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JOHN 6:16-21

John Series: Get a Life in Jesus

MANAGING THE STORMS OF LIFE

God speaks to us today...and he does it in a lot of different ways. He speaks to us through each other as we talk and hear testimonies. He speaks to us through creation, the Bible says, so we can learn more about Him and experience Him that way. He speaks to us through the Holy Spirit inside of us and even inspires us that way in our lives. A significant way that He speaks to us and one that really measures every other kind of thing that we think is God's word. So God's word becomes this authority in our lives. So if you want to hear God speak, open the book. When you open the book and you read it, God will speak to you and He'll teach you.

So every time we get together, we have a teaching time and at teaching time we look at some passage of scripture. Today we're going to look at the story of the disciples who got into a boat to cross over the lake of Galilee and on their way they encountered a storm in their lives, a physical storm. We're going to talk about spiritual storms, or not even spiritual, but the storms we have in life – physical, emotional, spiritual storms. We're going to take lessons from the storm that they experienced and apply them to our lives. So today I think you're going to find encouragement in God's word as we open it up. And we're going to find, I think, this greater sense of wanting to put yourself in God's hands, to trust your life to Him in a way that maybe you haven't in the past or you haven't before. That happens because we open God's word and we look at it. So we're going to look at that story.

If you have your Bible maybe you could open it up to John. We're going through the gospel of John verse by verse. As we're going through the gospel of John, we're looking for practical applications through the lessons that we learn from the gospel of John. I'd like you to stand with me as I read our passage today. I put it up here on the screen if you don't have your Bible with you. But please stand with me out of reverence for God's word as we read this morning.

John 6:16-21. When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were frightened. But he said to them, "It is I; don't be afraid." Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.

You may be seated.

When we hit storms in our lives, I think that they affect us and cause us to be upset. I would suggest sometimes that it's disappointment because life just isn't going the way we thought it would go. Sometimes it's just anger because this isn't right. Sometimes it's anxiety or fear because we don't know the outcome of where we're going here and that's just anxiety producing in our lives. Our emotions get ruffled in the midst of a storm. So there's the external storm that's going on in our lives, whatever that might be, but there's the internal storm that I think we want to spend our time specifically addressing today and draw some parallels between the storm and what's happening with Jesus and the disciples and our own lives and what's going on inside of us.

Everyone experiences storms in their lives. No one escapes storms. No one. It's been said that everybody is either just coming out of a storm in their life or they're in the middle of a storm or there's one on the horizon that they're coming toward. We all know people who are in storms, so it's a very relevant thought process today as we look at the storms that happen in our lives.

One of the benefits I think of being part of a church like this, our church is real. We're sharing with each other, we're not pretending to be something we aren't. We get together and we talk and when we do talk we talk about the real things that are going on inside of our lives, the storms that we're facing. I find that to be very encouraging. Because when I see other real people challenged with things, it's encouraging for me and sometimes I'm working through something and I can share that and it encourages someone else.

So the reality is that God designed the church to be this place where we can come together and say, "Oh it's not just me with the problems. It's something that we are working on in our lives together and we're walking along growing in our relationship with God as well.

Well what is a storm? If we look at storms they are characterized by certain things. Often they come on suddenly by surprise. Often they are rather tumultuous. Sometimes these storms cause us to feel upset or even afraid as in our story today, which is an opportunity then for us to see Jesus, as we see in our story today. And when that takes place and we see Jesus in the midst of the storm, that does something for us. It does something that's different than our story of last week, which was the feeding of the five thousand that happened earlier in the day of our story today.

You see when you understand God to be the God of not only the mountaintop where surplus is being provided, where He's supplying needs, but He's also this person. God is this person who cares for us and loves us in the midst of the challenges that we're experiencing. That's what storms are. Storms can be these stepping-stones of faith or the development of the facets of faith in our life. There are lots of kinds of storms, of course, that we can experience. There's storms of illness that are either sudden or prolonged. There are storms of loss. Loss of a house or loss of a job. Or a loss of something that you value. Storm of an accident. A surprise course of events that have taken place. But there's also storms of rejection, divorce, or abandonment. There's the storm of being misunderstood or misrepresented. This isn't fair if people really knew who I was. This isn't true about me. So there's those storm of misunderstanding that we experience. Those storms are real. They're painful. They're challenging in our lives.

Now the disciples in our story today find themselves on the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee is known for storms. Let me just explain. I think you'll find that the topography and the meteorology kind of interesting regarding the storms on the Sea of Galilee.

