



# It's Not About the Boat

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Vienna Presbyterian Church  
Luke 8:22-25

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Last Sunday was such a marvelous day. Hope Lee preached and the congregation overwhelmingly affirmed her call to become the next pastor of Vienna Presbyterian Church. She'll be here in early October and we are really looking forward to a new adventure with her. I've known her a while and her deep love for our Lord, her heart for Scripture, her gift of engaging people and her great spirit will be a gift to us all. Our Session, the elders, passed this marvelous resolution: "In deepest appreciation and gratitude for a final outcome glorifying God and serving the needs of our congregation, the Session of Vienna Presbyterian Church enthusiastically commends all nine members of the recent Pastor Nominating Committee and gives thanks to God for their diligent and loyal service." To which I add amen and amen!

I also am happy to report that as the number of new COVID cases decreases, and the number of fully vaccinated people increases, we will be able to bring more people into the sanctuary for worship, even as we maintain precautions to respect that the majority of our people are not yet vaccinated. Starting next Sunday, May 16, both the 9:00 and the 11:30 Worship Services will be open to a larger congregation, and registration for those services opens tomorrow. It is a joy to be in the House of the Lord together and we hope more of you will feel comfortable coming back.

The pandemic certainly created a "year of weirdness" for so many of us, in so many different ways. Some of us have grown closer to our Lord and to the church through its online presence, yet others of us have disconnected, simply because we find what works in our daily routines has shifted. As the pandemic subsides here (and we pray for those places where it is still raging), we will discover wonderful opportunities to re-engage – re-engage with the Lord who loves us and re-engage with each other.

One of my favorite expressions is to "take the adventure the Lord has for you." We know some of those adventures are wonderful and uplifting and other adventures involve real challenge and even suffering. I'll be talking about this idea of taking the adventure God has for us over the coming weeks, both the adventures our Lord has for us personally and the coming wonderful adventure for VPC. Today I want to zero in on the basic question, "Who is the Lord of your adventure?"

I'd like to begin by thinking about boats! Boats and adventures of all kinds seem go together. Just two weeks ago Glenda preached a wonderful sermon on the idea of transition that began with the disciples fishing from a boat when Jesus called to them from the shore of the Sea of Galilee after the resurrection. So, how do you feel about boats? I enjoy boats although I'm certainly no expert. I have an old aluminum rowboat that my dad gave me, although I haven't been on the water in it in a very long time. I've ordered a paddleboard kayak which will get me back on the water. I'd call that a kind of a boat.

My mentor, Jim Tozer, was an avid fisherman and boater. He was always out on the water. He told me one day that he was thinking of naming his boat *Immediately* because the

Gospel of Mark says, “Jesus got into his boat immediately!” Later Jim told me he’d decided to name his boat *The Word* because he loved spending time “in the Word!” Interestingly, the word “boat” occurs in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John nearly 50 times. It’s remarkable how many of the teaching moments Jesus had with his Twelve disciple-followers took place on a boat or near a boat!

What got me thinking about this matter of the adventure our Lord has for us—and with it this whole matter of boats—was a Zoom conversation in which David Steiner said to me, “Stan, get out of the boat!” That’s an expression that many of us know comes from one of the great boat accounts in Scripture. Jesus had fed the 5000, actually probably more like 20,000 when you include women and children. He tells his disciples to get into their boat and set off on the Sea of Galilee and he goes up on a mountain to pray. When he is finished praying, late after midnight, he walks down the mountain and out over the lake to his rowing disciples, who were a long way from land. They freaked out, seeing Jesus walking to them on the water, “It’s a ghost!” “Don’t be afraid, it is I,” says Jesus. Or more colloquially, “It’s okay, guys. It’s me! Don’t worry.”

Impetuous Peter immediately says, “If it’s you, Lord, command me to come to you on the water” (which tells us Peter knew the power of Jesus). Jesus said, “Come,” and Peter gets out of the boat! That’s where our phrase, “Get out of the boat,” comes from. It means to trust Jesus when he calls you to leave a place of security and launch into a new endeavor. I was driving in New Orleans when I was visiting my parents and was scanning radio stations, just looking for something interesting to listen to. I came across a preacher talking about this very story of Jesus – and Peter walking on water. I wish I knew that preacher’s name because what he said was, “When Peter got out of the boat, he wasn’t just walking on water, he was walking on the Word!” Wow! Yes! Walking on the Word – that is trusting in the word of Jesus, the power of Jesus, that is trusting Jesus. Jesus is the Lord of the adventure!

Now, when David Steiner invited me to, “Get out of the boat,” I knew exactly what he meant, yet at the same time, it immediately reminded me of a podcast I’d posted with my friend, Lee Zehmer, a few weeks earlier. That podcast was titled, “Get *into* the boat!”<sup>1</sup> It’s from another Jesus boat story which leads us to our text for this morning. *One day Jesus got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side of the lake.” So they set out, and as they sailed he fell asleep* (Luke 8:22-23). Clearly, Jesus is exhausted. No calming music, no melatonin, no lights out, he’s just out cold, sound asleep.

*And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in danger. And they went and woke him, saying, “Master, Master, we are perishing!”* (Luke 8:23-24) That’s kind of old language, “We are perishing.” None of us talk that way today. Those disciples were yelling “WAKE UP JESUS, WE’RE GONNA DIE!” When I was in Israel some

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.buildingoneanother.com/episodes/get-in-the-boat>

years ago, I visited a museum where they displayed an ancient boat found in the Sea of Galilee.<sup>2</sup> It was discovered when the waters had receded away from the shoreline due to a drought. The boat they found is about 30 feet long, 8 feet wide and perhaps 4 feet deep. It wasn't a boat Jesus used but it gives an idea of the sort of long, narrow, shallow boat the disciples were in when the wind was howling and the giant waves were overwhelming them and filling the boat with water. "Wake up Jesus. We're gonna die!"

