



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

John 6: 16-21

Spring 2022

"Trampling The Waves"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth. Well, we're in the Book of John and we're in chapter 6. We just began the chapter last week and we're looking this morning at verses 16 through 21. Jesus has done His fourth miracle of the seven miracles in this book; He fed a multitude, some 5000 plus. Some calculate the number to be close to or exceeding 20,000 if you count women and children.

And so now that's over and to diffuse a kind of excitement, or an excitement that was going through the crowd for they want to make Him king, (He's gotten rid of sickness in Galilee, now hunger, so they think He's the one to rule), we read that He sent His disciples off to keep them from being infected by this enthusiasm,

¹⁶ Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea, ¹⁷ and after getting into a boat, they *started to* cross the sea to Capernaum. It had already become dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. ¹⁸ The sea *began* to be stirred up because a strong wind was blowing. ¹⁹ Then, when they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near to the boat; and they were frightened. ²⁰ But He said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." ²¹ So they were willing to receive Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.

John 6: 16-21

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of studying it together.

(Message) Well, we all need grace to trust Him more. And that's what the Lord was teaching His disciples in this passage we consider this morning, in John 6, verses 16 through 21.

Monhegan Island, off the coast of Maine, is a place I've visited a number of times. It's a place of natural wonders. For over a century, artists have traveled there to paint seascapes with waves crashing on the rocks beneath its cliffs.

It's also a dangerous place. On one end of the island is the rusting hull of a ship, the *D. T. Sheridan* that was wrecked on the rocks almost a century ago. It's the only shipwreck I've seen, but coastlines all over the world are littered with them.

Archaeologists recently found and restored an ancient boat submerged near the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. That sea is also a dangerous place. It doesn't look it. Its waters are described as placid, like glass. But it changes quickly.

Jesus knew that, yet sent His disciples out on it just before a storm blew in. They spent hours alone in the tempest in the dark, fighting for their lives, when through the gloom Jesus came to them, walking on the water. It's the fifth sign in the Gospel of John and the second in the sixth chapter. The fourth was the miracle of the 'loaves and fishes', which made such an impression on the people that they wanted to make Jesus king. What they wanted was a warrior, a liberator, a Judas Maccabeus, (Judas the Hammer), who would drive Rome from the land and give them freedom. It was politics and intoxicating.

So Jesus sent the disciples away to protect them from that—and to teach them why He came. Not to be a sovereign, but to be a Savior, a sacrifice—and what that would mean for them as His disciples.

So to keep His mission from being sidetracked or shipwrecked He acted quickly to disarm the crowd. He sent away His disciples so they wouldn't be caught up in the

mania. Then He withdrew to a mountain alone. Both Matthew and Mark give further information. They state that Jesus went up on the mountain by Himself to pray.

That's where the passage begins. It was late afternoon when the disciples began their voyage across the sea. It was a calm, pleasant spring day. Galilee is beautiful in the spring. The grass and wildflowers are in bloom. A few years ago I was there with my daughter and son-in-law. We rented an apartment overlooking the sea. Each morning I would rise and watch the sun rise over the eastern hills and see boats traveling up the sea from Tiberius to Capernaum. Each day was sunny, warm and pleasant. And on this afternoon it would have been pleasant as well. Thousands had enjoyed a miraculous picnic on the grass.

So as the disciples left for Capernaum, they shoved off on a sea smooth as a mirror. I doubt, though, that they were thinking, 'What a nice day for sailing'. But wondering, 'Why did Jesus hurry them off? He'd won the multitude with a miracle and had the opportunity to be king', which they thought was all the reason for being the Messiah, 'That's what it was about, being king and ruling. Seize the day!' He didn't. Instead he dismissed the crowd. Why?

If that was their conversation, and I think it must have been, it wasn't long before their thoughts turned from politics to survival because the beautiful sea quickly turned ugly. It is notorious for that because of the geography. It sits in a deep bowl, almost 700 feet below sea level, surrounded by high hills. Cold currents of air are sucked down the slopes and the narrow gorges of the hills around it and they break on the sea suddenly, and with terrific force.

They were out in the middle of the sea when that happened. Verse 19 states, "They had rowed about three or four miles." But Matthew described it, 'it is the fourth watch', (Mat 14:25), between 3 AM and 6 AM. So they were out there, in the middle of the sea, in the storm for a long time, fighting the wind in a boat that Matthew described as 'battered by the waves.'

