



# Central Peninsula Church

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Luke 8:22-25  
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## When Faith Collapses

SERIES: *A Savior for All People*

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Let me start this morning by asking a very simple and pointed question: What could cause your faith to collapse? If something could happen that would cause you to stop believing in and trusting in God and his promises, what would it be? Would it be some individual catastrophe, such as losing a job, or having a loved one succumb to an illness, or a son or daughter go astray after a lifetime of praying for them? Or would it be some kind of national catastrophe? Maybe a political candidate that you feel is the next thing to the antichrist gets elected; would that cause your faith to collapse? Or maybe another Sept. 11 kind of attack, only worse? Or would it be something to do with the church? What if the church just totally caved into the culture? Or what if it didn't cave in but had to endure an onslaught of persecution?

It's a hard question to answer because no one really plans to have their faith collapse. We think we have faith but when a crisis hits our faith is tested. And none of us really knows how we'll respond. In Luke 8 the disciples of Jesus experience such a test.

### I. The disciples faith collapses in the storm (Luke 8:22-25).

Verse 22 begins, **"Now it came about on one of those days, Jesus and his disciples got into a boat and he said to them, 'Let us go over to the other side of the lake.' So they launched out."** The lake Luke refers to here is commonly called the Sea of Galilee, but it IS a lake. It was about 13 miles long and 5 miles wide. Jesus says he wants to sail to the other side, which would have been the eastern shore. Now remember that several of the disciples are commercial fishermen by trade. It very well might have been Peter's boat that they launched out on. So these guys know what they're doing. This is familiar territory for them. When it came to preaching, Jesus was "the man," but when it came to sailing a boat, they took control.

That becomes abundantly clear in the next line. Luke says, **"But as they were sailing along, he fell asleep."** It's likely that Jesus was exhausted. He had been "pounding the pavement," as we say, preaching about the kingdom and healing the sick, and he was bone tired. His head would have rested not on a soft pillow, but on the elevated, hard, wooden or leather seat normally used for the helmsmen at the stern of the boat. I can imagine that

it started out as a very peaceful evening on the lake. There is nothing like being out on smooth waters, with a slight breeze against your face, and the sun beginning to disappear behind the hills. It might have been one of those moments when the disciples were feeling pretty good about what they had gotten themselves into when they decided to follow Jesus and invest their lives in the kingdom he had come to establish.

But then, suddenly, as if out of nowhere, **"a fierce gale of wind descended on the lake, and they began to be swamped and to be in danger."** The Sea of Galilee is 690 feet below sea level. It is surrounded by hills with narrow, gorged valleys that act like wind tunnels. The wind comes off the Mediterranean Sea from the west, it hits those tunnels, and there is a powerful downdraft into the lake. This can cause an incredible, life-threatening storm to rise in just a matter of minutes.

These men know all about these kinds of storms. The fishermen, especially, would have known how dangerous they could be. But you get the sense that they had never been in a storm quite like this one, and they're in a panic. Meanwhile, Jesus is conked out in the back of the boat! You have quite a contrast here: The disciples are afraid and Jesus is asleep. So Luke says, **"They came to Jesus and woke him up, saying, 'Master, Master, we are perishing!'"** You can read between the lines here: "Don't you care? We're all about to die here, including YOU!"

I don't know how you are when someone wakes you up from a deep sleep, but Luke says, **"He got up and rebuked the wind and the surging waves, and they stopped, and it became calm."** We've seen Jesus rebuke demons before. We even saw him rebuke a fever. But here he rebukes the wind and the waves as if they were an evil force and they obey him. Like frenzied fans in a stadium immediately silenced when a star player breaks his leg, there is a hush; absolute calm; eerie silence.

And then the story closes with two questions. First, Jesus asks a question: **"And he said to them, 'Where is your faith?'"** The idea seems to be that somehow in the midst of the storm they had lost the one thing they needed the most. These men who had seen Jesus cast out demons, cleanse lepers, make the lame

walk and even raise the dead had seen their faith collapse. Jesus wants them to think about that.

But then there is another question. The disciples ask a question of themselves, **“They were fearful and amazed, saying to one another, ‘Who then is this that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?’”** The fear of the storm gives way to a different kind of fear; a sense of awe that is entirely appropriate in the presence of raw power and absolute holiness. “Who then is this?” That’s a good question!

## **II. Have faith that God’s Kingdom will not end because the King is omnipotent.**

I’m sure that many of you have heard this story before. Perhaps it’s even one of your favorites. What you have heard probably goes something like this: We all experience trials and storms of various kinds in life that threaten to undo us. Maybe it’s a bad marriage or a wayward child or the loss of a job or some life threatening illness. In those times we’re often like the disciple in the boat – instead of exercising faith in Jesus, we panic. What we need to realize is that Jesus is with us (he’s in the boat) and he’s able and willing to calm whatever storm and whatever trial we’re experiencing. We just need to have faith that he’s bigger than whatever storm might come our way and he’ll get us through.

