

Jesus' example. Slip away and find a quiet place "to pray." It's the best response when you're pushed beyond your limits.

Not long after the disciples started out, they ran into a mighty headwind. As the wind became more violent, the waves became more threatening. Even those who fished that sea all their lives must have started to be alarmed. They were "quite a distance from shore." (v.24) It was the middle of the night, and they were without their Leader who had once previously calmed a storm at sea when He was in their boat. (Matthew 8:23-27) But, where was He now? And why had He sent them out into this mess? Didn't Jesus care about them?

The disciples were to learn that even this crisis had its purpose. The winds were howling and the waves were threatening to capsize their little boat. But remember, it was Jesus' love for them that insisted they "immediately...get into (that) boat." (v.22) Otherwise, they might have died by becoming involved in a bloody insurrection.

2.) "Immediately" -- He Spoke. When their situation was desperate and seemingly hopeless, Jesus came to them, walking on the water. Nothing could keep Him away. The time was perhaps 4:00 a.m. The text says it was "the fourth watch of the night" and that was between 3:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m. -- the darkest hour of the night. (v.25) The place was the middle of the sea. But Jesus came. The initiative was all His. He knew that they needed Him. Their desperation bought Him. Love found a way. The waves of Jesus' love for them was stronger than the waves of the sea.

Of course, the disciples didn't recognize that it was Jesus coming "toward" them. They never expected to see Him "walking on the sea." Thinking that it was "a ghost...they...cried out in fear." (v.26) "But Jesus spoke to them (immediately), saying, 'Take heart! It is I! Do not be afraid.'" (v.27) He didn't keep them guessing who it was. "Immediately" He spoke to them. Just the sound of His familiar voice would have calmed them. The words He spoke were doubly reassuring.

Often we don't recognize Jesus when He comes to us in our time of desperation. A man was stuck on his rooftop in a flood. He was praying to God for help. Soon a neighbor in a rowboat came by and shouted to him, "Jump in, I can save you." The stranded man shouted back, "No, it's O.K. I'm praying to God and He is going to save me." So the rowboat went on. Then a motorboat came by. The

fellow in the motorboat shouted, "Jump in, I can save you." To this the stranded man said, "No thanks. I'm praying to God and He is going to save me. I have faith." So the motorboat went on. Then a helicopter came by and the pilot shouted down, "Grab this rope and I will lift you to safety." To this the stranded man replied, "No thanks. I'm praying to God and He is going to save me. I have faith." So the helicopter reluctantly flew away. Soon the water rose above the rooftop and the man drowned. He went to heaven.

Finally, he got his chance to discuss the whole situation with God, at which point he exclaimed, "I had faith in You, but You didn't save me. You let me down. I don't understand why!" To this God replied, "I sent you a rowboat and a motorboat and a helicopter, what more did you expect?" Perhaps you weren't expecting Jesus to come to you during your desperate need through a certain person. You may not have expected Him at the time He came. But He will come, "despite hell or high water" and you can count on it. He will never want you to face a terminal illness or the loss of a loved one or a crippling condition or financial problems or a family breakdown or a ruined relationship -- alone. "Take heart! It is I! Do not be afraid," He still says. (v.27) Jesus wants to be at your side.

Notice that the storm didn't immediately subside when Jesus came to His disciples. It was still going on as wildly as ever, but He was with them and that made all the difference. Better to have a violent storm with Jesus than to have calm seas but...be without Him.

3.) "Immediately" -- He Reached Out. Impetuous Peter couldn't wait for Jesus to come to their boat. He asked permission to come to Jesus "on the water." (v.28) Permission granted, "Peter stepped down from the boat, walked on the water...toward Jesus." (v.29) At first -- successful, he made one awful mistake. Peter took his eyes off Jesus and "saw" the wind's power. Fear gripped his heart and he "began...to sink." (v.30)

In this age of violence, we live in homes which use chains, bolts and extra locks for every door. We keep watch dogs, install window bars and purchase alarm systems. We are afraid that we might be robbed, raped or murdered. In the midst of such fear, it is easy to take our eyes off Jesus and begin sinking. We should be cautious, but "let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus." (Hebrews 12:2)