They were exhausted, in danger—and Christ was not with them. Very different from earlier in the day when they were in the sunshine, participating in a miracle, and being admired by the crowds around them. Now they were alone in the dark; wet, cold, frantically fighting against the elements with no letup in the storm—and wondering if their strength would hold up and they would survive.

Again, we don't know their thoughts, but we can imagine what was going through their minds: fear of death and doubts about Christ's wisdom in sending them out on the sea. It's what goes through our minds when we're put in peril and face difficulties that are beyond us and just seem to go on and on without letup—and we wonder, 'Where's God in all of this?'

What the disciples didn't know, and what we learn from Mark's Gospel, is that Jesus saw them out there, straining at the oars. He was on the mountain, alone, watching them and praying for them.

Now that is a simple but magnificent picture of the Christian life. While we are down here on the seas, so to speak, struggling in life's storms, Christ is above in heaven watching us and praying for us. He's our Savior. We are never absent from His mind and His concern. He never loses track of us. He's always following us, guiding us with His all-seeing eye, and praying for us as our great high priest.

The Lord wasn't surprised by the storm; He sent them out into it. He had appointed that storm for their good. As Paul reminded us from Ephesians 1:11; 'He works all things according to the counsel of His will.' And that certainly applies to this. And it was all working together for their benefit. They didn't know that, but it was.

Someone said, 'Trials are our diet.' They're one of God's means of proving our faith and strengthening our character. They produce maturity, endurance, and perseverance', Paul said, in Romans 5, verse 3. No sailor would master the sea if all his experience was on dry ground or sailing through pleasant waters and over still seas. Storms mature a sailor; and the storms of life are necessary for saints to develop skill in life.

God's people don't escape hardship and tragedy. Read about the saints of Scripture and of history and you see that they suffered much. Jeremiah, the weeping prophet said, "He has made my chain heavy." (Lam 3:7). But He knows how and when to make it light, when to help and give relief.

And after hours of struggle John wrote, "They saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near to the boat"—'and they rejoiced.'... No, it doesn't say that. It says, "and they were frightened." (vs19). According to Matthew and Mark, they thought He was a ghost. Imagine that. They saw God, they saw the Savior, and they thought He was some frightening phantom up from the deep.

Now I don't want to be too hard on them. I don't want to be hard on them at all. They were in a frightening place and His approach to them was altogether preternatural; supernatural. Still, His coming wasn't ambiguous. He approached in power and light. But what this shows is, we cannot trust our eyes, our lying eyes. It was when the Lord spoke that they got understanding. And what He said broke through this storm like a bright ray of sunshine, "It is I; do not be afraid." (vs20b). Then they knew. Then they took courage. And John wrote, "They were willing to receive Him into the boat." (vs21). It was a happy reunion.

And at that moment, they learned a fundamental lesson for their lives as disciples, and what Paul later expressed to the Corinthians, "We walk by faith, not by sight." John ends the passage by stating, "Immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going." (vs21b). Safe. That itself, by the way, was a miracle.

Modern commentators have explained away the supernatural in all of this suggesting that the disciples didn't sail across the sea, but they hugged the shore all the way. So when they saw Jesus, He was not in the sea walking on the waves, but wading through the shallow surf of the shoreline which was obscured from their view.

But Matthew and Mark are both clear. They recount that when Peter recognized the Lord, he got out of the boat, and he walked to Him. Remember he asked, "Bid me come", (Mat 14:28), and the Lord did. So he gets out of the boat and he begins to walk

on the water himself—until he looked around and he saw the waves and the wind...and he sank. Well, he didn't sink to his knees, he went under, and was in danger of drowning.

The text is very clear. They were far out into the sea. They were in the midst of it. It was a miracle. That's the reason John recorded it. It's been pointed out that if the disciples had been mistaken about the Lord's appearance and His location, He would have corrected them and this would never have appeared in the Gospels. No, it appears here because this was a miracle.

We shouldn't be surprised by miracles, whether it is this one or raising the son of the widow of Nain that Mark taught on this morning. (Luk 7:14). This is the Son of God. I can't do miracles. You can't do miracles. We're not seeing miracles happen today like they did in the first century. Miracles are impossible for us to do.

But they're not impossible for God—or for God's Son. And so this is what's revealed here; a miracle. The Lord's fifth miracle, and different in some important ways from the fourth miracle that happened just a few hours earlier. That one was public. It was the most public of all His miracles, to 5000 plus people.

This one was private—to just 12 men. The fourth miracle was for unbelievers. The fifth miracle was for believers. The purpose of this sign was to attest to the disciples something about Him; about who He is, about His mission, and about their lives and ministries as His followers, and later as His apostles.

