

Frank's father, an oil baron, had amassed quite a fortune, so Frank's childhood was really the dream of most kids. He lived on a luxurious gentleman's farm in beautiful rolling fields of greenery and grain near Syracuse, NY. Frank's mother had named the property "Rose Lawn", and it certainly lived up to its name in every way. So Frank's childhood was a happy one- loving parents, a luxurious environment, plenty of room to roam and explore.

But then one day, as Frank was out wandering happily in a grain field, he was suddenly jolted from his dream-life with fear and terror. It was a stranger, someone Frank had never seen before. Someone towering over him, silent and alone. Frank ran home terrified. For months, Frank dreamed about this silent stranger- it was a repeating nightmare that would follow Frank through several years of his childhood. And this single experience seemed to be such a blemish in an otherwise perfect childhood.

Years passed, and Frank grew up, married and had 4 children of his own. And spurred by that creative imagination that had been developed at beautiful "Rose Lawn", Frank became an accomplished story teller. In fact, neighborhood children would come to Frank's house just to hear him tell stories. Frank's favorite story took him back in his mind to the beautiful green hills of "Rose Lawn". But now in his older age, with a mature perspective, that stranger of his nightmares is no longer threatening. He is tame, and even friendly. In the midst of his story, one of the youngsters interrupts. What is the name of this wonderful kingdom that daddy is describing? Frank stops. He was not prepared for this question- but quickly his

eyes dart around the room for an indication, a clue as to what this kingdom could be called. Suddenly his eyes rest on the bottom drawer of his 2 drawer filing cabinet, and without blinking he reads what he sees there. The name is quite satisfactory to his young audience, and he goes on to finish his story, a story about a beautiful land, a story about a silent stranger who had once terrified him as a young child but who today he knew to be only a scarecrow, a story about a wonderful fantasy kingdom spontaneously named after the file drawer, the one below A-N, the magnificent tale of the wonderful wizard of OZ.

It is amazing how that which is terrifying to us at one time, can become even a source of comfort to us later on. My mother told me of a time when I was just 2 years old when they took me to a Halloween costume party. She said that I was so terrified that I sat for the whole evening on the lap of one lady dressed up like a cat. But now from an adult perspective, the costumes are not nearly as scary. I even look at Halloween costumes with a sense of nostalgia and comfort.

Such an event happened to the disciples in the 5th miracle recorded by John. An event that was a fearful one to them at first- Matthew in his account says in 14:26- "When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. 'It's a ghost', they said and cried out in fear."

Yet this event that initially brought so much terror to the hearts of the disciples who at first thought that they were seeing a ghost would eventually bring great comfort to their hearts as they reflected back upon it later in their lives. I am speaking, of course, of the miracle of Jesus walking on the sea of Galilee- it is found in John 6:16-21. But it is also recorded by 2 other gospel writers, Matthew

and Mark. Luke is the only one who does not mention it.

Let's read it together as John records it, and then we will add the additional features that Matthew and Mark give in order to get the full picture.

READ John 6:16-21

JN 6:16 When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. ¹⁹ When they had rowed three or three and a half miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were terrified. ²⁰ But he said to them, "It is I; don't be afraid." ²¹ Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.

Now John tells us that when evening came, the disciples got into a boat without Jesus and began to sail to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Matthew and Mark give more specifics about why the disciples set sail by themselves.

Matthew 14:22-24: Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

Mark 6:45-46: 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.

Now these parallel accounts add insight to John's statement in verse 15- Jesus

knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

*Jesus and disciples' intended period of rest has been interrupted by the multitudes.

*In compassion Jesus has taught the multitudes and fed the 5,000 men with 5 loaves and 2 fish

*Result- crowds clamor to make Jesus a king - great temptation.

*Jesus knew the disciples at this point couldn't handle this one. They would have joined in with the crowd, and they needed the rest anyway, so he sent them on ahead.

*Then Christ goes to the mountainside to pray so that he would have victory in this temptation and be sure that he was walking in the will of the Father, not after the desires of the crowd.

After his season of prayer which lasted perhaps 6 hours for both Matthew and Mark tell us that the miracle took place during the 4th watch - between 3 and 6 A.M., Jesus goes to meet the disciples on the other side of the sea. Since he doesn't have a boat, and the shortest distance between 2 points is a straight line, he decides to walk across the water. The fact that his purpose was to get to the other side of the lake to meet the disciples is brought out by Mark 6:48, 49- About the 4th watch of the night he went out to them, walking on the lake. And He was about to pass by them, but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, because they all saw him and were terrified.

*So the scene is clear. Christ has just faced an exhausting day- teaching,

miracle, etc. A great temptation- to be made king. So he has spent time in prayer for strength and wisdom, and now he is traveling across the water to meet with the disciples on the other side. And in the midst of his trip, he comes upon the disciples who are in great turmoil and danger, battling against a fierce storm.

Now in this miracle, we find 2 ways to cross a lake- one exemplified by Christ, the other by the disciples. And we would like to look at these 2 ways this morning.

1. First, let's look at the disciples. For they illustrate how we usually try to cross a lake. They were the experts in lake navigation. Several of them had grown up on this lake, they were fishermen, they knew this lake like the backs of their hands. And they were in a real predicament.

Mark says that they were straining at the oars - the word literally means tortured.

Matthew adds - the boat was buffeted by the waves, for the wind was against it.

