

Is Jesus in Your Boat?

John 6:16-21

Pastor Tom Anderson

In July of 1968, Boy Scout Troop 1104 from Dearborn, Michigan, set off to summer camp on Isle Royale National Park, located in the furthest reaches of Lake Superior. In Copper Harbor, those 47 scouts and their leaders boarded the Isle Royale Queen to make a 55 mile crossing that was advertised to take approximately 3 hours. The Queen was an all-aluminum boat about 100 feet long. With all their food, 25 canvas wall tents and personal gear, the troop pretty much filled the boat to capacity. Upon leaving the calm waters of the harbor, the wind began to pick up. Soon our intrepid adventurers found their selves rocking up and down 15 foot swells as the prow crashed through the white caps. We could no longer see the horizon, and no one knew where we were, and judging by the green color of our faces, we really didn't care at the time. Even if Jesus had come to us walking on the pure and shining waters of Gitchee Gummee that day, we would not have noticed because—Dramamine or no Dramamine—all heads were hanging overboard and looking straight down!

The Sea of Galilee is 13 miles long and 8 miles wide—over 41,000 acres in size, making it about four times the size of our own Houghton Lake. The deepest part is 141 feet down. Nighttime is the worst time to launch a boat on the Sea of Galilee. This is because the lake is 686 feet below sea level and surrounded by mountains. So at the end of a summer's day, the hot air that has risen up the mountain slopes since the morning begins to cool and rush back down the mountains and onto the surface of the lake causing fierce swells, and angry waves throughout the night. To make matters worse, the disciples did not have diesel engines like the Isle Royale Queen, they were rowing with make shift oars. They did not have compasses or lights. There were no lights on shore. Once they got out 3 or 4 miles they could only travel by what navigators call "dead reckoning" which is an estimate based on the direction and position they had when leaving the shore. Their craft was a 20 foot open boat made of wood and animal skin.

In their favor, most of the disciples had a lifetime of experience as fishermen on this lake and they'd traveled at night on the lake many times before. It's been said that experience is so that you can recognize the same mistake you made before. Four miles out, rowing against the whitecaps, the disciples realize they'd made a mistake and they were in real trouble.

Have you ever been in real trouble? I mean *real* trouble. Trouble like getting up in the morning only to discover your spouse has walked out on you during the night and the kids are hungry and you have to go to work in 30 minutes?

Trouble like coming home from school on Friday to discover your mom has left for the weekend, didn't tell you where she was going and left neither food nor money in the house for you and your two little sisters?

Troubles like having maxed out your credit card and gambled away your entire paycheck at the casino and now you have to tell your family? Trouble like going to the doctor for what you think is the flu and discovering it's really cancer? Troubles like hostility between you and your children that has grown so painful that you no longer see your grandchildren at Christmas? Troubles like addiction? Unemployment? Abuse? Grief? Loneliness?

In the darkness and storm around us here is Jesus, walking on the water! This is so outrageous; most people don't even give it a thought. It's not possible. It's not reasonable. It can't really be happening. It's just a story. It's just a ghost. It's wishful thinking. It's an allegory or a metaphor no more real than Aesop's Fables or lessons from the Brother's Grimm.

But what if it's true? What if Jesus really did walk on the water? In Arkansas, there is a proverb: if you see a turtle on a fence post, you know it didn't get there by accident. Applying this wisdom, we might at least conclude that the story about Jesus walking on the water is not to be easily dismissed as an accidental piece of folklore from the past. Rational people don't adopt outrageous stories for no reason at all. If the story is true—and I believe it is—then it means we are not alone. There is a God and he has come to us in Jesus Christ. He is available to us right now!

Jon Stone is a good friend of mine. He is the staff person for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship on the campus of Michigan Tech. He and his wife Jenny are proud parents of four. On occasion, he and I have spent many hours crashing through the brush in the Keweenaw hunting for brook trout. But life was not always so sunlit for Jon.

As a young man, his father beat him then deserted him. His mother drank heavily. At 18, he graduated, got a job and immediately moved out into his own apartment. Life for him was 10 hour work days followed by fast food and beer in front of the TV. A couple of months of this and he was suffocating in the emptiness and aimlessness of life. One evening he had had enough and resolved to end it all. He was lining up pills on the card table that was his only piece of furniture.

He was preparing to swallow them all. He decided to turn on the television so no one else in the apartment building could hear him as he lay dying. Wouldn't you know? The TV fired up with a message from the tail end of a Billy Graham crusade where the host urged the listeners to call the 1-800 help line. At the same time, a neighbor knocked on the door asking to borrow some dishes. His somber mood was broken, but he could not remember the help line number so he got on the phone and called a friend from high school who he knew was an active Christian. So began his long journey away from death and darkness into the light of Jesus Christ. You might say, Jesus came walking on the water and he dared to take him in his boat.

Another good friend of mine was profoundly alcoholic. His wife was headed into surgery that might take her life. The doctor had told him to prepare for the worst. He went home to review her insurance papers, her living will and her funeral wishes. It was about midnight and he found himself completely paralyzed. He did not know what to do or how to do it. He was not a Christian or even a man sympathetic to prayer but he hung his head in his hands and cried out, "God, help me, I just can't do it." What happened next are his own words: "Light filled the room as if heaven itself had opened its doors. I saw and felt a hand reach down from above and touch me on my head." He knew it was the hand of God. And so began his long journey from addiction and despair to freedom and life in Christ.

Jesus is not a magic man, he is God—the God who can do anything including walking on water. He comes to us in the darkness and storm of life. Don't ever neglect, discount or close your eyes to him, but always be willing to take him into your boat. There is no addiction he cannot break. There is no sorrow he cannot heal. There is no darkness he cannot enlighten. And there is no life he cannot redeem.

Jesus is not a fairy tale. Jesus is not a fiction. Jesus is not a dead Guru. Jesus is God for whom all things are possible. He works miracles. He will meet you in your worst nightmare and guide you safely to the other side. You who are furiously paddling, stop! You, who are hanging your head over the side, look up! See the Savior and invite him into your boat!