

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

September 14, 2025

The Gospels

“Why Are You Afraid”

Matthew 8:23-27

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As Floridians, we know something about big storms. I cannot believe this year is the 20th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina that brought destruction to New Orleans and many others along the Gulf coast. I had also forgotten how Hurricane Katrina came across South Florida before it turned into a gigantic Category 5 storm. However, Hurricane Katrina was thankfully only a Category 3 by the time it made landfall. Katrina remains the costliest hurricane in U.S. history causing damage estimated over \$203 billion.

With the 20th anniversary of Katrina, I could not help but remember a storm closer to us, Hurricane Michael, in 2018. Hurricane Michael was more intense than Hurricane Katrina at the time of landfall, making it one of the strongest hurricanes to ever make landfall in the continental United States. The Category 5 storm made landfall at Mexico Beach and had peak winds of 160 mph. The last few years have been very busy hurricane seasons in Florida. Praise God for a relatively quiet hurricane season so far this year!

As we continue reading through the Gospels, we join Jesus and the disciples on the Sea of Galilee in the middle of a really big storm. Let's look together at Matthew 8 starting in verse 23. Listen closely for the voice of Jesus.

Then Jesus got into the boat and started across the lake with his disciples. Suddenly, a fierce storm struck the lake, with waves breaking into the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him up, shouting, Lord, save us! We are going to drown!”

Jesus responded, Why are you afraid? You have so little faith!” Then he got up and rebuked the wind and waves, and suddenly there was a great calm.

The disciples were amazed. Who is this man?” they asked. Even the winds and waves obey him!”

Matthew 8:23-27 New Living Translation

Let's start by seeing where the disciples find themselves. They're in a boat. It is likely a fishing boat big enough for their size group and probably not many more. Jesus and the disciples are leaving the town of Capernaum where Jesus has been healing many people, and they headed out onto the Sea of Galilee in this fishing boat.

The Sea of Galilee was more than 600 feet below sea level. It was surrounded by mountains that towered a really big, freshwater lake about thirteen miles long and eight miles wide. The wind could really whip around down in that valley, so the Sea of Galilee was known to experience very sudden, stormy weather that rolled over those mountains.

A really massive storm comes upon Jesus and disciples, and it almost capsizes the boat. The waves are tall, and there is probably flooding on the deck of the boat. It's very interesting the Greek word used to describe this storm is *seismos* (σεισμός). It's the base word for a seismograph, an instrument that measures earthquakes. *Seismos* is used nine times in the New Testament, and every other time it is translated as "earthquake." This storm was beyond the ordinary! The disciples must have been scared to death.

Many of the disciples were Hebrew fisherman, but the people of Israel especially didn't care much for the water. They are not known for their nautical prowess. They don't build ships and sail in the seas. They are farmers and shepherds. For the Hebrews, the water represents something that is unknown, mysterious, and even dangerous. In Jewish writing, the sea is a place and a power of darkness and evil; the sea is threatening and wild. Who could control the sea? Certainly no human being. For the Israelites, only the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has that kind of power.

Remember back in the beginning! God takes that chaos, a formless earth with dark and deep waters, and God orders the cosmos creating the heavens and the earth. Remember when Moses leads the Israelites out of Egypt to the edge of the Red Sea. With Pharaoh's army pursuing them, I love this exchange between Moses and God in the book of Exodus.

But Moses told the people, Don't be afraid. Just stand still and watch the Lord rescue you today. The Egyptians you see today will never be seen again. The Lord himself will fight for you. Just stay calm." (Exodus 14:13-14)

Wow, Moses is being the great leader and non-anxious presence. God will fight for us. We just need to stay calm, be still, and wait on the Lord. Moses is really being a superstar leader. Sounds like great advice! Here is what God actually said next to Moses.

“Why are you crying out to me? Tell the people to get moving! Pick up your staff and raise your hand over the sea. Divide the water so the Israelites can walk through the middle of the sea on dry ground. (Exodus 14: 15-16)

God has to part of the waters of the Red Sea with the Egyptian army charging after the Israelites to get them across the water. There is no way the Israelites are swimming those waters. The water is unknown and dangerous; it is threatening and wild.

The disciples in the boat are scared to death. If the disciples go overboard, they are probably drowning. It is unlikely they are strong enough swimmers to survive this earthquake of a storm. What is Jesus doing in the middle of this fierce and sudden storm? Jesus is sleeping! I love the image of Jesus sleeping; it's peace and calm in the chaos. The disciples are not having it. They wake up Jesus and cry out, “Lord, save us! We're going to drown!”

Jesus asks the disciples in the boat and all of us today why are we afraid? We have this tendency to let fear shrink our faith. The disciples know that Jesus has great power. We only need to look earlier in Matthew 8. Jesus healed a man with leprosy. Jesus healed a paralyzed servant of a Roman officer. Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law of a high fever, and Jesus healed many demon-possessed people. The disciples have witnessed first-hand the power of Jesus over sickness and disease. Yet, this massive storm caused waves of fear and doubt among the closest followers of Jesus.