John simply says, a strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough.

Simply put, these men were in a fierce storm. It had taken them some 6 hours to progress half way across the lake - 3 miles or so. We can only imagine their emotional state. Physically they had been exhausted before they had started - they needed this rest. So by now, we can only imagine how frazzled they had become.

Yet their attitude remains determined. We are sailors, if we work hard enough, we can make it.

Now the reason for our assumption of this attitude is that important statement

of Mark's that we must constantly remember. Jesus said that this storm had been allowed to see if they had learned the lesson taught in the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000. What was that lesson? That Jesus Christ himself is the bread of life sufficient for every need. He is the staple for the Christian life, we live successfully only in his strength.

And Jesus said in Mark that they indeed had not learned this lesson. So we can assume that their attitude was that of going forth in their own strength.

We can almost imagine some of the conversations:

Peter: "We're in for a long night tonight. This storm is going to be a rough one. But we've been through rough storms before, we can make it."

John: "Our experience will carry us through."

James: "Let's just pull together, and we'll beat this storm yet."

And most likely, they would have made it. But without the Lord's help it would have been an all-night trip, and they would have arrived totally exhausted.

2. Now let's look at Christ's trip across the lake. While the disciples had entered the boat, he had dismissed the crowd and gone to the mountain to pray. Yet in spite of his praying for almost the entire night, both Christ and the disciples came to the same place on the lake at the same time, and the simple fact is that Jesus Christ would have arrived at the intended destination before the disciples had it not been for his finally helping them out. And Christ arrives with the spiritual refreshment that can only be found in communion with the Father.

One of the greatest hindrances to my prayer life is this matter of time. I get ready to begin a busy day full of many meetings and activities, and Satan says, you

don't have much time for prayer today- you have a lot to do. And so the temptation is either to cut down on the prayer time, or to pray thinking about all that has to be done. Do you face that temptation too?

But we are reminded in this miracle that more is accomplished through prayer than without prayer in our own strength. The object was to get to the other side of the lake. Christ spent almost the entire night in prayer and would have arrived sooner than the disciples who had rowed and toiled all through the night. Why? Because prayer opens the door to supernatural intervention. Natural reason says- I don't have time for prayer today. Spiritual reason must reply- I can't afford to neglect my prayer time today.

Martin Luther was once asked how he was able to accomplish so much in life. He replied that when he saw that his schedule was extra heavy on a given day, he would get up earlier and spend extra time in prayer so that he might have the strength to accomplish all his activities.

Now we won't completely see the lesson that Jesus is teaching through this miracle if we don't look at one interesting note that Matthew makes.

Remember- Purpose for the miracle as given by Mark- to teach the disciples the spiritual lesson of the breaking of the loaves and the fish. That lesson: that Jesus Christ is the bread of life, that he is the staple of our spiritual diet, that just as physical life has been designed to be dependent upon food for strength, so spiritual life has been designed by God to be dependent upon walking in fellowship with Jesus Christ.

With these thoughts in mind listen as I read these verses from Matthew 14.

READ Matthew 14:25-33.

MT 14:25 During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. ²⁶ When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

MT 14:27 But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

MT 14:28 "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

MT 14:29 "Come," he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

MT 14:31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

MT 14:32 And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. ³³ Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Do you see it? Do you see the lesson that Christ is teaching confirming his message intended in breaking the loaves and fish?

As long as Peter had his eyes on Christ, he was able to do what no other person has ever done - defy the very laws of gravity and walk on top of water. But the minute he took his eyes off of Christ, and focused on the stormy circumstances around him, he began to sink. He then could only be saved by calling out to Christ once again for help.

Jesus Christ is the bread of life. Christianity has been designed by God to be a living relationship with the person of Jesus Christ. As we realize this truth and as we walk in it, we will be able to experience spiritual health and vitality. If we

forget about it or decide to go our own way, we are going to sink in the water.

There are two ways to cross the lake presented to us this morning. One is by toiling at the oars in our own strength, taking upon our shoulders the responsibility of battling the storms. If we choose this way we either are not going to make it across at all - for there sometimes arise storms that are beyond our control - or we are going to arrive fatigued and exhausted, we are going to live our lives on the ragged edge of burn-out.

The second way is Christ's way. Committing our temptations to the Lord through prayer. Receiving divine strength from above. Keeping our eyes on Jesus, focusing on him rather than on the turbulence of the storm around us.

How did you cross the lake last week? How are you planning to cross the lake this next week?

The Sunday after the sinking of the great ship the Titanic a famous American preacher was speaking as a guest speaker in Belfast. The city of Belfast was reeling from the disaster. There had been great local pride in the Titanic since it had been built there. Many of the townspeople had been involved in the ship in one way or another- in fact 6 members of the church in which this American preacher was speaking had been mechanics on board her and had gone down to a watery grave that former week. As one can imagine, the church was packed that Sunday morning, and the crowd fell into a hushed silence as this preacher announced his title - "the unsinkable ship". But as his sermon progressed, it became obvious that the unsinkable ship of which he was speaking was not the Titanic, but rather it was a frail, wooden boat on the sea of Galilee. His text was

the same one which we have studied this morning, and the boat of which he spoke was unsinkable because of the prayers and faith of the Son of God who walked towards her on the water.

If we have our eyes on Jesus, if he indeed is the spiritual bread of our life, then we are sailing in an unsinkable boat.