IN SPITE OF THE STORM

(The Anchor Holds song and video is played)

The Anchor holds in spite of the storm. An anchor holds a ship firmly in place and prevents it from being carried away by the wind or the ocean currents onto the rocks of the shoreline. Our scripture reading and the song we just heard tells of Jesus as our Anchor, the one that is able to stead every life in the midst of any storm, both literally and figuratively.

The story of the stilling or the calming of the storm is definitely a miracle story in which Jesus Christ exhibits his power over nature, but it also speaks to us about God’s power to give us peace and stillness in the midst of our stormy lives. Let’s take a look at this scene of 2000 years ago and try to understand its relevancy for us today. After a day of teaching the multitudes, Jesus and his disciples get into a boat to sail across the Sea of Galilee. Actually the sea is more like a big lake. It is about 13 miles long and 8 miles wide. It sets in a valley area, surrounded by mountains and hills. Because of that, it is subject to severe storms that often arrive without any warning.

And that is what happened to the disciples. They were sailing happily across the lake when a violent storm swept down upon them before they even knew it. Lighting was flashing. Thunder was roaring. The ship was being rocked back and forth. The waves were crashing over the boat, and the boat was filling rapidly with water. Many of the disciples were fishermen, but their skill and their long experience of those waters now failed them. The danger was great. They had no hope of escape. The winds and the waves were mastering their souls as well as their bodies. Fearing for their lives, the disciples went to Jesus who was sleeping at the back of the boat. They awakened him, crying “Lord, save us; we are perishing.”

Jesus first admonished the disciples about their fear, emphasizing their “little faith.” And then he rebuked the storm in the same manner as He had previously rebuked demonic spirits. To the amazement of the disciples, the wind ceased, and the waves were immediately calm. They marveled at His authority.

In parallel verses in chapter 4 of the book of Mark, Christ says, “Peace! Be still,” and suddenly the wind stopped and there was great calm. Then it says that the disciples were absolutely terrified. They asked each other, “Who is this man that even the wind and waves obey him?” After all this time and all they had seen him do, they should have known who He was and what He could do. But they still hadn’t quite grasped it.

Sometimes we tend to judge or criticize Jesus’ original disciples for their unbelief. For three years, they had traveled with Jesus, daily having numerous opportunities to witness His teaching and His healing and experience His power. Yet still they were unaware. But today we are also guilty of shallowness. God performs miracle after miracle in our lives, and we don’t recognize it. Or even worse, we take it for granted. Shame on us.
How many of you have seen the film “Forrest Gump”? (Raise your hands) It’s a wonderful film about a young man with learning difficulties, who happens to be a really profound and wise man. One of his jewels of wisdom that I remember most is, “Mama always used to say, ‘Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you’re gonna get.’” There is real truth in that, isn’t there? Life is so unpredictable; we don’t know what surprises lay in store for us from day to day, even from hour to hour. Good things in life take us by surprise, and we celebrate those moments. But sadly negative and difficult times creep up on us as well and impact us when we least expect it.

There are times in our lives when we feel at the mercy of the storm, when we feel as if our lives are as chaotic as the buffeting ocean and we are about to go under. Perhaps we are facing a financial crisis, a disappointment, an illness, a breakdown of a relationship, bereavement. And we pray and pray and pray, but it seems as if Jesus is asleep. And he doesn’t hear, no matter how loud we shout.

Why that might be the case is a question we find so hard to answer, and an attempt to answer may sound trite. But we do know, what our experience is as Christians. When our lives seem tough or when we see the suffering of others, it is right and appropriate to be persistent in prayer. We need to keep calling on the Lord in our most difficult times. Because, in our persistence, the Lord does hear us and will rebuke the storms, and the chaos of our lives will be stilled.

The disciples were desperate; their lives were in danger. They thought they would surely perish. And their fear was not unfounded. Their faith was weak, but in their weakness, they called out to Jesus and he heard them and rescued them. And so it is with us. In the weakness of our faith, in the chaos of our lives, in the midst of our anxieties and fears, we too can call out to Christ in confidence that He will hear us and meet us in the storms of our lives.

No matter what storm you may be going through, no matter what trial or tribulation that you may be in, no matter how adverse the situation in which you may find yourself, always remember that it has not gone un-noticed by the Lord, for the Lord sees all and knows all about what you are going through and He is not unconcerned. Jesus cares. 1 Peter 5:7 says “Cast all your anxieties upon Him, for He cares for you.”

In our scripture text, Jesus is sleeping during the turmoil and chaos of the storm. Why didn’t he wake up when the ship was being tossed to and fro, back and forth, up and down? Perhaps the reason why Jesus did not awaken during the storm was because Jesus had a deep trust and faith in His Father, God. He believed that no matter what storm would come His way, His Father would take care of him and protect him. And this is how our faith in God should be. We should be able to rest in the Lord, believing and trusting in God to help us when we are going through a storm.

