



**Saint John United Methodist Church**  
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**Message for May 17, 2020**  
**“Overcomers: Peace over Anxiety”**  
**Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb**  
**Scripture: Matthew 14:22-33**

## **Morbidly Afraid of Germs**

Louis Pasteur is recognized as the father of microbiology. He was the one who helped make milk safe to drink by introducing the process called pasteurization. It's the process where milk is heated to a certain degree to kill all the harmful bacteria.

Ironically, Pasteur was morbidly afraid of germs. We shouldn't be surprised. It was Pasteur who introduced us to the idea of germs in the first place. Pasteur discovered that germs pretty much existed anywhere.

Pasteur was pretty much obsessed with his personal cleanliness. He compulsively washed his hands. He even washed the bar of soap he used. Ahead of his time, he refused to shake hands. 😊

Pasteur's obsession with cleanliness affected his concern for his son, Jean-Baptiste. Jean-Baptiste served in the French army during the Franco-Prussian War. He was stationed in an army hospital far away from the front lines. You would think that Pasteur would have been relieved that his son wasn't involved in the fighting. He wasn't. Pasteur knew that hospitals were especially infested with germs.

Pasteur was so concerned that he wrote to his son's commanding officer requesting that he be sent to the front lines and away from the hospital. In Pasteur's mind, flying bullets on the frontline were safer than a germ-ridden hospital any day.

We too find ourselves preoccupied with germs, even to the point of obsession. The Covid-19 Pandemic has got us thinking about such things. You and I are washing our hands more than we ever have. Our fear of testing positive has, at times, won the day. Our anxieties have been heightened and worries have taken hold.

What are we to do as overcomers? Let's turn to the scripture to get a few answers.

*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. Later that night, he was there alone, <sup>24</sup> and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.*

*Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.*

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

*"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."*

*"Come," he said.*

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

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

*And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." (Matthew 14:22-33)*

### **The Storms along the Sea of Galilee**

We find ourselves again on the Sea of Galilee, just three weeks removed from our discussion of Jesus calming the wind and the waves. This week we consider the great story of Jesus walking on the water. The circumstance is much that same as we talked about three weeks ago, save for the fact that Jesus was not in the boat but was off praying as his disciples made their way across the sea.

Just like the earlier story, a storm blew up making their travel perilous. To make matters worse it was right before dawn and it was terribly dark. You know what they say, *"The night is always darkest right before the dawn."* We'd do well to remember that.

We didn't talk about the storms that blow up in and around the Sea of Galilee a couple of weeks ago, save for the fact that those storms can happen at a moment's notice. The cool air that lingers around the lake often mixes with the hot air that blows in from the land surrounding it, hence the wind and the waves.

We are sensitive to temperature variations in our own area. Earlier this week we had frost on the ground. This weekend the highs are in the 80's. We have also had a lot of wind and rain in between.

### **The Storms in Our Own Lives**

The present circumstance we find ourselves facing these days with Covid-19 has caused us to consider the reasons for the *"storms,"* that are in our own lives. We have had more than a little to be anxious about. It seems there's always something to worry about. What about you in that regard?

Just this past week, the National Hurricane Center projected that the upcoming hurricane season would be worse than average. We also learned that there is a tropical depression forming just off the coast of Florida and it's not even Hurricane Season.

There are storms always on the horizon it is how we deal with them that makes the difference.

- Fear and the anxiety that comes along with those fears can limit us, defeat us, and even cause us to fail.

- Fear and the anxiety that comes along with it have a way paralyzing our lives.
- Fear and the anxiety comes along with it can keep us unhappy, dissatisfied, and on edge.
- Fear and the anxiety that comes along with it has a way of producing sleepless nights as we needlessly worry about things over which we have very little control.

All of us are afraid and anxious in facing the Covid-19 Pandemic for a variety of reasons and are left to consider how we will overcome.

Franklin Roosevelt shared during his 1933 Presidential Inaugural Address at the height of the Great Depression that *“the only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”* That was true then and it is true today.

### **Our Circumstances Have a Way of Getting the Best of Us**

The pressures that have come to bear over the past few weeks are real. They have worked to form a new reality for us and we’re not sure where all this is taking us. Our circumstances have had a way of getting the best of us. For some that’s translated into a lot more anxiety and worry.

The poet, Eleanor Hammond describes this sort of thing in a wonderful bit of verse.

