

IT IS I; DON'T BE AFRAID

John 6:16-21
Keyverse 6:20

„But he said to them, „It is I; don't be afraid.“

Thank God for granting us to learn the 5 loaves and 2 fish seeking faith, last week. We learned, that God is going to bless us, when we give the Daily Bread and 1:1 Bible study teams as our 5 loaves and 2 fish, so that the young people on the 1700 universities and colleges in Europe and even in the Muslim world will be spiritually fed by God's word, resurrected and raised up to God's exceedingly great army.

Today we want to think about Jesus' faith training for his disciples through the storm on the lake. Let's learn who Jesus really is. We learn through Jesus' discipleship training to grow as Jesus disciples and spiritual leaders through storm training. God may help us to listen to Jesus voice: "It is I; don't be afraid." and to invite Jesus into our lifeboat.

1. The disciples on the lake (16-18)

Only a few hours had passed since Jesus had tested the faith of his disciples through the feeding of the 5000 people. Philip had not passed, because he only thought about the money, but he could not bring anything to Jesus. But Andreas searched and brought 5 loaves and 2 fish to Jesus. Maybe the other disciples laughed at him, because he only brought the lunch box of a little kid. But Jesus saw his faith and was very happy about that. Jesus blessed these 5 loaves and 2 fish overflowing and fed the people. The disciples learned through that, that Jesus is God, while the people wanted to make him their "bread-king".

Let's look at Verse 16 and 17: "When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake,

where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them." When we read about this in Matthew (6,45.46), we learn that Jesus immediately had his disciples get into the boat to cross over before him. Jesus himself, after sending the people away, went up a mountain to pray. He may have prayed for the people, that they would come to understand that he had not come to solve their bread problem, but to become their true food, which remains for eternal life (6:27). Above all, Jesus prayed for the Twelve that through further training they would grow spiritually, be cleansed of false ideas and false goals in life, and grow as future spiritual leaders.

Many Christians think that in a life of faith everything should always go smoothly. Some think that they do not need spiritual training and that they would feel good with Jesus and in his love. Such people are like the crowd who, without insight, only abuse Jesus to improve their conditions instead of participating in the spiritual battle of Jesus or the spiritual battle of the servants of God. Jesus wanted to protect his disciples spiritually. Therefore he separated them from the crowd and sent them by boat across the lake.

Let us consider verse 18: "A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough." The Sea of Galilee is the deepest freshwater lake on Earth, over 200 meters below sea level. When hot winds from the desert meet the surrounding mountains, down winds develop, which hit the surface of the lake and cause the water to be violently whipped up. When a

strong wind arose, the disciples had to use all their strength to somehow hold the direction with their boat. Perhaps at the beginning the experienced fishermen among them said: "We can do it!" But their strength dwindled more and more and their situation in the middle of the night on the troubled lake was more than hopeless.

Why had Jesus sent the twelve by boat across the lake? Why did Jesus not say, "Enjoy a little of the euphoria and the beautiful feeling of this multitude?" Jesus wished with all his heart that the disciples would learn who Jesus really is. Jesus already knew that very soon the crowd, and even many of his disciples, would turn away from him disappointed and would no longer go with him (6:66). With this in mind, Jesus separated the twelve from the crowd and decided to prepare them for the coming events through storm training. Here we learn about Jesus' spiritual struggle. His focus was to raise up the Twelve through training as spiritual leaders and as determined disciples of Jesus. This is also very important for our life of faith. Jesus does not want "followers". He wants determined disciples who are constantly learning from him, who grow, who obey, and who can be used as key figures in his salvation story. Jesus did not train the great multitude, but His twelve. He was also not interested in those who would only enjoy a good feeling with Jesus, improve their conditions, and in the end would turn away from him disappointed and haughty. Jesus sees the hearts of the people. He sees those who come to him with humble and broken hearts, accept him as the true king of their lives and want to learn from him and grow spiritually. Let us give thanks to Jesus who separated his disciples from the crowd, protected and trained them with the hope of educating them to become spiritual leaders and raise them as shepherds for the shepherdless crowd, who would in the future even continue the work of God victoriously, despite resistance, persecution and suffering.