Unfortunately, I kind of identified with the disciples. How long do you think the disciples bailed water before they woke Jesus? Often times, I too try to calm my own storms, and only turn to God in desperation when all that I tried doesn’t work. Even then, sometimes I try to tell God what He ought to do, how He ought to do it, and when.
And while Jesus was asleep in the midst of the storm, his disciples were trying to work their own way out of the storm. They were trying to figure out how they were going to survive the storm. They were trying to figure out how they were going to guide the boat through the dangerous waves. They were trying to figure out how they were going to keep the boat from being overflowed with water. Sound familiar?!

That is how we are sometimes when we are in trouble; we try to figure out how we are going to get out of trouble ourselves. But when we are in trouble, we need to call on the Lord for help. The disciples had tried rowing and worrying and crying, but nothing they did had any effect until they called out to Jesus. The disciples cried out, “Lord, save us!” Under the circumstances, their plea indicates that they understand Jesus to be powerful enough to turn to when they cannot control their own fate. But their appeal to him isn’t quite enough, because Jesus chides them. “You of little faith.”

The disciples did demonstrate some faith, though it be little. Had they had no faith at all, they would not have cried out in fear to Christ calling Him “Master.” So when we cry out to the Lord in the storms of life, however belated it may be, it shows we have at least a small level of faith. Those without any faith don’t even think of calling upon Christ. However, that is not worth patting ourselves on the back for. Had the disciples or myself had great faith, we would not have given way to panic, but would have had full confidence in the Lord to take care of the situation no matter how promising or unpromising the outlook.

The Lord wasn’t awakened by the noise of the storm; but He heard the cry for help. He hears His people always when they call upon him out of the depths, in the hour of darkness, in terror or agony. And just as Jesus’ calming the storm gave reassurance to the disciples, he will calm our troubled hearts and minds and fill us with His wonderful peace.

Storms are equal opportunity happenings. All of us go through them at one time or another. No one is exempt. Many in this room are probably going through some storms at this very moment - in your home, in your family, with your friends, in your health, on your job, in your finances, with your child, or wherever. But we have a Savior in Jesus Christ, who is far greater than any storm we will ever face. Call out to Him. Sometimes He may change your circumstances. Other times, if you yield to Him, He will change YOU in the midst of your circumstances. And if you ask me, that’s a better deal yet.

There was a woman in a small community, who was well known for her faith and her great calm in the midst of many trials and difficulties. She had had more than her fair share of storms and challenges and giants to deal with: physical disabilities, the early death of her husband, financial setbacks. But her ability to maintain a sense of calm and peace and hope made others seek her out to learn how she managed so well, to see how her faith continued to grow. Another woman in the town decided that she would pay this woman a visit to find out the secret of her calm and happy life. She called her on the phone to set a time to meet for coffee in town. And when she met this woman of deep faith, she said, “So you are the woman with the great faith I’ve heard so much about.” “No” came the reply, with a chuckle. “I am not the woman with the great faith, but I am the woman with the little faith in the great God.”

We generally associate well-being with the presence of God. When things are all hunky-dory and our lives are going great, we are apt to think that God is with us. Conversely, when suffering or misfortune occurs in our lives, we have a tendency to think that we’ve been abandoned.
Sometimes in life we receive the answers we hope for, and sometimes we receive the answers we dread. Is God more faithful in one situation than the other? No. We can rejoice that no matter what the state of our circumstances or relationship, we are utterly secure in God’s everlasting, unfailing love.

Hebrews 13:5 is God’s rock solid promise to us. God says, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” Never means never. In joy, in sorrow, in safe secure times, in great storms of life, God is there.

Let me call your attention to our projected image for the message today. I love it. For those of you, who might not be able to see it clearly, it is a picture of a man in a boat in the midst of a storm, and Jesus is right by his side. This gives me great comfort. God is with me; I am not alone. Praise be to God!

I don’t know where you find yourself right now. Maybe you are in a time of smooth sailing. Maybe you are facing overwhelming circumstances. Maybe you’ve lost a job and feel a significant sense of sadness, perhaps even embarrassment. Maybe the word has come back from the doctor’s lab that the test was positive. Maybe you’re at a time when you feel as if you have failed as a parent or a spouse. Maybe someone your love with your whole heart has left you, either by choice or by death. Maybe for whatever reason all the dreams you took for granted will never be fulfilled. Wherever you are in life, no matter what is going on – whether you are in the best days or the worst days of your life, I pray that you will know, in the depth of your soul, that God loves you and will faithfully be with you through it all.

I would like to close with prayer. I would like you to join me – not out loud, but silently in your heart, in your mind, in your soul. Pray as I pray.

Lord, I thank you for being my anchor – the one that keeps me from drowning in the violent waves of life that come against me. Lord, thank you for being with me even now as I face this storm. Here silently to yourself and God, name a storm that you are now facing. Lord, thank you for being with me even now as I face the storm of …………. I know that I will come out of this storm victoriously. I will be smiling in the sunshine! In your Matchless, Mighty name. Amen.