This is a picture of modern day Galilee. The lake itself is thirty-one miles from top to bottom and at its widest point it's nine miles wide. It's seven hundred feet below sea level. So it's pretty low. It's tropical light. It's pretty warm and because it's near the war, it has a moderate temperature to it. Generally a very comfortable place to be. But there are mountains around the Sea of Galilee that go up the seaside up to 2,000 feet above sea level. Now you know when you go up high, if you go up to 2,000 feet, the air is cooler there. So that's what happens.

At certain times of the year, the clouds are going by and the wind is blowing up there at that level. The air is dry and it's cold and of course what happens to cold air? It goes down. Now it comes down out of those mountains through these kind of furrows and creates these windy areas coming down out of these paths sometimes. So when they hit the water, especially toward the center, there's a lot of wave activity. Very tumultuous and can be quite sudden. Because the lake itself is only about 200 feet deep, it can't absorb the energy from this, so the waves are just often quite high and it's difficult for any boat to maneuver on the lake when these storms suddenly come up.

Interestingly enough, it's similar to Lake Erie. There are five Great Lakes and Lake Erie is also relatively shallow at 200 feet deep. It is also a place where on the water the wind comes down through the hills and when it comes into Lake Erie it becomes also a very tumultuous place, the most dangerous of all the five Great Lakes for any boat that is fishing or maneuvering on the lake. So that's the background. That's what's happening actually in the Sea of Galilee. And our disciples are moving across the lake. What's interesting to me in our story is that Jesus sent them into the storm. I just want to talk about that for a moment.

In order to know that piece of information, I want to go to one of the other gospels because in the gospel of Mark this same story is told about the storm that was on the Sea of Galilee and the disciples were in it just after the feeding of the five thousand. So in Mark He tells us these five words describing the same story. He says – *Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray.*

So Jesus is sending the disciples into a storm. You have to pause for a moment. Why? Does it fit your theology? Oh I know God allows challenges to happen in our lives. But could sometimes the storm in our life be like a class? I mean I think there are some kids who say, "I don't want to go to school. I want to play on video games. I want to have a good time." And Mom says, "No I'm sorry. It's time for school. You need to go to class." I think that sometimes it's the challenges of life that provide these opportunities for us to grow.

So Jesus is sending them into this place where a storm is going to take place. Why? As I pondered the story, if I go back into our story from last week if you just look at the last verse that we talked about in John 6:15, it kind of describes what's happening at the end of the story. After

Jesus had fed all of the people, they're all excited. It says – *Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.*

Jesus knew that the people were developing this idea that had to do with popularity. You see at the time of the feeding of the five thousand Jesus' popularity was at a high point. We'll see next week that it starts to decline rather rapidly. But at this point His popularity is quite high. Now popularity is dangerous. When everybody likes you, you've got a huge number of followers on your Facebook where a lot of people click "like" on your post that you made, you can start believing things that aren't exactly true. Popularity has this way of confusing the truth and in this case the popularity of Jesus is growing and the crowds might want to make Him king by force. Anybody who can feed people, we don't need to have a welfare system; we just need this guy to be king. So we're great here.

Now it could be, it's possible, that the disciples themselves might be tempted to join into this kind of thinking. Maybe. I don't know. I'm just looking at the story itself. I know Jesus wouldn't be tempted by this. Jesus knows His mission. He knows where He's going. He knows what He's doing. But maybe the disciples could be tempted by this, so Jesus says, "Hey you guys, get in the boat and get going. Go. I want you to go to the other side. I'll meet you over there." Wow. Interesting.

You see popularity can do this thing to our pride that causes our pride to increase and can somehow mask the truth. So sometimes I would suggest God allows storms in our lives in order to help us deal with our pride issues. We know that's true of Paul, don't we? That he was given a thorn in the flesh. Oh wow. That's interesting.

Could it be that some of the trials that we experience are God protecting us from temptations that could get us into trouble? There are a lot of temptations out there. Temptations to cross the lines. To find enjoyment or pleasure outside of the boundaries. And we go outside of the boundaries that God has established to find pleasure, we find ourselves in serious problems. Relationship damage, addiction, challenges of all kinds happen when we go outside of the boundaries.

I think that God uses life situations sometimes to keep us right where we need to be so we learn how to trust Him more. I would suggest that another reason they're into this storm is so they could develop some faith in a new dimension. They could develop faith on the high mountain where the food is being multiplied and they can develop faith in the low lake where there's a challenge.

But I think it's more than just the highs and lows in life. If you look at faith, I look at faith having a lot of facets to it. It's not just good and bad or highs and lows. It's God wants to take us into a new facet of our faith when it comes to relationship or disappointment or dealing with our mouth or managing our emotions. There's all these facets of faith. So when we find ourselves in the midst of a trial, it's an opportunity to develop faith on a new level.

So here the disciples are into the storm and as they go into this storm they're growing rather in a challenging way.

