

The things that we complain about reveal something about our character. And they reveal something about our fears. There is a whole category of complaining that we call *first world problems*. And this kind of complaining reveals a sense of entitlement and a selfish orientation.

We get frustrated when someone blocks the whole aisle with his shopping cart. We get upset when the trash truck takes out the cable line to the house. We say things like, “I hate when I tell them ‘no pickles,’ and they still give me pickles.”

You get the idea. First world problems really don’t fit into the category of *problems* at all—even though these things often cause us such consternation. As we address such issues, don’t forget Paul’s admonition in Philippians 2, “Do everything without complaining or grumbling.”

In our Gospel reading, however, the Disciples have some legitimate concerns. Jesus sent them out across the Sea of Galilee in a boat so that He could finally find some solitude for prayer. And before they knew it, the storm clouds began to gather.

Remember that Jesus had been looking to be alone since Herod executed John the Baptist. We talked about this last week. This was a great loss for Him. And John’s death revealed the moral and political opposition Jesus faced from those who should be His own people.

But Jesus could not get away from the crowds—not yet. They followed Him everywhere—although mostly out of curiosity and selfishness rather than faith. Jesus set aside His own personal needs to have compassion on the crowds. He fed them all miraculously. And He revealed Himself as the One who could supply spiritual nourishment that would satisfy them unto eternal life.

And after this, the Disciples set out to sea—as Jesus finally went away to pray. Now, remember that several of the Disciples are professional fishermen. They knew how to handle a boat. But a serious storm arose when they were out in the middle of the Sea of Galilee. And they fought with it throughout the night—for something like nine hours. That is a long time to be out there in the wind and rain and darkness.

By the time we get to the central event that makes up our story, it is sometime between three and six in the morning. It was a long night. I am sure there was plenty of legitimate complaining going on and maybe even a bit of fear.

Now the passage before us is one of the most beloved and one of the most widely abused passages in all the Gospels. Christians love the courage of Peter, asking to walk on water, and then getting out of the boat. And he is courageous—at least for a moment.

And all too often, this gets used as a morality tale about how to deal with the storms of life. “Before you can walk on water, you have to get out of the boat,” they say.

Peter exemplifies the man who steps out in faith and goes after his dreams against all adversity. He takes risks. He battles against self-doubt. And he gets things done. We want to be like Peter. And we only need Jesus to come to our rescue if we start to sink.

But this approach to our text makes the mistake of reading the storm at sea as a story about Peter—and thus about us. I do appreciate the Disciples’ excellent confession at the end

of our reading. “Truly you are the Son of God.” But generally, they are filled with fear and doubt—including Peter.

Like every other Gospel narrative, this is principally a story about Jesus. *Instead of reading the Bible as a manual for success in life, we need to read it as the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

And here we first find Jesus praying—and He prays for hours. He is praying in solitude as the darkness descended and the storm began. Now, of course, Jesus was aware of the storm. This was no crisis for Him.

And it really should not have been a crisis for the Disciples. They had been in situations like this before with Jesus—specifically in Matthew 8 when Jesus had first calmed the storm—after peacefully sleeping through much of the storm.

In our storm, the Disciples had gone just three miles, according to John’s Gospel. Mark suggests that the disciples were straining at the oars. They did not surrender to the wind and the waves, but neither did they defeat them.

And yet, with divine purpose, Jesus goes to them walking on the sea. The Bible says only God is the full master of creation. Job confesses that God “alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the sea.” No mere human has the power to walk on water.

Now it was a long night. The Disciples were tired. The labor made them weary. The elements made them uneasy. Life is just hard sometimes. So it is hardly a surprise that the dim sight of a figure walking to them on the water would be overwhelming. Jesus may have frightened them more than the storm.

The Bible never approves the belief in ghosts, or more literally, Matthew uses the word *phantom*. But the Disciples thought this was the only answer for what they saw. And perhaps they thought of this as some portent of their impending doom. Superstition comes so easily to us.

But no. It is Jesus. And He says at once, “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” The phrase “It is I” actually reads simply, “I am.” And it is no accident that He chooses these words.

In John there are seven such statements. We heard one last week as Jesus says, “I am the bread of life.” And so, Jesus communicates that He is God—and that He is there.

It is doubtful—at this moment—that the Disciples grasped what Jesus was saying. We dare not expect them to comprehend all of this at once—distracted by the storm and the sea and the darkness.

But *we* can recognize that here Jesus *shows us* that He is God. And then He *tells* us that He is God. He is the Master of the wind and the waves. He walks on the water—He rides on the storm. And He calls Himself the great *I Am*. That is the point of this passage. That’s why this account is in the New Testament.

