

Temptation: Walking On The Sea

A Sermon By Rev. Grant R. Schnarr

"Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid" (Matt. 14:27).

Immediately after the Lord had fed the five thousand with five loaves and two fish, He told His disciples to get into a boat and go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee while He prayed on the mountaintop. Even though it was late, darkness was beginning to fall, they did what they were told and boarded the boat and headed off into the sea to reach the other side.

Now while they were out there, we know what happened. There arose a storm. The wind picked up very much and it was against them so they couldn't get to the other side. And we know they were rowing for a long, long time, fighting this wind, because they went out at the beginning of the evening and they were still trying to get to the other side at the 4th watch, which is just before morning. So they were rowing all night trying to get there. And we can imagine as the wind increased the waves must have tossed that boat around and around.

Of course the disciples were afraid. They were afraid that they might possibly sink. And then, beyond all this, while they were out there clinging to that boat in fear, all of a sudden they saw someone walking on the water toward them. They thought that it was a ghost, and they shrieked out in terror to see this man walking to them. They probably thought that this was a ghost coming to get them, to take them away, that they were all going to die out there in the sea.

But the Lord said, "Be of good cheer. It is I. Do not be afraid." And then Peter, the one who always seemed to act as a spokesman for the disciples said, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." So the Lord said, "Come." And Peter actually got out of the boat, and began to walk on the water to the Lord. But then, we are told, he looked up and saw the wind and how it was whipping the water around and he began to doubt. He became afraid and he started to sink. And so he called out, "Lord, save me!" And we are told, immediately the Lord grabbed hold of him, took him up. He was saved. Then, as soon as they got into the boat, the winds ceased and there was a still calm over everything. And we can imagine too, right then, the rays of the morning sun beginning to shine on the horizon. And then all the disciples who

were in that boat knelt down before the Lord because they knew that truly He was the Son of God.

Now this story of the disciples journey, their encounter with wind and wave and the Lord coming to them on the water represents something in our lives. We are all commanded to go forth on a spiritual voyage toward the life of heaven, and on the way we encounter storms, spiritual storms which can shake our very foundation. The particulars of this story explain what we encounter in our lives as we set out to do the Lord's will, what will happen to us and what the Lord expects of us.

It is important to recognize that the disciples did not take this journey on their own. The Lord commanded them to enter this boat and make their way to the other side of the sea. In the same way the Lord commands us to take that spiritual journey towards His kingdom, to begin living better lives.

The disciples do as He commands and enter the boat. A "boat," in the Word, represents doctrine. And if we pause to reflect on this we can understand why. Doctrines are vessels which contain the truth. They are ideas, notions that we have formed about life, from experience and from the Word. We fashion them by our own hands and use them to help us move forward in life. When we set forth on our spiritual voyage, these doctrines serve as our foundation. We rely on certain doctrines or beliefs to hold us up, to get us through each day, to sail through the uncharted seas of our lives.

Now, the Lord commanded the disciples to enter the boat. In the same way, we are commanded to take what we know and use it in our life to begin to go towards heaven. But what so often happens when we set off to do the Lord's will? We start off so well, clear sailing, all is calm. But then, out of no-where, a storm arises and we are caught right in the middle of it. All of a sudden the wind is against us. It's not so easy to get to the other side, to do the Lord's will. We find ourselves right in the middle of a temptation and it shakes the very foundation of our thoughts.

We are told that the wind was boisterous and it must have tossed the disciples boat all over the sea. And if we compare this to our lives, this is exactly what happens to us as we endure our spiritual storms. We can feel as if we are being tossed to and from spiritually. When we first set sail we felt as if we were on firm foundation, that our doctrine was

strong, would keep us afloat. But in time of temptation, the foundation, as it were, drops out from under us. We don't know what to believe any more. We can feel like we are being tossed back and forth by our emotions, by our doubts, by our natural inclinations to do evil. It can be very distressing to us. We cling to the boat, or our notions of what is right and wrong, very much afraid that we just might sink.

In this story there is much emphasis on the wind. The wind is boisterous. Peter sees the wind. The Writings say that wind here, represents false reasonings, falsity that whirls around in our spiritual minds, that whistles in our ears. Those false reasonings begin to whip up in us, to tell us lies. They can blow us all over the place as we encounter the storm of temptation. They fight against us so that we cannot reach our spiritual destination.

Now what would these things be? What are false reasonings? They may sound abstract. But they are not. They are thoughts induced by the hells which are contrary to the Lord's Word. If we are in an argument with someone and we feel we've been offended, we can come into temptation. We can want to hurt the person who has offended us. Now remember the Lord said we should forgive, we should love our neighbor. But the false reasonings begin to whip up within us and say, "Don't just stand there. That person will run all over you if you don't say something nasty back to them." That is false reasoning. Or if we find that we are caught up in a storm of disillusion, when we feel as if we are getting nowhere spiritually, the winds of false reasoning whisper in our ear that we are exactly correct. We are worthless. We can't change into a better person. We might as well give up right now before we get any more depressed. That also, is false reasoning. This is true with all temptations. In any temptation that we are going through, we should ask ourselves, "What are the false reasonings that whip around in our minds trying to sink our boat, trying to stop us from reaching the other side?"