First, clearly, it was to show that He is God who can do miracles. That's what all of the signs show. That's the purpose of this fourth Gospel, "...so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." (Jn 20:31).

And a careful student of the Bible would have seen in this fifth miracle a fulfillment of Job chapter 9, verse 8, where Job described the LORD as, "the One who commands the sun to rise. He is the One who alone stretches out the heavens and tramples down the waves of the sea, who makes the Bear, Orion, and the Pleiades."

That's the One who came to them in the storm on the sea. He certainly did not have a ghostly appearance, like some specter passing through the mist and spray.

Not at all, He came powerfully, trampling the waves, subduing them under His feet, making the sea like glass in His path—because He rules it. It obeys Him, just as the sun does when He commands it every day to shine.

The crowd He miraculously fed got a sense of that. They knew a miracle had happened. They believed that He was someone special. They believed He was the prophet that Moses prophesied in Deuteronomy 18, verse 18. But they didn't want to listen to Him, they didn't want to listen to the prophet. That's what a prophet is about, speaking and listening to Him. They didn't want to listen, they wanted to crown Him.

And the disciples, too, were caught up on the excitement. They were ready to join the mob and march on Jerusalem. Jesus sent them away from that. And here He corrected that misconception that they had entertained. He is the prophet. He is the Word of God, He is the Logos who John said, in verse 1 of this Gospel, the first verse, 'Was in the beginning with God, and who was God.' He is God the Son. He was in the beginning. So what John is saying there, (and it's a bit subtle but it's there), 'Go back to the very beginning, the first ...', (I think this is how I'd put it), 'the first nanosecond, if you can divide that make it even smaller. Go back to the very beginning, and Christ was. Always was. He's eternal. He's the eternal Son of God.'

So they were to listen to Him. He had come to be a liberator, to liberate mankind from sin and death, from guilt and fear, to give His life. And to give life through the giving of His life, which is everlasting life—which could only happen by His death, which could only happen through His sacrifice.

Well that was the storm of His life, the greatest spiritual storm of all, the pain and shame of the cross, which was the very wrath of God that He absorbed, that He took as our substitute. It was hell itself which He bore in our place—for His people. But He came through it triumphantly, as He did here, trampling the waves.

And it's the life they were to expect for themselves. Denying themselves, as He instructed them to do, taking up their cross daily. They wanted to join the crowd. They wanted to reign. They wanted to sit on 12 thrones with Christ, judging the 12 tribes of

Israel in the regeneration—‘The kingdom to come’ that Jesus spoke of later in Matthew, chapter 19, verse 28.

Well, there will be that kingdom. There will be that regeneration. There will be those crowns and thrones. —That's our future and it was their future. It's glorious. It's beyond comprehension.

But that's not for this present life. Today we are pilgrims in this world. It can be difficult. It would be very difficult for the apostles. Paul described the life of an apostle to the Corinthians. And you might think, ‘What a glorious thing, to be an apostle.’ And it is; it is in its own way.

But he told the Corinthians, "God," he said, "has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death because we have become a spectacle to the world." (1 Cor 4:9). That word, *spectacle*, in Greek literally means ‘theater’. In fact, the Greek word is *theatron*. Their lives were on display, like being on stage. And the world considered them to be playing in a comedy—not anything serious. "We are fools for Christ", Paul wrote. (vs10).

That's how the world looks at apostles, a bunch of fools. And it's how the world will look at us if we stand for Christ—if we make a statement for Him. The disciples needed to know that. The storm that night was to teach them this. He deliberately sent them out on the sea to correct them and instruct them on who He is, what He came to do, and what they would experience. They would live in the storm—not on the thrones. But they were not to fear. They were to be encouraged. That was His message to them. "It is I; do not be afraid." (vs20).

The last part of that statement is a command in the present tense and it has the sense of, ‘Don't go on being afraid. Stop being afraid!’ Why? The storm is scary. It's life threatening. It was “an existential threat”, we hear that expression a lot today. Why not be afraid? Because the ‘One who tramples the waves’ is with them. The One who triumphs over the storm, who ordains the storm and controls the storm is with them always.

That's one of the great promises that we find all through Scripture: Stated beautifully, perhaps most famously by David in Psalm 23, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I fear no evil, for Thou art with me." Why do I fear that dangerous place if the Shepherd is with me?

