[Mis]placing Faith: I Cant Remember Where I Put It

Luke 8:19-25

Key Verse: Luke 8:25

"'Where is your faith?' he asked his disciples."

Let me tell you a story. It's one you might know pretty well. We got Jesus and his disciples going about their regular business. Jesus has been teaching and preaching all over the place. People have been coming far and wide to hear him, and, yeah, some criticized him. Well, one day, while all this was going on, Jesus suggested to his disciples, "Let's go over to the other side of the lake." They started looking at each other and began to agree, "Why not?" Then they all got into a boat and set out across the Sea of Galilee. Now, the waters were nice and calm and maybe there was a gentle rocking to the boat. It was peaceful and serene, and in this setting, Jesus closed his eyes and drifted off into a sweet sleep.

While Jesus was taking his siesta, things started to change. The still air started to stir and before they knew it, a squall came upon them and the once calm sea turned violent. Now, these guys were seasoned fishermen…men who spent more than half their lives on the water, but the waves were getting so bad that they were getting swamped and were almost at death's door. These guys sensed the severity of their situation, and they started freaking out because they were so afraid. The end was near in their eyes and they turned to God for help, but he was still sound asleep through the whole ordeal. They rushed over to him and woke him up. "Master, Master, we're going to drown!" they said to him. Then, he told the storm to be quiet and, instantaneously, everything turned calm. It's so surreal. It had to have been like in the Matrix when Neo is first put into the construct and told about the matrix. As Morpheus is talking about the matrix, the surroundings change in a snap and Neo is caught off guard and looks around in disbelief. Anyway, after that, Jesus commented on their lack of faith and the disciples were just dumbstruck by what just happened.

It's a good story and pretty familiar, right? It's got action; it's got drama; and it's even got a twist in it. There's something for everyone. The best part about it is that I think we all can identify with what is going on. Now, I don't mean the whole boat thing, but metaphorically, doesn't it sound familiar to you? Think about it like this; things are going pretty well in your life. Everything seems to be coming together. There is purpose and a lot of good things are happening for you, and then, in a flash everything is just turned on its head and your world is shattered. You turn to God and you think he might be sleeping. Then you despair.

Here's another story. There was a man, some call him handsome, but I think he is a bit geeky and a lot weird. Anyway, this guy struggled with lots of stuff and he finally started to come to God. Slowly but surely, things in his life started to change and he now had hope in a living God. Eventually, some of those hardships started to subside and things started to smooth out. God provided for him in the form of a good job, and after working for about a year, he became engaged

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to the most beautiful and joyful woman in the world. Everything was going great. There were plans being made. Then, just a few weeks after being engaged, his father went into the hospital and he could have died. A few months later, his father's mother passed away and sent shockwaves through the family. Lastly, just three months before the wedding, he loses his job and he is stuck wondering how he will support his new family. There seems to be no light at the end of this tunnel.

That's just one story. We each have one of our own. Think about your lives; even right now there is probably someone more focused on their problems than anything else. The waves are high in a lot of lives. We have family members that are sick, maybe close to death, or your relationship with a certain family member is strained and it grieves you dearly. For someone else, you may not have had a good year in school. All your hard work has led to dismal grades. Maybe work sucks. It's a dead end, unfulfilling job with people who irritate you to no end. Still more are affected by this economy and are slowly dipping further into debt. The job hunt has been going on for months with few prospects. Feeding yourself and your family becomes harder with each passing day. For each of these stories, you might look into the future and it all seems so bleak and feels life threatening.

When the world grows dark like this, what's your response? When the storm came upon the disciples, Jesus was asleep, and they were freaking out. They screamed, "We're going to drown!" To them, it looked like Jesus didn't even care. Here was this guy that supposedly was God in the flesh and he is sleeping in the midst of the most terrible plight any of them had ever experienced. If he was God why doesn't he do something besides sleep? If he was God why is he letting them die? What's wrong with this guy? Doesn't he care?

Are we any different? When the waters rise and threaten our safety, it feels like the whole world is caving in and we can't stop the fear that rises up in our hearts. It becomes so hard to do anything: to focus or to pray. We wonder, "Why is this happening? I've been trying to follow Jesus. Why did he let this happen?" Then we look for Jesus, but he doesn't seem to be around. We might blame God, accuse him of being faithless or we might blame ourselves, "What did I do wrong? Why am I being punished?" Thoughts may arise and we question God's plan and consign ourselves to death: "Just take me, Lord. I am done." Like the disciples, we show that we do not have faith in him. We've placed our faith in ourselves or others or the situation.

The reality of the storm is different than how it feels. In this passage's case, the disciples did not do anything wrong or stupid that put them into the situation. They didn't wander away from Jesus and do something foolish. Jesus was the one who initiated crossing the lake. "One day Jesus said to his disciples, 'Let's go over to the other side of the lake.' So they got into a boat and set out." (22) All they did was follow Jesus. Since Jesus started the whole thing, it was his plan. But it wasn't his plan to raise twelve disciples and kill them in the middle of the Sea of Galilee before they could do anything. That's just silly. Also, Jesus isn't the sort to put them through hard times, just so that he can be entertained. In this same passage, Jesus calls those who hear God's word and put it into practice his family. (21) Jesus loved the disciples; he wouldn't subject them to torture for the sake of his pleasure.