The disciples were afraid when they saw this wind, and they clung onto the boat, just as we can be afraid in times of temptation. But things are not as hopeless as they appear. The Lord was coming to them, walking on the water. And the Lord comes to us in temptation. In fact the Writings tell us that everyone must go through temptations if they want to progress, if they want the Lord to come in to their lives. Don't feel sorry for yourself if you're going through temptations. The Lord is coming to you. The Lord says, "Be of good cheer. It is I," signifying His presence. We may not feel Him all the time, but He is there. He's

coming to us. And if we hold on, if we try to do His will, He will come to us.

But first of all, when the disciples saw the Lord coming to them, what happened? Well they didn't recognize Him. They saw Him as a ghost coming to them, something cold and lifeless. And they cried out for fear. Imagine that! These grown men cried out for fear.

What does this represent in our lives? It represents us in temptation, seeing the Lord and His teachings as being something cold and lifeless that can't help us, something scary. So, in fact, if we want to get our neighbor back in the middle of a quarrel, when we look at those teachings about forgiveness, they look cold to us. They scare us. "I don't want to forgive," we can say. If we are tempted, for example, to think or act lasciviously, the teachings about conjugal love, chastity, purity, can seem so dry, so cold, so lifeless. In the midst of marital turmoil the teachings about keeping the marriage together, to work toward conjugal love, can seem dead to us, even frightening to think about.

In all temptations that we have, the truth that we need the most often looks the most frightening. It looks like a ghost, like something that is going to hurt us, not help us. But we've got to pay heed to that teaching if we want to make it through the temptation. It is the Lord speaking to us. Not an apparition. The Lord calls out, "Be of good cheer, it is I," to show that if we follow, the Lord will save us. He came to save us; He didn't come to hurt us. The teachings are given to us, not to scare us, but to help us through the storm.

And then Peter gets out of the boat. Peter represents faith. Peter represents the faith in us which wants to follow the Lord, which wants to understand. So that faith within us calls out, "If it is You, command me to come to You." That Peter within us wants to let go of the boat, to let go of our preconceived notions of what is right and wrong, to face the storm in temptation and follow those teachings. That faith wants to walk toward to the Lord even though the Lord is not yet recognized to be the loving God He is. That faith within us wants to reach out, and do what is right.

And we can all feel that in temptation when the wind is howling, and we are being tossed around. At one time or another we recognize that the Lord's truth has power. And we can follow it. But do we have the

courage to follow it? Do we really have the guts to get out of that boat? That is what the Lord is asking right here. That faith within does, and will, if we let it.

The Lord commands Peter to come. Come. Get out of the boat. Come to Me. And so Peter gets out of the boat and begins to walk on the water toward the Lord. The miracle is happening. And in our lives when we begin to follow the Lord, we can see the miracle, we can realize that these things are true, that we are actually on top on this temptation, that we are persevering in temptation. But then the Word shows how human we are. Peter, because of the wind, begins to doubt. The Lord recognizes that when we start to do His will, even if we begin to see that it is working, we are so tempted to look up at the wind, at those false reasonings. We're so tempted to pay attention to them, to try to listen to them one more time, to make sure that they are not right. And as soon as we pay attention to those things, as soon as we begin to doubt the Lord's Word we begin to sink.

In the literal sense, Peter cries out, "Lord, save Me." And immediately the Lord catches him and holds him up. In the internal sense of the Word, is in those times when we are full of doubts, when we are sinking, we should cry out to the Lord for help, to recognize that He is the only one who can save us. The temptation is not complete until we have utterly given up. We have to recognize that we can't do it. But the Lord can. And in desperation we must call to Him. And He will be there, and He will catch us before we sink, and take us into His arms.

We are told that when Jesus and Peter entered the boat, the storm ceased, the winds were calm, the waters were calm. And we know what this represents in our lives. It represents the end of that particular temptation. As soon as we respond to the Lord, as soon as we let the Lord take us into His arms, the storm does cease. It becomes quiet in our own minds, our hearts are quiet, those doubts disappear, those false reasonings are gone. And we can really wonder to ourselves, "How could I have ever doubted?" The truth become clear to us, and there is peace. And so is it any wonder that at that time those disciples who were in that boat, all of them, got down on their knees in front of the Lord and worshiped Him. They knew that, "Truly you are the Son of God."

And so in life we have all formed our own vessel to carry us, the doctrines to help us on our voyage. And each one of us is called upon to

get into that boat and set out on uncharted seas of life, to try to find the right way to heaven. But when we are out there we have to recognize that the storms of temptation will come, and with them, the winds of false reasoning. And in those times of doubt, when we cling to our preconceived notions of what is right out of fear, we must recognize that the Lord is there and coming to us. His teachings may seem frightening to us, but He is within them and they do have power, if only we, like Peter, trust Him enough to face the storm, to step out and follow His teachings. Doubts will come, and with them, even desperation, but in those times of desperation we must call upon the Lord. Like Peter we must say with a sincere heart, "Lord, save me!" And we will be saved. He will immediately pick us up and take us in, and there will be peace. And in the calm, as we kneel before Him in humble recognition of His power, the light of the new day's sun will begin to glisten on the horizon. "He turns the shadow of death into morning" (Amos 5:8), "Even the wind and the sea obey Him!" (Mark 4:41).

Lessons: Matt. 14:13-33, AE 514:21