We live in a world where fear is projected on us constantly. Some world leaders would have us think civilization is nearly always on the verge of collapse because of war, violence, immigration, disease, or some economic downfall. Much of our world functions like God is not present with us. We are tempted to our trust in systems, policies, and procedures. As followers of Jesus, we know a better way to live. Jesus came to the world to bring the kingdom of God and show how very present God is with us. With the Messiah's arrival, God's presence moves more visibly from the temple in Jerusalem into world through the person of Jesus. When the Holy Spirit comes in the book of Acts, the presence of God moves again to making a home inside of us. We are the temples of the Holy Spirit!

Whatever fear is staring you down right now—whether it's about your career, your family, your education, your finances, or your future— we need to remember that the presence of God is our remedy for fear. The apostle Paul reminds us (Romans 8:35-39) that nothing—not our fears for today, not our worries about tomorrow— nothing can separate us from God's love. That love is God's presence. God's presence is what provides for us when we look fear in the eye.

We might fear trouble with our personal finances. Our family had to get tires for all three of our cars this year. Tires are expensive! It was hard to shell out that kind of money. What if some huge unexpected financial burdens happen? We can go from financial security to scarcity pretty quickly. When we are afraid of not having enough money, we need to trust Jesus to provide for us. Our God is a God of abundance not scarcity.

We might fear struggling with our health. Whenever I visit people in the hospital, I think that there will be a day when I will be in the hospital and could be facing a major health issue. Our health is a gift from God, and our health is also something that is finite. Every one of us will get to the point when our bodies fail and we pass away from this world. When we are afraid of losing our health, we need to trust Jesus to care for us. The worst-case scenario is leaving this world and entering the God's everlasting life. Our God is a God of healing and eternity, not suffering and death.

We might fear being judged or rejected by people around us. With our family and friends, we might fear being judged or rejected for what you believe about God or what you think is good and right. We should not be afraid to live our faith in Jesus and do what we believe is right. I would also encourage you to be kind and discerning about what is right. The tone of what we say matters. We might have a right position but the wrong posture. When we are afraid of being judged and rejected, we need to trust Jesus to love us. Perfect love casts out fear.

If we are going to be followers of Jesus in this wild and scary world, we need to seek God's presence every day. God is not asleep at the wheel of our world. Jesus is right here in the boat with us. Even while Jesus was asleep, Jesus trusted God the Father to be present in the storm while Jesus slept. Jesus wants us to see His power and marvel even in the middle of the biggest storms of our lives. We don't have to wait until the storm clouds have passed. Jesus wants us to experience the peace of trusting in Him right now. Jesus has it all under control.

In the words of C.S. Lewis, Jesus is not safe, but Jesus is good. Following Jesus closely will require us to go to some places that are dark and wild places. Jesus will call us out of our comfort zones. This reality was so hard for the disciples in that boat to understand. The life and ministry of Jesus led he directly to the cross. We're on the other side of the cross and the resurrection. We have the Holy Spirit with us. The same power that brought Jesus back to life is the same power that lives in us today. Even when Jesus calls us to go to another country, to different part of town, or across the street to build relationships with the neighbors we don't know, Jesus is with us every step of the way.

Jesus is God with us. He's in the boat with us in the middle of the greatest storms. We need the faith to trust Jesus will be there for us no matter what happens. Faith is not the absence of fear, but the choice to trust God even when fear is present.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES: (Books marked with * are available to be checked-out in the Asbury Discipleship Resource Center)

- *The Holy Bible* (Several FREE copies are available in the DRC)
- *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure*, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones
- *Trusting God: Even When Life Hurts*, Jerry Bridges
- *Your Church is Too Safe*, Mark Buchanan
- *Running Scared: Fear, Worry, and the God of Rest*, Edward T. Welch

Icebreaker I – If Jesus gave your current season a weather forecast, what would it be—and why?

Icebreaker II – Share a “storm story” (literal or life-storm). Who was in the boat with you?

1. In Matthew 8:23–27, Jesus sleeps during a **seismos**-level storm. What might his sleep teach us about trust, limits, and pace in our own storms?
2. Jesus asks, “Why are you afraid?” Where does fear most shrink your faith right now (finances, health, relationships, reputation), and what would trusting Jesus look like this week?
3. Compare Exodus 14:13–16 (“stand still” vs. “get moving”). How do you discern when God is calling you to wait in calm vs. act in courage?
4. The disciples ask, “Who is this man?” How does Jesus’ authority over creation shape your view of his authority over your calendar, budget, and body? Give one practical implication.
5. We can hold the right **position** with the wrong **posture**. Where might your tone (online or in person) undercut your witness, and how can love “cast out” fear in that space?
6. What impacted you most from the sermon? How might you apply this week’s sermon to your life?
7. How might this group pray for you this week?