*“Like snails, I see the people go along the sidewalks row on row. And each one on his shoulders bears a coiling shell of heavy cares, the spiral of their own affairs. Some peer about, some creep on blind, but not one leaves his troubles behind.”*

Sound familiar?

Jesus says, *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”* Matthew 11:28-30

### **Internal Fears**

So there are all sorts of external circumstances that give us concern. There are also those things inwardly that weigh down. Sometimes those inward fears are the worst of all. They certainly take a lot more energy to deal with.

Victor Hugo, who is famous for his novel *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, also wrote a story call, *Ninety-Three*. It’s about a ship caught in a dangerous storm on the high seas.

At the height of the storm, the frightened sailors heard a terrible crashing noise below the deck. They knew at once that it was cannon that had come loose. It was moving back and forth with the waves, crashing into the sides of the ship from the inside.

Knowing that it could cause the ship to sink, two brave sailors volunteered to make the dangerous attempt to secure the loose cannon. They knew the danger of a shipwreck from the cannon was greater than the fury of the storm.

The same sort of thing was going on for those fateful disciples as they made their way across the Sea of Galilee that stormy night. They not only had to battle the wind and waves, but their own internal fears, those fears that screamed that their faith wouldn't be enough to see them through.

There in that boat they stood terrified holding on for dear life.

It was then that they saw what looked like a ghost approaching them on the water. It turned out to be Jesus walking on the water. He greeted them with words that have rung through the ages.

*"Take courage!" he said, "It is I. Don't be afraid."*

Jesus had come not only to quell the storm outwardly, but inwardly as well. But not before he demonstrated the great things that can take place when we keep our focus on him.

### **Peter Steps Up and Steps Out**

It was Peter who stepped up and stepped out. Peter was always the impulsive one. He called on Christ to bid him to come out onto the water. Jesus was quick to oblige. Peter got out of the boat and began to walk on the water as well.

It wasn't long before the wind and the waves started to get to him. Peter began to notice the storm more than the One who was the calm in the storm and because of that began to sink.

- Who of us hasn't had our attention more so on the storm that rages around us, instead upon our Savior who stands ready to sustain us through it?
- Who of us hasn't felt the waves of the Covid-19 Pandemic lapping up around us?

It's been hard to keep our heads above water emotionally, financially, and even spiritually. We have all felt as though we might even be sinking into the abyss. As we have said all along, *"Jesus is seeing us through this."*

For Peter, the second he began to sink Christ extended his hand and pulled him up. Christ's hand is extended to us as well. He comes to pull us from that sinking feeling that all might be lost and puts us at the very place we needed to have been all along—in his loving hand extended our way.

It very well might be that you are asking, *"Where is Jesus in all of this?"*

And just like he did with the disciples Jesus makes his way your way to give you courage in the midst of the storm and to raise you up when you feel as though you're sinking. Jesus always comes when you need him the most, and depending on where you are in our faith journey, when you least expect him.

### **How Have You Recognized Jesus?**

The disciples thought Jesus was a ghost as he approached them that late night on the Sea of Galilee. Their faith was such that they couldn't see him very clearly.

And the questions come to each of us.

- How have you recognized Jesus through all of this?
- Has he come to you in miraculous ways?
- Have you found him lifting you up and steadying you in the midst of the storm that rages around you?

It comes to us in the midst of all we face and all we will face to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. Just like Peter, we'd do well not to let the storm that rages around us to turn our attention otherwise.

*"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith."* Hebrews 12:2

And as we do so he will sustain us in every way. He will lift us when we are sinking and put us on safe ground.

*"Take courage! It is I. Do not be afraid."*

Let's take Jesus at his word, shall we? Let's give Jesus the chance to prove himself and as he does we will surely overcome to the place that our anxieties will give way to peace.

### **Safe in Our Father's Arms**

I love this story told by Jill Briscoe about a little girl on a train in England. The other passengers were entertained by the friendly youngster who seemed to be quite at home with everyone. In fact, people began to wonder just who her mother and father were since she seemed to be equally at home with everyone on the train.

Then the train gave a shrill whistle and entered a long, dark tunnel, and the little girl suddenly became anxious. She ran down the aisle and threw herself into the arms of a young man at the rear of the car and everyone smiled.

There was no doubt as to whom the child belonged. She was happy and safe in her father's arms. Her joy was evident. Still in the tunnel, still in the dark, nothing had changed save for the fact that she now rested in the arms of her father.