And let’s not miss out on the historicity of this account. Jesus literally walked to the Twelve on the water during a storm. Water was everywhere—falling from the sky—blowing in their faces—churning beneath them.

This isn't Jesus knowing where the rocks were—as some have joked. And once we safeguard the authenticity and uniqueness of Jesus' miracle—once we understand what it is all about—we can affirm that we are like these Disciples in some important ways.

When Jesus comes, it spells the end of fear for those who believe. Jesus' command, "Do not be afraid" appears seven times in Matthew's Gospel—always to those with faith in Him. The story speaks. It comforts us. It calls us to know who Jesus is. It calls us to a stronger faith.

Peter's time on the water leads to more fear and doubt. It isn't always courageous to step out of the boat. Sometimes courage requires us to stay put.

In Mark 6, when Jesus comes to the frightened Disciples, He says the same words, "Take courage! It is I (I am). Don't be afraid." But in Mark we get a little more detail of what is going on in the fearful minds of the Disciples.

Mark records, "And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened."

And here, Mark scolds the Twelve. He says they had not understood the miracle of the loaves—the feeding of the 5000. This is, if they had sufficiently meditated on the feeding of the 5000, they would not have feared the storm.

Or more significantly, they would not have been surprised by Jesus walking on the water. They should have known that Jesus was coming for them. He would deliver them.

Perhaps it seems unfair to expect the Disciples to grasp all of this. But Jesus expects us to know Him and His ways. Doubt is not the answer at a time like this. Neither are demands or ultimatums. Jesus expects us to draw conclusions about the way things are—from His actions and character—and apply them to our own situations.

Not many of us get into storms at sea, but we do find ourselves in trouble from time to time. We do, on occasion, get into real situations that cause real anxiety. And trouble can make us panic.

Now I hope that we can get beyond complaining when trouble comes. I hope we can get beyond complaining in general. "Do everything without complaining or arguing."

But maybe the issues are about your relationships, work, bank account, health, or even happiness. Certainly, we should take steps to deal with our own situations—keep paddling the boat. But also understand those situations in your own life that you cannot solve.

Through it all, we have His promise. Jesus will deliver His people. But He does not do it at once. He waited as much as nine hours before He went out to the Twelve. He let them fight with the storm for a long time. And this was even for their good.

We cannot understand the full complexity of how God orders time—much less our own lives. And this is why we have a reading from Job tied with this passage. Job waited a long time for his deliverance. But we trust God anyway—all because of His Word. The Word of God makes all the difference in moments of trouble.

And I like the way Paul says it in Romans 8, "Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. "

So, this whole event reminds us that Jesus Christ is all-powerful. He has power over creation. He walks on the water. Even the wind and the waves obey Him. He could rescue His own just as soon as things start to go wrong. He could even prevent those things from happening.

But since we know Christ, and we know that He is good, we can also know that if He allows us to face adversity, He does so intentionally. It is part of His purpose for us. He uses trouble for our good. And He will save us firmly and finally in the end. That is enough.

I like the way St. Gregory the Great says it, “If God had not permitted suffering, man would not know his limits, nor his need for God. Suffering breaks pride and brings us to repentance.”

The soul does not awaken through comfort—but through the fire of affliction. Suffering is not a curse. It is the mercy of God drawing us back to Him. In suffering, something goes on which helps the heart to receive God’s revelation.

We may be much tossed, but we are quite safe, for we have an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast. Our hope has such a grip on us that we know it. In a boat you feel the pull of the anchor, and the more the wind rages the more you feel that the anchor holds you.

We need to trust Him in that. When Mark says, “for they had not understood about the loaves,” he teaches us to meditate upon the goodness and power and identity of our Lord Jesus Christ. And thus, we live in confidence rather than fear.

The feeding of the 5000 teaches us that Jesus is powerful, compassionate, and willing to act for the good of His people. Really, the cross shows us that even more clearly.

Jesus did not leave the Disciples alone in their anguish. He came to them. He spoke to them. He delivered them. He gave them peace.

Of course, it may take time. We may even have to wait until the Last Day. But that doesn’t mean that He doesn’t offer us hope right now. He even delivers us from living in fear.

If Jesus can walk on water, surely we have nothing to worry about. We cry out to Him in faith, “Lord, save us.” And Jesus tells us, “Do not fear.” And He says to us, “Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Jesus tells us that He is God and that He is there.

That is enough. Jesus is the Word of God. And the Word is true every day. And His Word ought to calm our fears—as surely as the voice of Jesus calmed the storm. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

*+Soli Deo Gloria+*