

## Contrary Winds.

Text: Matt 14:22-33

Suggested Hymns:

442, 337, 366, 158, 397

1) They come

2) They frighten

3) They stop

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 14:22-33, <sup>22</sup> *Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away.* <sup>23</sup> *And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there.* <sup>24</sup> *But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary.*

<sup>25</sup> *Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea.* <sup>26</sup> *And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear.* <sup>27</sup> *But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."*

<sup>28</sup> *And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water."* <sup>29</sup> *So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus.*

<sup>30</sup> *But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!"* <sup>31</sup> *And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"* <sup>32</sup> *And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.* <sup>33</sup> *Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God."* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

When people get together, they usually start to talk about the weather. And so in our sermon for today we are going to talk about this well-known subject, a popular introduction to our conversations.

Many of us who have come to church today have greeted our friends with the words, “*Well, it’s a nice day!*” or whatever the case may be. And today we also are going to speak about the weather.

One thing you will notice is that the weather changes. A few hours of sunshine may be followed by thunderclouds, storm, and rain. The temperature may become suddenly hot or cold.

Quite often the weather is said to be unfavourable, especially to the gardener, the fruit-grower, the farmer, the builder, the traveller, or those whose work is out in the open.

What looked like success may suddenly be ruined by a change in the weather, a heavy downpour, a killing frost, excessive heat, thick fog, or contrary winds.

On the other hand, “*It’s an ill wind that blows no one any good!*” What looked like certain failure, may turn into smiling success by a slight change in the weather.

Thus it is also in Christian life. We can also speak of bright sunshine, cloudless skies, dark days, dreary weather, and the burning heat of Christian life.<sup>1</sup> From bright days under the smiling sun of good fortune and success we may run into a stormy season.

There is also weather - good weather, bad weather, and changing weather in Christian life. We read in John 16:20, ***you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy.*** “*Storms may howl, and clouds may gather, but all must work for good to me.*”

Upon the basis of our text, which brings us the story of Christ’s walking upon the stormy waves of the sea to His disciples, let consider today the Contrary Winds. May the Lord bless our meditation.

## **1. The Contrary Winds They Come**

Jesus commanded His disciples to get into a boat. The disciples ran into a storm. But it was not their fault. It was after this first feeding of the multitudes that “***Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away.***”

Aside from the fact that the disciples were not very anxious to leave Jesus in the midst of the multitudes who wanted to take Him by force and make Him king, there may also have been the fear of crossing the lake alone in the night-time on account of a former experience when a wind-storm arose.<sup>2</sup>

But “***Immediately***” Jesus told them to go, with the promise, it seems, to meet them at some point along the shore later on. And the disciples departed. And now, gradually and gently, Jesus proceeded to dismiss the crowd.

And then “***He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there.***” Whether Jesus was with the disciples or not, storm or no storm, the disciples should do as they are told, they should go about their business, while the Lord would go about His.

Thus also in life. Storms will come in life. A bad spell of weather is to be expected. Scripture says that “***We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.***”<sup>3</sup> And the point for us to remember is that we should do as we are told, “***seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,***”<sup>4</sup> go about our business, while the Lord goes about His. After all, it is also the Lord who directs and controls the storm.

The disciples in the midst of the sea. Hours pass, and a storm begins to sweep down the barren hills. It is the fourth watch of the night, that is, between three and six in the morning, as the disciples, hugging the shore, rowed furiously in the teeth of a gale. The boat was out in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves, the winds were against them, and the disciples were in great distress.

After eight hours of hard work they had not rowed more than about three or four miles,<sup>5</sup> a little more than half the distance, “***and Jesus had not yet come to them.***”<sup>6</sup> While they were distressed with toiling at the oars and were tossed up and down on the perilous sea, there was not, as they had probably hoped or expected, any sign or signal from Jesus.

With the surface of the sea like a boiling cauldron and in the face of contrary winds, it would have been impossible for the disciples to make a landing. As experienced fishermen they were well acquainted with the dangerous moods of this hill-bound, yet deep-lying inland sea.

A well-known traveller writes: *“My experience in this region enables me to sympathise with the disciples in their long contest with the wind. The wind howled down every way from the northeast and east, with such fury that no efforts of rowers could have brought the boat to shore at any point along the coast.”*

The disciples were headed for Capernaum, but now they were driven away from the shore. At any rate, the winds were **“contrary”** which means the winds were against them. And we can easily picture to ourselves the plight in which the disciples suddenly found themselves.

What is the application for our own lives? After days of calm and a season of quiet we may suddenly find ourselves in the midst of a storm on the sea of life. We may have fair weather at the beginning of our journey and fine sailing through the whole long voyage and yet meet with storms before we reach the port. *“When it rains, it pours.”* Every wind is contrary, and everything seems to go against us. All at once there are fiery trials, tribulations, grief, and sorrow.