And where is Jesus? I want to go back to the story that's presented in Mark to see where Jesus is and how He's working in the midst of this. Because notice what's going on from Jesus' perspective back in Mark 6. *Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them.*

I just want to make the point that even in the midst of the storm, Jesus cares and He knows what's going on. I want to say that because I believe that sometimes people think that if they're in the storm of life that God has somehow turned His back on them. That God doesn't see what's going on and that the problem that they're experiencing is somehow out of God's sight. So it's a beautiful picture to see that Jesus saw, even though they are three to four miles away, the other passage tells us, rowing, that Jesus sees what's going on. And not only does He see them, but He's going to go be with them.

So in our story it tells us in verse 18 – *A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were frightened.* I imagine what the passage is saying is they were frightened by seeing Jesus. It doesn't seem like He's supposed to be there in the midst of this storm. There He is and they're afraid of the whole experience.

But notice in the midst of the storm they meet Jesus. If you're going through a storm right now in your life, if there's a challenge that you're experiencing that seems out of control, surprising, difficult, it's a place to meet Jesus and to allow Jesus to care for you and nurture you and love you. I find that sometimes people who are in storms find themselves ashamed that they're into the storm. But notice the disciples are doing the right thing. They're following Jesus' instructions by obeying Jesus. They're doing what's right and they find themselves in the midst of a storm.

Can you do the right thing and still be in a storm? The answer to that question is yes. If you're in the midst of a storm, I don't want you to live there feeling ashamed that you're in a storm. Because that happens to people on a regular basis. The person who doesn't want to go out in public because their hair is falling out because they're in a storm. Or the person who's been divorced or in the process of getting divorced, and now all their friends are saying, "Well where's your husband? Or where's your wife?" And you're going I don't even know how to answer these questions. And then there's the shame that you experience in the midst of that that is unnecessary and I would say is often a tool of Satan to try to limit us, to hinder us from moving forward.

If you're in the midst of a storm, I would encourage you ask this question: Am I doing the right thing? The disciples were doing the right thing and they still were in the storm. Ask yourself the question, am I doing the right thing? You have to start there because we do know that there are some storms that come into our lives because we're doing the wrong thing. Isn't that the Jonah story where Jonah is doing the wrong thing so he's in a storm. So we have to ask the question, am I doing the right thing? Very important question to ask.

But if you're doing the right thing and you're still experiencing a storm, even if the wrong things that you did some things in your past that contributed to your storm today, the question is this: What am I doing right now? Am I living for God right now? Am I doing the right thing right

now? If you are, there's no room for shame. There's room for confidence that God is working in your life, that Jesus will meet you in the storm and that you can go forward in this sense of peace and confidence.

We have to do that with humility and here's why. Because sometimes we think we're doing the right thing, so we're pursuing that, but then we say, "God, help me understand." So every once in a while then as we're doing what's right, God says, "Oh I think you need to grow in this area, so He moves us a little to the right or a little bit to the left. And we need to change. As we do, we're being sensitive to the Holy Spirit.

The Bible describes the Holy Spirit like this wind. There's a spontaneity to the Holy Spirit. It's like this wind that moves us and as He does He may direct us to say you know, I think you need to do something different here. So we move. Because we want to be able to answer the question, are you doing the right thing? We want to say yes, I'm doing the right thing. When we do the right thing, then we are right where we need to be. Because the safest place in life to be is right in the middle of God's will, to be obeying Him. But that doesn't mean there won't be any storms. Because storms occur in our lives just in the course of things. I don't pretend to know all the reasons why storms take place in our lives. The reality is God meets us in the storm, as He does with Jesus. Jesus meets them right in the middle of this storm.

I think it's important for us not to feel ashamed about being in a storm if we're doing what's right. So you want to ask God, "Lord, I believe I'm doing what's right. If I'm not, please show me. Teach me. I'll change. I want to do what's right. I want to live for you. I want to do the right thing." And as you come to that place in your life where you say, "God, I want you to run my life, I want you to control me," then there's something that happens with that inner storm inside. That it starts to calm. That God does something inside of your heart that's just amazing and provides you with that greater confidence of what He wants to do inside of you.

I've got to take you to another passage of scripture. This is a passage that is in the Old Testament in the book of Zephaniah. Now you don't usually hear sermons preached on the book of Zephaniah. The book of Zephaniah is a prophet of the Old Testament and two of the three chapters in this book are about the judgment that's taking place on Jerusalem, on Judah because of what they've done wrong. But in chapter 3 he reminds them of the great love He has for them. In the midst of this storm that they've experienced, He wants them to feel His presence. He wants them to understand what He's going to do for them.

