

Where's This Boat Going and Are We Going to Make It?  
Matthew 8:23-27  
Dr. Alan H. Landes  
Crestview Presbyterian Church  
January 31, 2010

Over the past three weeks, we've been taking some snapshots of what it means to be part of a community of faith... asking ourselves about demonstrating care and compassion toward those around us: "What Makes the Baby Cry?" Then, it was MLK weekend and we considered the courage shown by John the Baptist- someone Jesus called the "greatest man born of woman." Last week, we poked around at the ancient phrase from the Nicene Creed, "One Holy Catholic Apostolic Church." Today, we're going to go on a boat ride with Jesus across the Sea of Galilee.

This morning's little story begins with Jesus climbing into a boat, and "the disciples followed him." In the five verses earlier, Jesus spoke about the cost of following him, and now, off they go... into a boat as they prepare to cross the Sea of Galilee. (show pictures of Sea of Galilee)

In the early church, a boat often stood as a symbol for the church... and the various stories about boats and the disciples helped make that a meaningful thing. Even today, you'll find drawings of boats on banners or posters being used to represent the church of Jesus Christ. This story- from the outset- is meant to teach us something about the church.

Now- this wasn't a very big boat, and although many of the disciples were seasoned Galilean fishermen... we can imagine a small boat somewhat overcrowded with thirteen grown men. We were in the Holy Land a year ago, (show pictures of museum

boat) and went to a museum displaying a 1<sup>st</sup> Century fishing boat which had been dug out of the mud- you can see that it's no Queen Mary.

When we went out on the Sea of Galilee, our boat was substantially bigger.

(show picture of us on the Sea of Galilee) One of the of the interesting things about the Sea of Galilee that becomes immediately apparent is how the mountains there form a channel through which cool winds from the Mediterranean Sea are drawn whenever the air pressure changes. When they reach the hot, humid air lying over the lake, violent thunderstorms erupt which threaten to swamp any boat unfortunate enough to be out on the lake. One of the nights we when were in the region, a storm sprang up with such force that some in our group worried about the hotel windows caving in. Fortunately, they didn't- but it provided a first-hand illustration of the circumstances we read about today.

Back to scripture; all three Gospel accounts of this event have Jesus asleep in the boat. A few verses earlier, Jesus had mentioned that "foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." He must have been really tired to have fallen asleep in that little boat- but the point is... even if not up and active among the disciples... he was still there, alongside the others... just as he's aboard the good ship Crestview. Then, "without warning," it says, "a furious storm came upon the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat." The disciples were afraid: "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!"

There seem to be a few storms clouds here as well, and some have become a bit anxious about that. I think it always helpful to be sure folks have as much information as possible, and that even innocuous things left unspoken can grow sour in even the

healthiest churches. Most here know that our associate pastor Denise Pass has submitted her resignation; we're going to vote on that in a bit. Normally, that's not such a big deal, but some have become concerned that her leave-taking suggests something unhealthy about Crestview. So the Session met yesterday study the matter, including meeting with each staff person individually. At my invitation, a member from Presbytery's Committee on Ministry came to moderate the meeting; she's here today to simply watch what we do next.

Let me make a few observations. First of all, a relatively new hire- Denise- has claimed difficulty in relating to her supervisor... not a "stop the presses" sort of thing, to be sure- happens all the time. She's resigned- nothing unusual about that, either. Today is her last day, and the time has come for folks to move on. In my role as pastor, I've made a few suggestions to church leaders about how that can happen, using existing resources. Crestview is extraordinarily fortunate to have as part of your staff team three people who have functioned a decade or longer as ordained pastors in other places: Debbie Handkins and Dick Eckert as American Baptist pastors, and Bill Gardner as a pastor at two different Brethren churches; Rodney spent some time in seminary classes as well as working in worship leadership for various churches over the past 30 years. They've talked about what might be done next, and sense that there's some real potential embedded in what's unfolding. They've told those personnel team members assigned to meet with them that they are eager to move ahead.

In turning back to today's biblical account, we find the disciples waking a sleeping Jesus who seems less concerned about the storm than they: "Lord, save us! We are going to drown!" Jesus replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Those

could well be Jesus' words to Crestview today. No matter how hard someone might try to control today's events... no one can control those circumstances any more than the disciples could control the atmospheric conditions leading to a thunderstorm over the Galilee- thunderstorms happen. What's important is remembering to turn to Jesus regardless of present circumstances... and know that he's the one who can direct even the elements of nature... and trust that now- and always- Crestview is his church, and we are his people. After all, the church is the Body of Christ, and the role of the body is... to support the head.

Trust Christ- Crestview's boat will not capsize- no matter what. Are these the very best circumstances any of us can imagine? No- they're not; Denise is leaving- but Crestview needs to wish her well as she sets out on the next stage of her journey with Christ. So also, Crestview will press on... because there is no turbulence that should ever keep any of us from focusing on the goal of what the Apostle Paul calls the "upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

Remember- the best is still yet to come! As a sign and symbol of the church's determination to look forward, I'd like to invite Elder Jeff Johnson to come forward as we welcome some new members who to jump into the Crestview boat and baptize one young man eager to set out on a new adventure in his walk with Christ.