I used to think that I could lead a "storm-free" life of faith and survive with my own strength and enjoy my life with Jesus. But because

Jesus loves me and didn't want to leave me the way I was, he gave me the privilege to participate in the work of discipleship training, to learn faith and even to work together for the work of God, even though I left school after 10th grade and could never study at a university. It is Jesus' grace that he invited me to live in community and gave me an excellent spiritual education at the UBF university through the servant of God. Now I may even serve intellectual students with the Word of God and serve the pioneering work at the Bonn-Rhein-Sieg University of Applied Sciences with my house church. Through serving the sheep and children I may learn to pray like Jesus for their spiritual growth and to serve them spiritually, so that they may grow as disciples of Jesus and be used by God as spiritual leaders and main persons of his salvation history.

In this part we were allowed to reflect on Jesus' work of raising up disciples. Jesus trained the twelve with the hope of God. He separated the Twelve from the crowd to train them as spiritual leaders and to prepare them for the coming events through storm training.

2. Jesus walks on the lake (19-21)

Let's look at verse 19: "When they had rowed about three or three and a half miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were terrified." According to the Gospel of Matthew (14:26), the disciples were even frightened, screaming in fear and shouting "It is a ghost!" Why did the disciples react so violently? It was because they were full of fear and unbelief. They looked at themselves, at their hopeless situation in the middle of the stormy lake. Although they had already experienced the four miraculous signs of Jesus, they were still spiritually ignorant and had no faith. While Jesus had prayed on the mountain, they themselves had remained without prayer. As a result, they had no understanding that they could not recognize Jesus who came to them on the lake, but only saw a ghost and cried out and were afraid.

We can understand very well how the disciples were afraid, can't we? No one can claim to have never experienced a situation in which one gets into great fear of death. Just in this year 2020 we have witnessed how suddenly and unexpectedly a worldwide pandemic has spread over mankind. No place in the world was and is exempt from this. All public life and the economy were suddenly largely shut down. Suddenly we had to comply with numerous hygiene and distance rules. Never before had we been forced to wear mouth-nose masks. Never before have such huge sums of money been made available by governments to mitigate the serious economic and social consequences. Some experts gave important advice. But many people still live in fear, anxiety and uncertainty. Some also warned that the fear of the virus could be more dangerous than the virus itself. Fear comes to unbelievers and believers alike. But the decisive factor is how we deal with it: do we fight with our own strength or do we come to Jesus?

Why did Jesus lead the twelve into such an unexpected, frightening, and almost hopeless situation? He gave them this storm training so that they might not remain in fear but might be spiritually strengthened by the crisis and grow into courageous and determined spiritual leaders. Jesus led them into this storm so that they would learn to believe in Jesus instead of fighting and going down by their own strength. We are currently experiencing that many spiritual leaders have become too fearful and are even afraid to preach the truth of the Word of God clearly. Some are afraid of losing the recognition of other people; they are afraid of not conforming to the mainstream. Where they would have to speak clear words against, for example, the various ideologies such as genderism and humanism, they retreat out of fear, remain silent or compromise. And where they would have to encourage and edify, they have nothing to say either. They are afraid to serve their generation with the Word of God and to give clear guidance based on the Word of God. But thanks be to

the Lord, who in the midst of godless humanism, liberalism, genderism and relativism does not stand idly by, but has long since begun to raise up an exceedingly large army of disciples of Jesus.