Before Peter sank in over his mouth, he had the faith to cry out, "Lord, save me!" (v.30) This is the basic prayer in our desperation,

reduced to three words. In panic there is no time to speak the equivalent of even a thirty second T.V. commercial. Peter got Jesus back in focus again in a hurry and it saved his life. Jesus "immediately" reached out "His hand and took hold of him." (v.31a) When Peter frantically needed Jesus. Jesus was there. So...don't go empty-handed through a crisis situation. While you are sinking, clutch the hand within your reach that wants to save you. The storm may still rage, but those locked hands -- yours and the Lord's -- will overcome its worst.

Peter was rebuked by the Lord because his faith -- wavered. "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" (v.31) But at least Peter had enough faith to get out of the boat and try -- to walk on water, try -- something new and challenging, try-- to reach Jesus. Sometimes our faith wavers. We don't want to get out of the boat. We don't want to get our feet wet. We don't want to respond to Jesus' call. Why? Because we're afraid of trying anything that we haven't done before.

Now, finally, "when (Jesus and Peter) got into the boat, the wind stopped." (v.32) Not until that time did the gale subside. When we let Jesus get into our boat, the storm will subside. Why do we keep Him waiting outside so long, while we battle the elements ourselves? No matter how small your boat, there is always room for Jesus -- in it.

The final act is the disciples in the boat worshipping Jesus, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God!" (v.33) The phrase "Son of God" was much more than their previous exclamation when Jesus calmed the storm. Then they asked, "What kind of a man is this?" (Matthew 8:27) How long does it take us to worship Jesus in a special way after He comes into our boat and saves us from some predicament?

So, during that "night to remember," the disciples came a long way toward seeing Jesus in a new light. When Louise Nevelson, the famous American sculptress was in her 80's, she was asked whether at her age her creativity was fading, Nevelson replied, "While in youth you can walk, at this stage you can dance." Friends, are you still dragging your feet when you should be gliding across the floor? At our stage of life, we too should be dancing -- dancing for joy that Jesus is "the Son of God" and...our Savior. (v.33) Amen.

Matthew 14:22-33,

"HOW QUICKLY CAN GOD ACT?" (Pentecost 12A) '20

Dear Friends of Christ,

Did you hear about the secretary who got her word processor confused with her food processor -- she ended up mincing her words.

All kidding aside. Words are important. What excitement when a baby speaks his/her first word. Because words are important, we spend much time choosing the right word, the best word, the most exact word to express our thoughts. St. Matthew was inspired to use a powerful word -- "immediately." He used it three times in just twelve verses in our text. (vs.22,27,31) Each use describes a time frame within which God acted through Jesus. Each time the word is used, the situation is more urgent. Super computers can do ninety-three quad-trillion computations per second. From ancient times God has known how to act "immediately" when His children are in desperate need.

1.) "Immediately" -- He Insisted. This Gospel passage begins with Jesus "immediately" insisting that His disciples get into a boat and cross the sea. (v.22). He, with their help, had just fed the five thousand and night was falling. Why would Jesus insist that the disciples quickly get into a boat and cross the Sea of Galilee at that hour?

John's Gospel (with its account of the feeding of the five thousand) explains the haste. Because of Jesus' wonder-working powers, a movement was gathering momentum to crown Him as "king" and to overthrow the existing ruler. (John 6:15) This would amount to insurrection. Jesus wanted none of it, nor did He want His disciples to get involved in it. With the enthusiasm of the moment they could easily be misled. To prevent any possibility of this, Jesus insisted that the Twelve "immediately" get into a boat and cross the water "to the other side," even though the darkness was setting in. (v.22) He would dismiss the crowd Himself. This He did and then "He went up onto the mountain by Himself" to spend most of the night in prayer. (v.23) Jesus desperately needed sleep, but He needed prayer -- more.

When the world closes in on you -- packed schedules, endless meetings, long hours, little time with the family, tedious chores, chauffeuring children, garden work, doctor's visits -- remember