6: 15 Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.

Now, remember that the disciples believes that Jesus is the Messiah but they believe that He is a political messiah that will overthrow the Roman government and establish himself as king. Since they are the disciples, they thought that they would have earthly power in their hands.

Proof : Remember the story where two disciples were arguing who is the greatest. It means who should lord over them. (Luke 22:24-30) Or the mother of James and John asking Jesus that He puts her sons on his left and right when He becomes king. (Matthew 20:20-28)

This is the reason He had to dismiss them to spare them from this worldly temptation. God had to take them out of that situation.

Please note : That is what God will do sometimes, He will take us out of a situation even if it seems nothing bad is happening because He is sparing you from something.

Look at this.

23 After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone.

Mark 6: 46 After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray.

Why? Remember, though He is fully God, He is also fully man and as man He is tempted to avoid suffering on the cross (Prayer in Garden of Gethsemane) and go the easy route of having everything in this world.

Isn't that the temptation of Satan to our Lord?

Matthew 4: 8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9 "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."
10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only'

If that is the temptation to our Lord, He knows that's also going to be the temptation to His disciples.

That is also the temptation to us. Our tendency to depend on our own resources, the world's riches instead of worshipping and seeking and serving God first.

Illustration : Some of you might say, not me pastor. Let's say someone says to you, "I'll pay all your debts and let you win the \$55M lotto but with this condition, you must not go to church anymore, not give even a centavo to the work of the church, worship, pray and listen, study or even read God's Word." That's a great temptation. Because \$55M, you might say, will help your relatives, will give you a comfortable life and etc.

Our Lord was sparing them from that great of a temptation. And one of his ways, is allow struggles in our life.

1 Corinthians 10:13 The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure.

2. He's testing our obedience.

24 and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

Again, "contrary" in KJV, (sinasalubong ng malakas na hangin)

But look at what's happening still.

Mark 6: 48 He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them.

John 6: 18 Then the sea arose because a great wind was blowing. 19 So when they had rowed about three or four miles,

Remember, it was Jesus who asked them to

Matthew 14: 22 Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side,

Where?

John 6: 17 got into the boat, and went over the sea toward Capernaum

(Show map) If you look at the map of the Sea of Galilee, the feeding took place in the shores of Bethsaida and Jesus asked them to go to Capernaum.

Take note again :

- **They were already a considerable distance** (3 to 4 miles around 5 km to 6.5 km)

That's like from 1 Maple Ave. to Chinguacousy park

- **They were rowing, not sailing but against a strong wind and it's already dark**

What's one of the natural thing to think of? Let's just go back because we are moving against the wind and wait until morning.

But the command of the Lord is specific.

22 Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side,

Biblical Illustration : Remember the Israelites, they were okay when they got out of Egypt but when difficulties arise, they wanted to go back to Egypt.

But it was different with Abraham, God asked him to sacrifice his own son, the son he loves and yet without hesitation, Abraham was willing to do that knowing that God is powerful to raise his son to life according to Hebrews 11.

Quote : The testing of our obedience is the testing of our faithfulness.

What does the Bible say when our faith is being tested by trials?

James 1: 2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. 4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Now, what is happening while we are undergoing this struggles?

II. JESUS SEES.

Now remember the story I preached and it was in Matthew 8.

When they were in the middle of the sea, Jesus was sleeping. At least, they know that Jesus is with them and can wake Him up. *That's why Jesus said to them, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" (Matthew 8:26)*

This time, it wasn't a life and death situation because it doesn't show that they were scared of the waves, they were only really struggling (straining) **and Jesus wasn't with them.**

But where is our Lord even during our times of struggle? When life seems to be against us? When there are no opportunities opening up for us? Or nothing is happening when it comes to your health or your finances?

Mark 6 : 47 Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. 48 He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them.

Now, I don't know how our Lord saw them because it was dark but let's also remember He is God.

Psalm 139 : even the darkness will not be dark to you;

*the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.*

Remember also that's what happened when He met Nathanael

John 1: 48 "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."

In short, our Lord saw Nathanael even before He actually saw Nathanael.

Remember, God sees what's happening to us. God is seeing our struggle. Look at what He said to Moses when He was asking him to lead His people out of Egypt.

Exodus 3 : 7 The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering.

9 And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them.

There's a term used by the generation today : "I see you." GOD SEES US.

Isn't that comforting that God sees what's happening to us? He knows what's happening to us.

Illustration : There was one time after Chicay had this bad side effect after her long day chemo. She was just forced to sleep on the left side of her body. She can't even sit or stand because she was so weak and then I heard her crying. I went to her and asked her why she was crying. She was literally facing a blank wall, just a literal blank wall in front of her and she said, to me in Tagalog "Wala akong makita B. Wala akong makita.." (I can't see anything B, I can't see anything) Not because she was blind but it's like she can't see beyond the wall. It's just like a blank wall. In short, she was losing hope. Will there ever be an end to her sickness, to her struggle? And she found comfort in the word of our Lord in Jeremiah 29:11...just the two words...

Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

She told me that the Word of God "I know" was more than enough for her.

(By the way, to keep her from losing hope again, I blew up each individual photo of my children, framed it and hanged it on that darn wall. So whenever she is forced to sleep on that side of her body again, the sight of her children will give her another reason to be hopeful.)

BROTHERS AND SISTERS, JESUS SEES OUR STRUGGLE.

Next week, we'll finish with

- Jesus goes to our side.
- Jesus saves.

But before we go on breaking of the bread, let me finish one of my ol' time favorite stories that I love telling.

Story : There was this house on fire and a kid was trapped in the second floor. It was already full of smoke and the kid was on the window but because of the smoke, he can't see anything. But he heard his father's voice, "Johnny, jump. I will catch you." The kid said, "I'm scared." The father said to him again, "Just jump, I will catch you." The kid replied again, "But I can't see you." And then the father replied, "I doesn't matter if you don't see me, what matters is that I see you."

QUOTE : TRUST IN JESUS. HE SEES US.

BREAKING OF THE BREAD.

S.G.D.

Note on walking on water... notice he multiplied the bread and the fish after praying...now he's walking on water after praying...Peter walked on water after asking Jesus (praying)... that's what happens when we pray, we get God's power in our life.