This week our Next Generation co-workers undertook a blessed missionary journey to East Germany and got to know the life and discipleship work of Martin Luther. They learned how Luther was committed to the work of raising up disciples on a daily basis. His disciples printed, disseminated and affirmed Luther's writings, which clearly identified the false teachings of the official church of that time. Luther was not afraid of the powerful authorities. Rather, he risked everything to obey the Word of God, the Word of Truth, even though he was declared "outlawed." Are you familiar with this term "outlawed"? It means the opposite of what you mean by "to be free as a bird." In the Middle Ages, anyone who was considered outlaw could be hunted, captured or even killed by anyone. No one was allowed to give food or shelter to the outlaw, otherwise he made himself punishable. Everything could be taken away from the outlaw and even his wife was officially declared a widow. If Luther had thought of himself in his storm of life or had made compromises, there would have been no spiritual renewal and no revival in Europe.

Today, more than 500 years later, a spiritual renewal is more than necessary. Jesus is preparing us for this as well. For this he even trains our young generation to equip and strengthen them to challenge the spirit of the times with clear insight, clear identity and above all with the living Word of God, and to lead this continent back to the Bible. One young person asked: "Why am I alone in God's work? Where are all my friends? And don't they all believe in God?" We may encourage him. "You are not alone. Many friends are around you. You are a leading figure in God's work. Accept the spiritual storm training with gratitude, then God will use you as an influential spiritual leader and lead many to repentance through you." Our next generation is God's hope for Germany

and Europe, even for the world. Satan works very cunningly to tempt and seduce them with false teachings. That is why we must remain spiritually alert, pray for them, fight for them and also train them so that they live with spiritual identity and, like Martin Luther, grow as spiritual leaders for this generation and are used preciously in the history of God. Let us work together with the servant of God in this time of spiritual storm in one spirit. Let us prepare the best environment in which God will work mightily through the coming GLEF 2020 and through the 40th anniversary service.

What did Jesus do when he saw the fearful disciples? Let us look at verse 20: "And he said unto them: It is I; don't be afraid." In the midst of the roaring storm and the lashing waves, the wonderful words of Jesus resounded. Jesus must have cried out loud so that the disciples could even understand his words: "It is I; don't be afraid. Here Jesus says 1) who he is: "It is I", that is, I am Christ the Lord. Believe in God and believe in me, for he who sees me sees the Father. And 2.) Jesus says "don't be afraid", i.e. that wherever Jesus is, we need not be afraid. Fear is the consequence of sin and comes from a broken relationship with God. Already after the fall in paradise, people were afraid and hid from God. Fear can make a person completely useless and miserable. Fear paralyzes. Fear makes a person sink. Fear destroys. Fear is the opposite of faith! Therefore: like the disciples, we too may hear Jesus' call personally: "It is I; don't be afraid." If a politician, sportsman or writer said this to us, it would have little meaning. We would probably have to continue to fear. But who is it that says this to us, to me and to you? It is Jesus! The almighty and living God. The creator of heaven and earth. He is the God who says in Mt 28,18, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." He is the God who says in John 16:33, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." The Psalmist writes in Psalm 46: "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the

heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. Selah". And at the end of the psalm God says: "Be still and know that I am God! I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth. The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah."

Even believers can be frightened. But for us, fear must never become a normal state. As spiritual leaders, we must overcome our inner fear by looking at Jesus and hearing his voice in every situation: "It's me; don't be afraid." John Wesley (1703 - 1791) experienced the following before his conversion. When he traveled to Georgia in 1735 on a ship, it was caught in a violent storm and he was faced with fear. On the ship there were some missionaries of the Herrnhut Brethren church who, to everyone's surprise, were fearless. In the middle of the service the high waves broke over the ship, but they continued to sing their chorales. After the storm Wesley asked if they were not afraid: "Thank God, no" was his answer. "And your wives and children?" "No, they are not afraid to die." That experience gave Wesley a lot to think about. He learned that these Christians had a deep peace with God that he himself had not yet experienced.

