Grace and Peace from God Our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

We are all aware of the storms the last few years have brought us. Covid changed the way we lived our lives - not always for the better with the emotional and economic turmoil. We all remember the fear that this brought us. Traditional worship was upended, schools were closed and our daily routine changed and we were not able to do many of the things that make our life more enjoyable. We continued through the fear and we were able to make it through the storms. Now it is time to “take heart” as we take the hand of Jesus and move on past these storms and sail into the future as we turn our attention from ourselves to those who are in need.

When we discuss todays story we should compare to the Stilling of the Storm account in 8:23-27, since both are stories about the disciples being afraid while they are in the boat with winds and waves. In the first story, there is a great storm, waves swamp the boat, and the disciples are understandably afraid for their lives while Jesus is getting some well-deserved rest. The disciples awaken him imploring “Lord, save us!” While Jesus calls those who had rudely awakened him cowardly “ones of little faith,” Jesus also rebukes the winds and sea, and everything becomes calm. In amazement, the disciples contemplate what sort of person Jesus is since “even the winds and sea obey him.”

In contrast, in today’s story, even though there is wind and waves, there is no storm, but the disciples are also afraid but not fearful of losing their lives. Their fear is seeing someone walking on the water and thinking it’s a ghost as they cry out in fear. There was a wrist band going around that said “What would Jesus do?” Well, we know what Jesus did. Immediately he told them, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.” This time he reassures them without rebuking them. The expression “walks on water” indicates someone with extraordinary talents or abilities, but no other human has accomplished walking on water. (Story of 3 fishermen).

Peter told him if that is him command me to come to you on the water so Jesus told Peter to come to him. Then, when Peter left the boat we began walking on water going toward Jesus. Then Peter noticed the strong wind, became frightened, and began to sink, and he cried out, “Lord, save me!” Immediately Jesus reaches out and catches him. Jesus helps Peter in his fear to return to the boat’s safety and security in the same way Jesus gives us not only powerful reassurance but also the gift of presence. God is not distant from our fears, but close to keep us safe. Jesus rebukes Peter saying he is one of little faith and asked why he had doubt. Peter was okay until his attention shifted from Jesus to the wind. In turbulent times it is important to keep our eye on Jesus. As soon as they got in the boat the wind stopped and all was calm. Jesus helped Peter in his fear to return to the boat’s safety and security. Jesus gives us not only powerful reassurance but also the gift of presence. God is not distant from our fears, but close to keep us safe. So, the song reminds us:

It was all about Jesus so then those in the boat worshiped Jesus, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

In both stories, Jesus ends up in the boat with the disciples. A ship was one of the earliest symbols for Christianity, since the original disciples were fishermen, and many churches, if you look up, are designed to be an upside-down hull of a boat. This symbolism is done on purpose to make a statement. When in the midst of adversity, both safety and salvation are experienced in the church with Jesus in its midst. Just as Noah and his family entered the ark and were saved from the turbulent waters, so we enter our churches to find the saving peace of Christ there. Both “Noah’s Ark” and Peter’s boat have been used as images to refer to the church Christ founded. We can now return to this safe harbor after a turbulent time. We can take the hand of Jesus. Remember the words of the song:

“Put your hand in the hand of the man who stills the water. Take a look at yourself and you can look at others differently

Put your hand in the hand of the man From Galilee.”

But the ship is not made to stay in a harbor. Like the old chicken joke, why did the chicken cross the road we ask “Why did the boat cross the sea?” To get to the other side! It doesn’t end there, however. Jesus and the disciples cross the sea to get to the other side to minister to the people there.

In each story Jesus clearly demonstrates that he is Lord of the wind, waves, water, and sea, those chaotic elements in nature. Elements that we have difficulty controlling - think flooding, Tsunami, tornados, hurricanes, etc. So, we grab the hand of Jesus as we move forward and confront those things we have no control over as we serve others. Thanks be to God and the Son of God. Amen.