

Presbyterian Atlantic Youth Synod
St. John's, NL
"Buffeted by the waves..."
Dr. J. Dent

May 13, 2011
Matthew 14: 22-33

Make sure the passage above is read.

You've entered a stormy land with high winds. Just as the disciples did, so you too, as a part of the Church, have entered a stormy land. And what does that look like?

Sometimes the storm is more like a shaking up of your life, like in Japan, or Southern California where I grew up, and saw the overpasses fall down, cement and re-enforcement steel crumpled like they were nothing, and those quakes were only 7 on the Richter scale not like 9 in Japan.

Sometimes the storm is more like burning fire, where you are wondering what will be left after the fire goes through? We were in the Okanagan in BC when on a July morning in 2003 we were under a one hour evacuation alert at Sunday morning worship. We had a couple of boxes of pictures in the van and some camping gear. I had the Session and church records in the car, just in case we had to evacuate and nothing was left of the church or our house when we got back. That worship service was surreal. It was a time to think about what's important to you. So what is important to you? What would take in such a situation? What would you think of protecting if you only had a suitcase or less, and had the leave all the rest behind?

Sometimes the storm is more like a flood, like in Winnipeg where my eldest daughter was born, or Brandon, or in Quebec at the Richelieu river. In a flood, the muck rises from below when you least expect it. What's the muck in your life, rising from below? We had a house in Eastern Ontario which had a sewer backup. There's nothing like three or four inches of water in your basement with little poops in it to focus your mind on action. What action would you take if you couldn't stop the muck from wrecking your house? Who would you go to for help?

The water was rising for the disciples. All they could think about was Jesus sleeping in the back. Where are you, Lord? Why aren't you helping the way I expect you to help? Can't you smell the poop?

And the wind was in their faces, strong enough to break the sail, perhaps. I didn't really experience wind before moving here to Newfoundland, where the wind is constant. If you ever have a calm day, God bless you. The biggest storm here most recently was called Igor, and it destroyed roads and homes. The sins in our lives can destroy our homes and our future as well. What sins are you battling? In my backyard, it was the fence that was swaying in the wind. I was outside in the 120 to 150 km/hour winds. The aluminum siding off a house down the street was blowing off of it. Such siding is thin and sharp and four to six feet long and a foot wide. It was like knives flying through the air. My fence is held up by 4x4's about this size, (*indicate*), preserved wood in a huge amount of concrete, less than ten years old. It snapped off as if it was nothing. The stormy wind can devastate your property. It can literally blow you away, as happened with some here. What are the stormy winds in your life?

Some say we are in for a stormy ride with the new government. Some say the same about the new opposition. Wherever you are politically, nevertheless, all of us have an emotional and social side to us that cannot be denied, except to our detriment.

The context for our lives can be quite stormy, even if no one out there knows much about us. They don't know if someone in the family has a drinking problem and it is deeply affecting us. My dad was an alcoholic, I know something of what that's like. My brothers are seven and ten years older than me and they teased me mercilessly as a little kid. I know what's like. I was beat up quite a bit at home, both physically and emotionally, and I know what that's like for me. But I don't know you, and don't know what you've gone through and what you haven't. Maybe you've had a beautiful, supportive, loving relationship with parents, if you have two parents in your life, a good relationship with your siblings, if you have any of those and whatever your extended family life is like, mixed, blended, complicated or not.

An emotional storm is carried within. It doesn't go away when the outside weather patterns change. It stays with you, even when you move away from the province and town or city you know so well. It stays within until you get help to weather that storm and find the calm. For some of us, this is a life long project. We didn't ask for the storm to hit us the way it did. We didn't ask for the waves to pummel our family the way it did, or our school, or our relatives. But it did.

Or maybe you're getting into the relationship phase of your life, and all the feelings that come with that. That's a confusing time, as it has been for generations. It is a time of huge passion, imagination, wondering, rejection, huge highs and gigantic lows.

What storms come with dating or whatever you call it today, boyfriends, girlfriends, sexual choices! These storms again are ones that can last and last beyond whatever relationship you choose to enter, and even when you don't choose. May I just tell you as a fact that these storms and memories are carried throughout your whole life. I carry mine. You do carry and will carry yours. This is all the more reason to talk about what you are choosing with a trusted friend, or even better, a trusted adult. This is your life. It takes courage to reveal a secret, to let someone into the privacy of your relationship decisions, your wondering, and your imagination. But now is the best time to open up, to get a greater perspective, inviting God into those decisions through friends and adults who know God, who know God's power and help through the best and the worst.

Probably the most intimate parts of our lives are the relationships with the opposite sex and relationship with God. The disciples gave up a lot of the security of their lives when they chose to follow Jesus. They left the ordinary routines with which they were familiar and they put Jesus in the center. Don't let anyone tell you that you are too young to do the same. You can make life changing decisions this weekend for Jesus, for total commitment to God, and a life perspective that takes you away from all the values of the culture, mostly around time and money, career and power, as the culture see it, to this deep relationship with Jesus that changes your life goals, your life passions, your life choices.

The disciples didn't know they were headed for a storm when they got in the boat. Many of them had spent most of their lives as fishermen in the boat, as young boys, as young adults. They had weathered some storms, yet they were not ready for this storm. It was a spiritual storm, because they knew Jesus was with them, yet apparently he was not making the storm go away. He let them go through some shockingly large waves. He let them go through some huge wind. He let them get all wet. Ever felt all wet? That's when you realize you're on a totally different path than a lot of your friends, maybe all of them. Let me talk about fish for a minute. You know the salmon, East coast and West coast salmon fight against the current to get

home, to live a fulfilled life. There are some amazing pictures of salmon jumping the opposite direction over a waterfall, against the flow. You know a Christian has to fight against the cultural currents to live a fulfilled life, something that you need to prepare for, if you haven't already faced it. Christianity is not a popular option these days, not for a while. Our parents and grandparents lived in a time in Canada when people asked why you weren't going to church, since mostly everybody did go to church. In our day, even though the census material tells more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of the population is Christian, less than 15 out of 100 go weekly to worship. And we may find out that has dropped again. So if you are going, you need to know why you are going, and what it means to you. It's not automatic, even if your family goes, you know now it's not automatic.

In fact, if you look at confirmation or membership classes for youth your age (or younger), you will find that most of the Presbyterian youth are choosing confirmation as a graduation away from church. They affirm their baptism, profess their faith publicly and then leave, often for the rest of their lives. Now if your congregation is not experiencing this, you are blessed of God. But most of our congregations are seeing most of your age group leave the church in droves.

So the storm is not only in your personal life, it is in the community of the faithful, we call church, whether a small group, a large organization, tiny and survival minded, or huge and powerful, reaching out and knowing where you are going. The waves are lapping against the lower sections of the church building and feels like erosion on a massive scale.

So what can you do? First of all, keep your eyes open, keep your ears open. Don't go into denial and say, "there is no storm," I don't see any storm. Because the waves are filling the boat, whether it is the boat of our personal lives or the boat of the church. See what is happening. Listen to what is going on.

Second, realize you can't do this alone. The Christian life was never meant to lived alone. We are together in the boat, no matter how bad or how good it gets. Reach out for help. Be courageous enough to share some of what you are going through. Ask for prayer. Ask for advice. Learn lots more about the Bible in small groups, in church, at home. You may be surprised how much wisdom is around you.

Finally, at least for this talk, ask God for help. God is able to address your situation. It may not feel like it right now, but he can and he will. Sometimes our stories seem to take place while Jesus is still asleep. We wonder what God is doing, if God is interested. But please know deeply that God is. Jesus finds a way.