Let me just read these verses from Zephaniah 3:16-19. *Do not fear, Zion.* Now Zion is another name for Jerusalem. So that's his target here. *Do not fear, Zion; do not let your hands hang limp.* You know what that is. Either in shame or discouragement you go, "Oh." *Do not let your hands hang limp. The Lord your God is with you.* Just like in the boat, Jesus was with them. That sense that God is with us and the knowledge that He's present in the midst of our challenges is so comforting. He says – *The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you (just feel that), in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.*

And then there are five “I wills” here, a quote that the prophet is representing God and he’s making five *I will* statements. *I will remove from you all who mourn over the loss of your appointed festivals, which is a burden and reproach for you. At that time I will deal with all who oppressed you. I will rescue the lame; I will gather the exiles.* And notice what he says now. Fascinating verse in the Old Testament that I want to apply in our lives in the midst of our storms and that we might experience. He says – *I will give them praise and honor in every land where they have suffered shame.* In place of shame He gives us praise and honor. Wow.

Even in the midst of the storm, you can hold your head up high and say, “Yes, there’s a storm in my life, but I’m doing what God wants me to do. He told me to get in the boat and row to the other side. I’m obeying Him. If He tells me to do something different, I’m going to do it, but I am right in the center of God’s will. I’m doing what He wants me to do.” And therefore notice it’s God giving the praise and honor. Usually we talk about us giving the praise and honor to God. But God is giving praise and honor to that person in place of shame. Oh I love that picture. It’s something that I think we all need in our lives when we’re tempted to put ourselves down or limit our ability or not allow God to work in a greater way.

Let’s go back to our passage today in a moment.

Here’s what I think happens in our lives. We say things to ourselves that are not true and we need to replace them with what God says to us. I’m just going to give you a bunch of examples here of the way we say things and the way God says things to us.

We say, “It’s impossible.”

God says, “What’s impossible with men is possible with God.”

We say, “I’m too tired.”

God says, “I will give you rest.”

We say, “Nobody really loves me.”

God says, “I love you.”

We say, “I can’t go on.”

God says, “My grace is sufficient. My power is made perfect in weakness.”

We say, “I can’t figure things out.”

God says, “I will direct your steps.”

We say, “I can’t do it.”

God says, “You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you.”

We say, “I can’t forgive myself.”

God says, “I forgive you.”

We say, “I can’t manage.”

God says, “I will supply every need according to my riches in glory.”

We say, "I'm worried."

God says, "Cast all your anxiety on me for I care for you."

We say, "I feel all alone."

God says, "I will never leave you or forsake you."

I think we say things in the midst of the storms that create for us a difficult place. God has another message that He wants us to hear, another message that He wants us to experience, and that message is in the book. If you want to hear God speak, open the book. When you do, there's this message all through God's word of what God wants to do in the midst of the challenges. When we feel depleted He feels the strength that He offers to us.

Now let's go back to our passage one more time and notice in verse 20 another thing that God says. They're frightened. *But he said to them, "It is I; don't be afraid."* And then a very interesting thing happens in the passage, don't you think, in this last verse. It's like they're surprised at the end of the story. It says – *Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.* Like surprise! You're there! That somehow in the midst of the storm Jesus is working things in a way that they're surprised by the ending. I'm not suggesting that every time you're in a storm that when Jesus meets you the storm is over. But that's what happened. There was a surprise nature in this process that they were going through that God did something and they go, "Whoa." We're surprised by it.

The phrase right before it though is probably the key to the whole passage here where it says in verse 21 – *They were willing to take him into the boat.* Which I find kind of a strange statement as well. *They were willing to take him into the boat.* Why wouldn't you be willing? It's Jesus out there walking on the water. It says – *They were willing to take him into the boat.* And that has to be where we are today. Are you willing? Are you willing to take Him into the boat? Are you willing to take Him into your life, into your car, into your finances, into your relationships, into your health? Are you willing to bring Him on to those things? Because when He does, boy, amazing things happen on the inside.

If you're in a storm today, I want to encourage you to meet Jesus in the midst of your storm. If you're just coming out of a storm, I encourage you to share that with others so that it can be an encouragement to other people. We need to know that storms are yet on the horizon for any of us and all of us. We need to be prepared for those and there's a spiritual strength that God provides through His Son Jesus Christ.

If you've never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, I want to invite you to do that today, to trust Him. He will guide you. He will work inside of your heart in a way that is supernatural. Not just natural, but supernatural. Something amazing happens inside of your hearts.

Would you stand with me and let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we right now come before you and trust you in the midst of the challenges, the difficulties that we experience. We ask you to teach us, to lead us, and to guide us through the challenges that are ever-present in our lives. Lord, I pray for each person here. You know their needs, each person who's listening, and there are specific challenges that they face. Lord, I pray that you would touch them, that you would meet them in the midst of the storm. In Jesus' name, amen.