*And Jesus awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm. He said to them, "Where is your faith?" And they were afraid, and they marveled, saying to one another, "Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?"* (Luke 8:24-25) It was my mentor Jim Tozer, the one who thought about naming his boat "Immediately" or naming it "The Word," who pointed out something to me that is huge about this account of Jesus: "Why," Jim asked, "were the disciples afraid when Jesus calmed the storm?" You'd imagine they'd have been thrilled! Jim explained something to me that any real boater would know.

Jesus rebuked the wind and the raging waves. It's not unusual to experience a wind storm that violently blows around you and quickly dissipates as it moves along, but not the waves. Notice the words Luke used are "*raging waves.*" Raging waves are filled with kinetic energy and when the wind stops in a storm on a lake or at sea, the waves don't stop. They continue to rage and slosh back and forth until the energy dissipates. That process can take a while. Yet, in this moment the disciples in the boat see Jesus rebuke the wind and waves and there is immediate calm. That. Just. Doesn't. Happen. It was a supernatural God-moved miracle. They were terrified by the storm and now they are terrified by the calm because they knew this Jesus, this Jesus, has the actual power of God.

If "get out of the boat," means to walk on the Word, to trust Jesus on new adventure, why would this second story lead us to say, "Get into the boat?" We realize immediately when some kind of storm in life dominates our life, that is when we want to draw near to Jesus! He was in that boat and they called on him – and he's in your boat. Upon further reflection, we realize it's not about the boat! It is about Jesus! It's not about whether you are in the boat or out of the boat. It's about being near Jesus, trusting Jesus, the Lord of the adventure. Whatever your adventure is, however exciting, however terrifying, Jesus is the Lord of your adventure and fundamentally it's not about the boat. It's not even about the adventure, it's about trusting your Lord in the adventure!

Which brings us briefly to the story of Peter and some of the disciples that Glenda referred to a couple of weeks ago. Jesus has been raised from the dead and is appearing to various people. Peter and some of the disciples are up in Galilee, and Peter says, "I'm going fishing." A half-a-dozen guys go with him, including John, known as the "beloved disciple."

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<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sea\\_of\\_Galilee\\_Boat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sea_of_Galilee_Boat)

They are a hundred yards off shore and fish all night catching nothing. Jesus appears on the shore and calls out, “Cast your net on the right side of the boat” (John 21:6). They do it and catch a haul. John remembers the very same thing had happened before and cries out, “It is the Lord!” You can just hear impetuous Peter again, “The Lord!” And over the side he goes, swimming like crazy to the Lord who loves him.

Peter had denied Jesus three times and Jesus had looked him right in the eye when he did it the third time. It was a bitter, bitter moment for Peter. So why is he swimming like crazy? He knows it’s going to work out because he knows Jesus. He knows Jesus loves him and he loves Jesus! Whatever has gone down in your life so far, no matter how raw, how wrong, how uncertain, mismanaged, or sinful you may have been, you can know the very same thing. Peter jumps out of the boat and swims; he doesn’t just ride the boat into shore, because Peter got it. It’s not about the boat. It was never about the boat. It’s about Jesus!

About a year before her death, wonderful author Catherine Marshall wrote in her diary, “I slipped badly again yesterday and let my negative attitude about my health take over. This morning the Lord grabbed my attention with this message, ‘Be still and know that I am God.’” On February 24, 1983 she wrote, “I have hit a new low – gasping for breath. I am backed up against Jesus’ help. Suddenly I have a strange exhilaration. Jesus has His hand firmly on me. He is saying, ‘Love others, let them love you that you may be prepared for resurrection, life.’” Then Catherine Marshall wrote her final words: “March 12, 1983 – God says to me, ‘Keep your eyes off yourself, off symptoms, off negatives, and look steadily at me. I made you. I love you.’”<sup>3</sup> For Catherine Marshall it wasn’t about the boat of her life but about the Lord of her life.

One night some time ago, I awoke in the middle of the night and my mind was stewing over all sorts of work-related anxieties, issues surrounding new product development and the marketing and delivery of services to challenging clients. After a fitful time of tossing and turning, I fell asleep and woke again in the middle of a dream in which, out of the clear blue sky, words began to sing in my mind, “Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in you.” Over and over, affirming and comforting with a beautiful melody, “Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in you.” I woke up, got up, and sat on the sofa trying to remember where these words came from, and slowly, wonderfully, the words of the worship song, *You are My Hiding Place* by Michael Ledner came to mind. *You are my hiding place, You always fill my heart with songs of deliverance. Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. I will trust in You. Let the weak say I am strong in the strength of my Lord. I will trust in you.*

It’s not about the boat! It’s about Jesus. A huge sense of relief flooded my soul as I remembered the majesty of Jesus who loves me and loves you, in the boat, out of the boat, whatever your adventure may be, whatever the adventure of VPC may be, when you are afraid,

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<sup>3</sup> Leonard E. LeSourd *Guideposts*, July 1983, quoted in James R. Tozer, *Mighty in Spirit*, 1986.

you, too, may trust in Him! Whatever adventure is going on in your life right now—a storm in your boat or sunny skies—just remember it's about the Lord who loves you, it's about Jesus!