We are greatly encouraged by the faith struggle of Shepherdess Joyce in the midst of her current life-storm. Humanly speaking, she could be full of fear. But S. Joyce has Jesus in her life boat. Instead of looking at her health situation or the situation of her family, she looks at Jesus and hears his word: "It is I; don't be afraid." Let us continue to pray for her, that she will overcome all storms in looking at Jesus and in listening to his word, and that she will be spiritually strengthened through the crisis and will be used by God as a courageous woman of faith and defender of the Gospel all the way to India.

How did the disciples react when they heard Jesus' voice? Let us look at verse 21: "Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore

where they were heading." When the disciples heard Jesus' voice, Jesus' word, peace came into their hearts. They immediately came with their boat to the port of salvation. The various storms of the spirit of the times and of false teachings that constantly affect our own lives, including our children, sheep and house churches, quickly make us fearful. But every storm of life is ultimately a test and also a chastisement, so that we learn to trust Jesus absolutely, to believe in His help and to experience His help. Hebrews 12:11 says: "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." With Jesus, no storm, no punishment, no trial is in vain. It is for our good. In the midst of the spiritual storm, we have the privilege of looking at Jesus, of hearing his voice and of inviting Jesus as a helmsman in our boat of life. Therefore, let us hear Jesus' voice in person: "It is I; don't be afraid."

Have you heard of the Spaffords' family? They were from Chicago and wanted to support D. L. Moody during his missionary campaign in Great Britain. Horatio Spafford sent his wife and their four daughters (between 3 - 13 years old) by ship ahead of him while he was on his way to follow up on business. Then a ship accident occurred on the Atlantic Ocean during the crossing, in which more than 220 people died - all four daughters of Horatio and Anna Spafford were also killed. When Spafford later travelled to England, the ship's captain showed him the spot where the accident had occurred shortly before. And there was born the song we all know, "I am well in the Lord." In the midst of the greatest storm of life, Horatio Spafford could look up at Jesus, take Jesus into his life boat, and have peace with God.

We remember Joseph in the Old Testament. Because of the envy of his brothers, who even wanted to kill him, he was sold to a caravan of merchants who went to Egypt. There Joseph became a slave in the house of Potiphar. Joseph always did his best. But

one storm after another came upon his life. His master's wife slandered him and he was put in prison. In prison he lived as a shepherd for his fellow prisoners. But even they forgot him. Finally, with God's help, he could interpret Pharaoh's dreams. So God lifted him up and made him the second most powerful man in Egypt. We can learn from Joseph that in the midst of all the storms of life he believed in the sovereignty of God. Then he was always able to overcome his fateful situation and in the end testified (Gen 50:20): "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."

Sometimes we think that a storm of life is too strong and that we will perish. But like the disciples, God wants to train us through the storm and teach us to believe absolutely in His help and care and to hear the voice of Jesus: "It is I; don't be afraid." Jesus is God. He is the Almighty. He is the Creator. The wind and the sea obey him. With Jesus in the boat of life, we may stand firm in the midst of the heaviest storm and go forth without fear. With Jesus we will reach the safe shore.

Today we have learned that Jesus separated His twelve disciples from the crowd to train them as spiritual leaders through storm training. We also learn that we can listen to Jesus' word in the storm and invite Him into our boat of life. Many young people are driven and seduced by the various false teachings of the spirit of the times as if in a storm. We are allowed to serve them with the Word of God and form 10,000 1:1 Bible study teams. Let us pray that through Bible study, many students in their storm of life will recognize who Jesus is, so that they will not fight with their own strength and remain in fear and helplessness, but will meet Jesus who calms their storm of life and says, "It is I; don't be afraid. Let us pray that our sheep will accept Jesus as their helmsman in their boat of life and grow to be disciples of Jesus through the storm training. Let us experience with Ezekiel 37:10 that spiritually dead bones come to life and that through spiritual training strengthened leaders and shepherds are

needed as God's exceedingly great army for world mission.