



**His Excellency,  
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Diocese of Belleville**

August 13, 2023  
St. Luke Parish, Belleville  
Sermon:

**“Come! Get Out of the Boat and Into the Stormy Seas of Life”**

(This is the text as originally written. During the actual delivery, some passages were omitted and other comments were added spontaneously. *Nota bene*: This text has not been thoroughly proofread. Therefore, there may be errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation.)

**Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,**

**The mammoth humpback whale is, for me, one of the most fascinating creatures on earth. The Hawaiian island of Maui is one of the best places to see these great wonders. The whale watching boats depart from Front Street just a block away from the famous, massive, 150-year-old banyan tree, a must-see stop for every tourist.**

**Last week’s devastating hurricane, tornado, and wildfires brought death, unspeakable sorrow, and destruction to most of Maui’s historic city, Lahaina, an area very familiar to me.**

**The fires raged so swiftly that some people literally jumped into the ocean to flee the fast-moving flames. In an interview, one woman, rescued from the storm-tossed sea, said, “I can’t swim so I kept praying, Lord Jesus save me! Lord Jesus save me! I was pulled from the water in the nick of time, and I am convinced that Jesus saved me in answer to my prayers. I just want to say, Thank you Jesus!” Some people may believe that it was the Coast Guard and not Jesus who saved her. But she is convinced that she is alive because of divine intervention. Perhaps it was both.**

**This morning's reading from Matthew 14: 22-33, tells us the story of Peter's faith AND doubt on the storm-tossed Sea of Galilee. This account of Jesus walking on water toward the boat of the disciples, and Peter jumping out of the boat to join him, only to begin to sink into the sea and to be rescued by Jesus, is parallel to the story in Matthew 8: 23-27, in which Jesus is sleeping in a boat with the disciples when a terrible storm threatens to sink the ship. In this story, the frightened disciples wake Jesus up shouting, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" Jesus asks them, "Why are you terrified, O you of little faith?" \* Then he gets up, rebukes the winds and the sea, and there was great calm. The disciples are amazed and ask, "What manner of man is this, whom even the winds and the sea obey?"**

**Some commentators argue that these sea storm miracle stories are not to be taken literally. That they should be seen as parables about the importance of faith in Jesus Christ. Many other commentators argue that these stories MUST be taken literally because they are examples of Jesus' power. The two stories may be two different versions of the same story. Like the woman saved from the turbulent Hawaiian sea, the Gospel writer clearly believes that Jesus is the central actor in both of Matthew's sea rescue stories.**

**Let's take a closer look at the Gospel reading in which Jesus calls to His disciples in the midst of the wild and restless sea. Notice, He is not beckoning them away from the storm. Instead, His voice calls them *into* the life-threatening weather.**

**Significantly, Matthew says that Jesus made the disciples get into the boat. A better translation of the verb would be that he forced or compelled them. He *compelled* them to get into the boat and to leave Him alone with the crowd of more than 5,000, which He has just fed by the multiplication of loaves and fish.**

**The Gospel says that after Jesus dismisses the crowd and sends His disciples out into what will become the raging chaos of the sea, Jesus retreats to a mountain, which for Matthew always means Jesus is going to a place of intense prayer and intimate communion with God. While Jesus is off by Himself in private prayer, the disciples find themselves in a life-threatening situation.**

**The disciples are far from the land, and the boat is being beaten by the waves due to a sudden storm. The situation is very similar to Jesus' calming of the sea in Matthew 8: 23-27. But in this version, the disciples cannot awaken Jesus. Because Jesus is not in the boat.**

**The text says that, even though they were used to storms as experienced fishermen, the disciples were having a difficult time keeping their boat afloat. It is not until the fourth watch of the night (early morning between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m.), when it was still dark, that Jesus appeared to them, walking in the middle of the sea. The disciples do not initially recognize Jesus in the midst of the darkness and the raging storm. With the roar of the waves and the spray of the sea drenching their boat, the Disciples think Jesus is a phantom or a ghost. They cry out in fear! (In biblical times, it was commonly believed by fishermen that boatmen who drowned at sea often haunted fishermen as ghosts or spirits on the sea by night).**

**Over their cries of fear, Jesus calls to them, "Take courage, do not be afraid, it is I." Jesus reveals Himself - not simply as Jesus, their teacher, but as "I AM," a more literal translation of "it is I." For Matthew's Jewish audience, "I AM" suggests the name of God revealed to Moses, "I AM that I AM," "I AM Who AM." Do not fear, I AM is here! Peter, doubting that it is really Jesus walking on water, says, "If it really is you, command me to walk on the water. Jesus utters a single word, "Come!"**

**With remarkable trust and courage, Peter climbs over the side of the boat. In the middle of strong winds and waves, Peter trusts Jesus enough to step out of the boat. It is an incredible display of faith in Jesus. Not one of the other disciples dared set foot out of the boat and into the sea. But suddenly, frightened by the powerful storm, Peter begins to sink and cries out, "Lord, save me." Jesus takes his hand and saves him, saying, "O you of little faith!" Jesus and Peter get into the boat.**

**When Jesus told Peter to come to Him, He didn't calm the storm. Rather, He invited Peter out into the storm, into the rough seas. The rebuke of Peter's lack of faith was because he took his eyes off of Jesus and instead focused on the storm. And only then does the sea become calm. But scripture does NOT say that Jesus calmed the sea, as it says in Matthew 8: 23-27. It seems that the storm simply blew over.**

**The other version of this story, in Chapter 8, when Jesus calms the sea from within the boat, ends with Jesus' question, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" In that version of the story, the disciples seem to be wondering who Jesus is. "What manner of man is this? Even the sea obeys Him!" In today's version, the disciples state clearly who the man who walked on water is, "Truly you are the Son of God."**

**If Peter had not dared to leave the boat, he would not have experienced the power of Jesus to save him from his doubts. The storms of life give us good reason to be afraid. The existential philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard, called the decision to follow Jesus a leap of faith, like jumping off the cliff, or leaping out of a boat into the stormy seas of life's uncertainty.**

**We all like to feel comfortable and safe. This is a part of human nature. Sometimes Jesus asks of us to take a risk and place our trust in Him. Sometimes, He asks us, like Peter, "Come, get out of the boat, and into the sea."**

**Each of us has experienced difficult moments when we were not certain of what to do. We wanted to cling to the security of what is familiar in the boat of life. But Christ Jesus may be calling us to get out of the boat.**

**Come! Get out of the boat and reach out your hand to Jesus Christ to renew your faith by intensifying your life of prayer, your daily reading of the scripture, your relationship to Christ in the Holy Eucharist, your regular participation in the Sacrament of Reconciliation for the forgiveness of your sins, and your resuming the practice of morning and night prayers.**

**Come! Get out of the boat and shine the bright light of the gospel on your views concerning the pressing ecclesial, political, social, moral, and economic challenges facing the world today.**

**Come! Get out of the boat and try to bring a greater Christian presence to your place of work or where you go to school.**

**Come! Get out of the boat and accept the family member who is living in a manner with which you disagree.**

**Come! Get out of the boat and forgive your wife or husband, mother or father, son or daughter, who has deeply disappointed or hurt you.**

**Come! Get out of the boat and lovingly challenge a family member or friend who, claiming to be a Christian, speaks of individuals and groups in an unchristian manner.**

**Come! Get out of the boat, confident that Jesus Christ is walking with you over the stormy seas of life!**

**Praise be Jesus Christ. Both now and forever. AMEN**