I know that sermon because I have preached it. But as I’ve thought more about this story the more I question that interpretation. You see, like you I know that sometimes Jesus doesn’t calm the storm. If we’re honest, sometimes even his most devoted followers get caught in a storm and never come back. Marriages fail. Children sometimes never come back to the faith. Your career may never recover from the layoff. Loved ones die. It happens. You know it happens. Jesus doesn’t always calm the storm for us. Don’t get me wrong. Sometimes he does calm those storms, but not always. He IS always with us, but he doesn’t always fix the problem.

The more I’ve thought about it, I’ve come to believe that the real issue at stake is not the personal survival of each disciple but something else; something bigger. They were afraid they would be drowned, and they were afraid Jesus would be drowned. But why? I don’t believe those men were simply frightened of death. What frightened them is that if that boat went down, everything they were investing their lives in and everything Jesus stood for was going to fail. They had heard him preach for nearly three years now. What did he preach about? Over and over again Luke tells us he preached the

good news of the kingdom. He, of course, is the King! The way you enter the kingdom is by giving up your allegiance to everything else and following him. If you do that, he said you will become a part of something glorious that will last forever.

For example, he just finished telling the parable of the sower, in which he promised that some seed would fall on soil that would produce a hundred fold harvest. That’s an amazing harvest. That’s like saying your money market account is going to earn 100% interest! That’s the kind of fruit the word of the kingdom will bear. They had believed him. They had believed in the glory and indestructibility of the Kingdom of God he was building. Now, in the boat, they felt that all that was in danger. Not only are they in danger of going down, but the King is going down too, and he doesn’t even seem to care! “Master, Master, WE (not “I”) are perishing; and if WE perish in this boat, this business about the Kingdom of God is finished.” That’s what panicked the disciples. “Master, how can you sleep? The boat is going down. You’re going down. What about the Kingdom?”

One of the things that convinces me this is the right way to look at this story is that Luke tells us Jesus “rebuked” the wind and the waves. There was an evil force behind that storm. Satan wanted to sink the boat. That’s why Jesus “rebuked” the storm in that same way that he “rebuked” demons. Jesus knew that the devil was at the back of the storm. The devil is thinking, “If I can sink this boat I have the chance of ending the whole enterprise right here.” But the devil is a fool! The King of kings is in the boat and he’s omnipotent. He’s more powerful than even the perfect storm. You cannot sink a boat that he and his disciples are on because at that moment in time they ARE the kingdom.

What about today? The kingdom is still a reality. Throughout this world there are people who have sworn their allegiance to King Jesus. He’s alive and he is still building his kingdom. Remember the story Jesus told about the mustard seed, which started so small but grew and grew until it became larger than all the plants and formed large branches so that the birds of the air could nest under its shade? That’s the kingdom!

This is very good news for those who have entered his kingdom! We’re the birds that nest under its shade. For those who see the kingdom as the most significant thing in the universe and are investing in it as such, this will resonate deeply. Marriages may fail. Careers may go down the tube. Heart disease or cancer or a car accident may take us. Kids may not turn out as we had hoped. America may go to pot. The church may have to undergo persecution and hardship. But the kingdom will survive because the King is on board and he is omnipotent.

So I ask you, as I ask myself, where is your faith? God wants to develop our faith in the King. God wants to develop our faith so that no evil, no storm, can undo his kingdom. As Martin Luther wrote:

*And though this world, with devils filled, should  
threaten to undo us,  
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to  
triumph through us:  
The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him;  
His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure,  
One little word shall fell him.*

*That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to  
them, abideth;  
The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him Who  
with us sideth:  
Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;  
The body they may kill: God's truth abideth still,  
His kingdom is forever.*

### III. God wants to develop our faith that his kingdom will survive because the King is omnipotent.

God wants to develop our faith that his kingdom will survive because the King is omnipotent. The question is, how does he do that? What does that look like? Let me make three observations.

*First of all, faith is developed in the storms of life.* Faith is not learned primarily in a classroom; it's learned in life. It wasn't enough for the disciples to watch Jesus heal people; nor was it enough for them to listen to him teach. That's why he allowed them to undergo real life situations that would test their faith.

It's the same with us. You cannot learn faith by watching others go through hard times. You have to get in the boat yourself. You have to feel the wind against your face and lose your balance as your life begins to rock back and forth. Nor can you inherit faith. Just because your grandparents and parents had it, doesn't mean you automatically get it. You have to learn it through your own storms. Nor can you learn faith by attending a Bible Study. I've been to countless Bible Studies. I've been to three different seminaries. I always say that I'm educated beyond my intelligence. But I never learned one single thing about faith in the classroom. What I've learned I've learned in the storms of life.