And here the Lord was telling the disciples, 'He was with them'. That's a claim to deity right there; subtly, but that's what He's saying to them. 'He was with them', just like the LORD of Psalm 23. He would say the same to you and me if we were in this kind of situation. —And we will be, 'Stop fearing. There's no reason to fear, not for you, not for a child of God. I AM with you. Take courage!'

And the storms come in life just as this one did on the sea: On a sunny day in a pleasant and prosperous time. That's when it happened. Suddenly. Bang. Everything changes. Do not be afraid? —How can we not?

Well, we cannot when we understand this. What calms our fears and gives us courage is the knowledge of what is revealed here: Christ is God. He's in control and He's always with us. He was with the disciples all along. He was with them at the height of their crisis when they thought they were seeing a ghost. Their fear resulted from not recognizing Him. Calm occurred when He spoke to them.

And there's a lesson in that—maybe the lesson. How do we get stability in life? How do we get stability in our faith? How do we conquer fear? By recognizing God's hand in our lives. That's why it is so important to read and listen to His Word—Scripture. It is listening to Him speak to us.

Robert Murray McCheyne had a short life, but a significant ministry in the church of Scotland. In 1839, he went to Israel, then Palestine, to study the possibility of a mission to the Jews. (I think I might have mentioned this on Wednesday night.) He took Romans 11 very seriously and knew the salvation, the conversion of the Jews would be a great blessing—life from the dead for the world. And so the church wanted to know if there's an opportunity to minister there.

So he went to Palestine and was there for some length of time, but his church back home in Dundee was always on his mind. And he wrote letters to the minister who was preaching in his place. And in at least one of those letters he gave some encouragement and instruction. One concern he had was the people's lack of readiness for hard times. He wrote, "Prepare them for sore trials. I fear most Christians are not quite ready for days of darkness."

Now that registered with me when I read that. "Most Christians are quite unready for days of darkness." He wrote that almost 200 years ago when life was pretty severe for everyone. Well, what about us today in these very, very soft times in which we live? I think most of us are unready for dark days and trials. The only way to be prepared is to know God's Word in order to know Him increasingly and trust Him more fully. He's sufficient for every trial and circumstance in life. And He stated that to the disciples in the first words He said to them, "It is I." (vs20). Literally, it is "I AM", and affirms the same thing Job 9, verse 8 affirms, that 'the one who walks on the water is the LORD who created and controls the universe.'

The words, "I AM", are the basis for the LORD's name in the Old Testament. (I'm sure you know this; 'Jehovah', or 'Yahweh'.) The LORD stated them in these words in Exodus 3, when He spoke to Moses out of the burning bush. He identified Himself with the words, "I AM who I AM," so that Moses could go back to Egypt and tell Israel who had sent him: "I AM has sent me to you." (vs14). Then, after a series of miracles, God delivered His people from slavery by parting the Red Sea and bringing them through the sea on dry ground. That event is celebrated in the feast of Passover.

Now remember, John stated in verse 4 that the feeding of the 5000 occurred 'at the time of the Passover', which suggests a connection between the events at the Exodus and these events there in Galilee. So when Jesus said to them, "It is I," or "I AM," He was signaling to the disciples that He is the Lord God who said to Moses, "I AM who I AM." It was a concise way of saying to them, 'I am the one who ruled the sea in Egypt

and delivered my people then. And I rule the sea here in Galilee and can deliver you from all of the storms of life.'

So when the Lord says to us, (as He is saying to us here), "It is I; do not be afraid," we have every reason to do that, every reason to stop being afraid. The Lord God is with us—always with us.

Didn't seem like He was with them in the midst of that storm, as they were losing strength and giving up—but He was with them, praying for them; and He came to them at the right time. And the irony is, (and what we don't expect), trials like this are a divine means of blessing. It's through trials that we grow personally. And through them the Lord is often seen more clearly and known even better.

Often it's those who suffer, sometimes in isolation and loneliness, that are able to see God more clearly than those who have an easy time, a less challenging life. It was at such times that Paul got special glimpses of the Lord: When being rejected by men, being kicked out of the synagogue, being ridiculed by the philosophers in Athens, or thrown in prison. The Lord, in those times, would stand with him and speak to him. "Do not be afraid any longer." That's what He said to Paul. (Acts 18:9).

Samuel Rutherford famously wrote in one of his letters, "I see that grace grows best in winter." And he would have known. He suffered much in his life, personally, and much in the ministry as he stood for Christ and the truth. And here, the Lord deliberately sent His disciples into harm's way for the purpose of causing grace to grow in their lives, and give them a deeper, more personal knowledge of Him—to advance their faith.