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Instead, “we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28) There are good reasons why Jesus brought his disciples onto the lake. They had seen Jesus do many things. He has driven out demons, healed the sick and raised the dead in front of their eyes. Jesus revealed to them, his almighty power over the living and the dead, but they needed to see more. What they saw did not have a personal connection to them. It was just head knowledge. Jesus had to personally show them his power. They had to experience it for themselves. When his disciples woke him saying, “‘Master, Master, we’re going to drown!’ He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm.” (24) All Jesus did was tell the wind and the waves to stop it and they stopped immediately. That’s really amazing. If you are making waves in a pool and you stop all of a sudden, the waves keep going until they eventually disappear. They don’t stop when the disturbance stops, but here both the disturbance and the waves cease at the same time. It is by the power of God that Jesus calmed the sea. The Bible says of God, “You answer us with awesome deeds of righteousness, O God our Savior, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas, who formed the mountains by your power, having armed yourself with strength, who stilled the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, and the turmoil of the nations.” (Psalm 65:5-7) Jesus was helping his disciples see that he is the Almighty God who created the wind and the waves and could easily tell them to stop. And because it is the power of the Lord, it doesn’t stop just because we can’t see him awake and attentive.

This event also showed Jesus’ faithfulness. The fact of the matter is that Jesus did not let them die. They were rightfully terrified and I am not sure how long the storm was going on, but we might ask why Jesus didn’t stop it sooner. Why did Jesus expose them to abject terror before calming the storm? The better thing to notice is that Jesus did not abandon his spiritual family. He was not distracted by something else and negligent to those God had given him. When they needed him, he was there. And need is the operative word. Jesus acted on his time, when he was needed not when he was wanted. It is impossible for Jesus to be faithless. In fact, when we are completely faithless, Jesus doesn’t turn his back on us, but makes the extra effort to reach out to us. Paul wrote, “if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.” (2 Timothy 2:13) Jesus is faithful to us because he is faithful to God. The greatest example of this is what Jesus did for us on the cross. The whole world turned their backs on Jesus and had him crucified for no real reason. He bore our sins and asked for God’s forgiveness on us. Jesus is faithful to us, even when we do not deserve it.

Along the same lines, the storm was to test the faith of Jesus’ disciples. They needed to see how much they actually trusted Jesus’ power and faithfulness. He didn’t need to see it for himself, he already knew, but the disciples needed to see the reality of their faith. The goal of our faith is to grow to have the same type of faith Jesus has in God and quite often we have to see where we are still lacking. In good times, it is easy to think that we have faith. “Oh, yeah, I trust completely in God.” I don’t know how many times that I thought that. But that is not faith; that is being relaxed, comfortable and overconfident. Here, Jesus was shaking the disciples’ false sense of security and revealed the truth to them. Their lack of trust meant that they needed to come closer to God, so

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that fear could be removed and their faith purified.

When the Israelites were coming out of Egypt, God had Moses lead them through the desert for forty years to prepare their hearts to take possession of the Promised Land. They were a whining, complaining bunch in no way ready to fight for the land God had promised them. The Lord changed them in the desert so that they would be ready to take the promise. The same thing was happening here. Jesus was getting the disciples to see that they needed to be changed and have more faith. One of those guys, Peter, eventually understood that and wrote, "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed." (1 Peter 1:6-7)

So, when the world feels like it is falling apart, what do you do? It is our human nature to despair and fear the unknown. Our thoughts become very inward, like the disciples'. When Jesus asked them, "Where is your faith?" (25), he knew that their faith was not in him, but in something else. They were hysterical, and rightfully so. They could have died that day, but they lost all hope in their own sailing ability to see the storm through. They lost faith in the boat being able to weather the storm. All the while, their hope – their faith – should have been in Jesus. When they misplaced their faith, they realized that it wasn't really faith at all.

In our predicaments, Jesus asks us the same thing as the disciples, "Where is your faith?" Where have you put your faith? Look at the questions that come across your minds when trouble comes. Are the questions pretty much centered on you? Are you wondering what you did wrong to incur the wrath of God? The Lord loves you; in the worst of your sins, he sent his Son so that you could have salvation. Why would he pour out his wrath on you for some tiny little thing, when he sent his Son for the accumulation of your sins? Maybe it is not about what you did and did not do. Maybe it is about God loving you so much that he wants for you to be like Jesus. He is purifying you of all the false ideas, false hopes, and false security that we accumulate in our lives, so that we can be useful to him.

How about another story? Martin Luther was a monk in Germany in the 1500's, but his spirit was never quite settled. He was terrified at the thought of God because he understood the just God as one who would punish someone for even the smallest sin. In his words, "My situation was that, although and impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I have no confidence that my merit would soften him. Therefore, I did not love a just and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against him." Luther's focus was on his sins and his condition, but one day, while wrestling with the word of God in Romans, the false ideas were broken and the fullness of God was revealed to him. "The righteous will live by faith" became his center point. Instead of looking at himself, Luther finally saw the grace and love in God's heart, and he was a changed man. He was no longer held captive by his condition, but became an instrument of God and a great man of God.

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So then, take a look at your situation one more time. Take a good hard look. Where do you thoughts dwell? In my case, I notice that my thoughts, when I get burdened, revolve around me second-guessing my decisions. I've got to look for a job and I am getting married in less than two weeks. Those two things keep my life pretty busy, right now, but there has been a lot more this week. I started a temporary job to keep myself sane and I had this message to write. But while working and message writing, I couldn't stop thinking that I was neglecting my original duties. When I was writing this message, I kept thinking about wedding prep and finding a job. I questioned why I even agreed to prepare this message. Even two weeks was far too close to the wedding. It was all about my decisions. I never really focused on God's will to refine my faith in him. I saw the burden and not the love. My faith was not placed in my heavenly Father. He has put me in this situation because he loves me and wants for me to really be useful to him.

Now it really is your turn to ask yourself, "Where is my faith?" Jesus has asked you and you really should know. If you are going through hardship and you feel like your head is going to explode, remember Jesus. Remember his power and his faithfulness. Know that he, quite literally, loves you to death and has nothing but the best in store for you. You are being purified so that you can better take hold of his great promise of eternal life. "Have faith in God." (Mark 11:22)

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