And sometimes in the midst of it, I've failed the test. Just like the disciples, I've wondered if this whole thing about Jesus and the Kingdom is really true. But one of the great things about the Lord is that he stays committed to us. He's committed to developing our faith and he knows that it

takes time. Jesus didn't abandon these twelve disciples after their faith collapsed; he stilled the storm anyway; he shows them that the Kingdom will go on even if their faith fails, and he prepares another test for them. If you're a follower of Jesus, I can guarantee that as long as you live, he will stay committed to developing your faith.

But what does that look like? This leads to the second thing: *faith will rest in God's promise when it seems he is absent.* What do you do when things seem out of control? Some of us are "fixers." We're the ones who try to organize people in the boat to bail water. Do you know any people like that? There are other people who don't fix, they just deny. The storm hits and their life becomes chaos and they say, "What storm? I don't see a storm. Everything is wonderful." It's enough to make you sick, isn't it? Finally, there are people who don't fix or deny; they just blame. Usually they blame someone nearest and dearest to them. "Peter, why didn't you listen to the weather report? It is all your fault!" Often times the person we blame is God: "Master, don't YOU care...?"

What should we do when things seem out of control? What do we see Jesus doing? Not only is Jesus the object of faith, but he is a picture of faith as well. Faith that RESTS in God's promise when it seems like he is absent. Why is Jesus able to sleep in the storm? Because he knows that nothing will get in the way of God's kingdom purposes. There is a rest, we might even call it a sleep, that pictures trust in God. Proverbs says, **"When you lie down, you will not be afraid; When you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. Do not be afraid of sudden fear, Nor of the onslaught of the wicked when it comes; For the LORD will be your confidence..."** (Proverbs 3:24-25a). You see, this isn't the sleep of laziness or denial; this is the sleep of one who can say in the midst of the storm. "The Lord is my confidence."

Which brings me to my last point: *True faith depends on the greatness of its object.* In the midst of the storm, many people say, "Have faith. You gotta believe. Everything happens for a reason." But the Bible never tells us simply to have faith. The Bible tells us to have faith in God and his Son, Jesus Christ. You can have all the faith in the world, but if it's in the wrong thing, you will sink. Faith depends on its object. Don't focus on how much faith you have; focus on who your faith is in. You can have a little faith on really thick ice and you'll be fine. You can have a lot of faith on real thin ice and you may drown! That's why the story ends with the question, "Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they

obey him.” You see, the issue of faith is inexorably bound up in the issue of who Jesus is.

## CONCLUSION

My friend Paul Nuth, a Cambodian, who lives in San Jose, recently wrote, “The last seven months, we have had hard times because we don’t have enough income to support our family.” That’s a storm. Then he goes on to write, “But one evening we sat down around the table and the four of us prayed. Normally we read the Bible after we pray, but this time I shared with my family about my life during the Killing Fields. I thank the Lord Jesus Christ for saving me before the Communists took over Cambodia. About three months after the takeover the Communists took my father and killed him because he was a police officer. My mother and seven of us in the family went to live in another village where the Communists helped us build a small home made of bamboo and the leaf of the palm tree. Then they divided my family. My oldest three sisters and I worked in the fields to plant rice. We would wake up and walk to the fields very early each morning and wait for the sun to rise. I heard some people cry because they stepped on thorns and were bitten by cobras and died. We worked very hard every day for 14 hours and did not have weekends off. I worked for no salary but I got rice and soup with salt that was the size of a small cup of coffee. The Communist leaders ordered us around and pointed the guns at us as if we were criminals. The Communists killed most of the educated people. We didn’t have any freedoms – I didn’t have freedom of speech, I didn’t have any freedom to travel; we just played dumb and did hard work for them. We couldn’t even question the Communists because they were dictators. In the Communist regime, we lived each day in fear, not knowing if we would survive another day. So one day my friend, my family, and I made plans to escape to Thailand. We walked through the jungles and across the mountains while being cautious, knowing that the Khmer Rouge soldiers, mine fields, robbers, tigers, and cobras await. All through the jungles I prayed to the living God Jesus Christ. During the time that I lived with and escaped from the Communists, and even today, I always thank Him for saving me from the Killing Fields. Finally I got to Thailand and then traveled to the USA in 1981. I know that God saved my life for His purpose. That’s why I have committed my life to believe and obey the Lord. We have to trust the living Lord Jesus Christ, knowing that whatever happens in life, He will provide for us.”

The thing I love about that is that you would think Paul had learned it all in Cambodia. You would think after all of that he would have the faith-thing down pat. But here we see that today God is still developing his faith; and we see that he is learning that faith is resting/trusting in the living Lord Jesus when he seems absent. He does the same thing with us: *He wants to develop our faith so that his kingdom will survive because the King is omnipotent.*

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