Still, these are not easy experiences for ourselves. Even the apostles tried to avoid hardship. No rational person seeks suffering. No one says, 'Well, I know my faith will advance by suffering, and I will learn perseverance, so I'm going to seek it out.' That's not to be the application of any of this. We are naturally weak, and we are naturally beaten down, and we naturally succumb to the trials of life. But trials will come. We don't need to seek them, they will come and they will never be easy. They are trials, and they test our faith.

I often think of Jacob, a patriarch, a man included in Hebrews chapter 11, the chapter of faith. He was given a vision in Bethel of a ladder from heaven with angels on it. He wrestled with God. He experienced God's hand of blessing all through his life.

But he had a hard life. In Genesis 42, verse 36, in what was one of the lowest points of his life, [During a great famine, when he thought he'd lost two of his sons, (earlier, years earlier Joseph, and then recent to that event in Genesis 42, Simeon), when he was feeling the brunt of all of this, feeling beaten down.], he cried out in despair, "...all these things are against me." (vs36).

Now that was what the disciples must have said out in the sea. They were rowing against the wind; all of the elements were against them—and they likely felt that all of life was against them. But what Jacob would soon learn is that when he said, "All these things are against me," in reality, everything was for him—working to his benefit, and his great blessing and great reunion with his sons and his entire family.

Later in Genesis 48, verse 15, at the end of his life, Jacob described the LORD as, "the God who fed me all my life long", (or shepherded me), "all my life long, unto this day." Is that for us? Always. So we need to be reminded of this continually.

And Jesus did that for His disciples, not only here in this passage, at that event on the sea of Galilee, but to the end of His life He was teaching them that. He concluded His farewell discourse in John 16, verse 33, by telling them, "In the world you have tribulation." So He's making it very clear to them, before He leaves them to go the cross and then go back to the Father, making it very clear: Your life's not going to be easy. You're going to have tribulation. As My servants, My apostles, you're going to have a rough, rough time. "But take courage," He said. "I have overcome the world." (And He could have said, 'Just as I did in that storm on the sea.')

He overcame the world through His perfect life of obedience, through His sacrificial death, and through His resurrection from the dead. He overcame this hostile world for us so that now all the trials of life are for our good, even when we think they

are all against us. He's with us and He helps us through them—as Jacob learned and as those disciples learned on the sea.

They prepare us for life in the present so that we may not live for the present, but we will live for eternity. That's the ultimate goal. We're not just making it through this life as best we can and coming to the end of it—and that's it. We're not living for the now. We're living for the world to come.

Everything we do has significance. And the Lord will bring us through it. That's the assurance the believer has. And He will not lose one of us. He will bring us safely home when our work is done and bring us through the storms. In fact, I see an illustration of that in the final statement of the passage, "And immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going." (vs21b).

Hebrews 11:16, speaks of a 'heavenly country'. That's our land. That's where we're going. Jesus overcame the world for us to have that heavenly country. And when the moment comes for us to leave this land for that one, it will be immediate. It will happen like this did, "immediately". Paul said that in 2 Corinthians 5, verse 8, "Absent from the body...at home with the Lord."

And here's the lesson: "In the world you have tribulation..." (Jn 16:33). Don't be unready. Know Scripture. Hear Christ speaking to you. Know Him and take courage. He's overcome the world and is with us. And someday the storms will end, the trials will be over and we will be at home in an instant, at the land to which we are going. A glorious land.

So I must ask you, in conclusion, to which land are you going? Is this world, this present land, the only one you know, the only one you care about, the only one that you think is real? You will lose it. You cannot stay here. You can only be here for a brief time. We're just a vapor.

There is a land, the heavenly country that Christ has obtained for all of His; all who believe in Him. It is a land of light and joy where God 'wipes away every tear from our eyes.' If you've not trusted in Christ, look to Him, believe in Him, and be rescued

from this fallen, foolish world—and from the darkness and gloom of eternity to come. Trust in Christ as your Savior. May God help you to do that—and then rejoice.

LORD, we do have that hope, a hope of a brighter place, a glorious place, of eternal life, and eternity with You; and in great glory in the kingdom to come, in the new heavens and the new earth to come—and heaven before us now, if we should leave this world shortly.

We also have the hope that You're with us presently in all of the circumstances of life. And so we give You praise and thanks for that. Help us to understand that better, to believe it firmly, and to live with that hope. We pray these things in Your Son's name.

The LORD bless you and keep you now, the LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace. In Christ's name, Amen.

(End of Audio)