Moreover, when such stormy trials descend upon a Christian, it can often be said that they are not his fault. The disciples were where the Lord had sent them, and yet this storm arose. Had they been fleeing from the Lord like Jonah, instead of following His directions, it would have been a different matter.

Thus also in a Christian’s life. Contrary winds arise, even if he is leading a Christian life. He is exactly where the Lord has sent him, pulling at the oars, trying his best, and still the ill winds of hardship and misfortune continue to blow in his face.

Furthermore, it was a great discouragement to the disciples now that Jesus was not with them, as He had been on a previous occasion. At that time, on their journey to Perea, Jesus was indeed asleep during the storm, but He was soon awakened.

But now Jesus was not with them at all. Thus it also happens in Christian life. Storms arise, contrary winds rush in from all sides, but no help is at hand, and no Jesus around!

While such adverse circumstances may be very discouraging, still they are a trial of faith. For the time being, there was nothing else for the disciples to do but to keep pulling at the oars.

Although troubles and difficulties beset us from all sides, although the winds of adversity become more contrary and violent, there is only one thing for us to do, namely, to remain firm in faith, to become *“fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;”*<sup>12</sup> *rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer,”*<sup>7</sup> and to keep pulling at the oars.

This, no doubt, could be said of the disciples. But, as it happened, although Christ was near, at the first their fears were increased. The winds were contrary, the disciples were alarmed, and now they became thoroughly frightened.

## **2. The Contrary Winds They Frighten**

Jesus walking upon the water. *“Man’s extremity is God’s opportunity.”* Or in the words of a German proverb, *“When greatest the need, God is nearest indeed!”* But it did not seem that way to the disciples. What happened now frightened the disciples even more, although it should not have done so, but it did. It was like being struck down by lightning.

Jesus was neither ignorant of, nor indifferent to, the plight of His disciples. It was Jesus who directed their course. He knew all about the storm, and still He told them to climb into the boat. Even while He was praying on the mountain, He had perceived their distress. He saw them pulling at the oars at the rate of about one third of a mile per hour, and still He let them pull. His hour *“has not yet come.”*<sup>8</sup>

The Hymnist writes,<sup>9</sup> *Belovèd, it is well: Though sorrow clouds our way, ‘Twill only make the joy more dear That ushers in the day.*

Finally Jesus’ hour has come. Even now He was probably on the road near the shore. His help is never too late. Eight long hours have passed, and it is indeed three o’clock in the morning.

The Lord of nature is at hand, to whom *“is given all power in heaven and in earth.”* It is the Lord who *“treads on the waves of the sea”*<sup>10</sup> and *“walks on the wings of the wind.”*<sup>11</sup> Leaving the road, Jesus turns down to the surf, walks across the beach, and, contrary to the laws of nature, He *“went to them, walking on the sea.”*

In a miraculous manner Christ makes His appearance and comes to the help of His distressed friends. The winds may have been contrary, but here is the Lord of winds and of the waters who is about to correct and to control their power for the help of those who were in danger and distress.

***It is I; do not be afraid.***” When the disciples saw a gleam in the darkness and saw a figure of One who to them looked like Jesus, — though they could not believe their eyes — walking upon the waves of the sea as if out for an evening’s stroll, calmly walking as if He meant to pass them by,<sup>12</sup> they cried out in terror and rushed to the conclusion, ***“It is a ghost!”***

They thought they saw a phantom, a ghost! If they would have remembered their crossing into the land of the Gadarenes,<sup>13</sup> they would have immediately connected the *‘Stiller of the storm’* with this *‘Traveller on the sea.’*

It was only when Jesus spoke to them that their fears were removed. Above the roar of the raging sea and through the darkness of the storm-tossed night came the well-known, the cheering voice, ***“Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.”***

Thus also Jesus comes to us when we are in trouble. And in doing so, He can take what course He pleases. ***“Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.”***<sup>14</sup> Of course, in coming to us, we do not always know His way nor recognise His helping hand. The important point is that we should always trust in Him and always be ready to welcome His comforting presence. What sweet comfort we have in the words of our text, ***“Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.”***

The hymnist writes,<sup>15</sup> *Commit whatever grieves thee, Into the gracious hands Of Him who never leaves thee.*

And now comes the Peter episode. Peter fearless, and Peter frightened; Peter valiant, and Peter weak; Peter dry, and Peter dripping. After the identity of Jesus had been established the disciples were ready to take Him into the boat. But in his impetuous joy Peter could not wait for his Master’s approach. ***“Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.”***

This request of Peter was foolhardy and presumptuous, but it was true to his character. At any rate, it showed his great love and affection for his Saviour, his

willingness to be directed, and it certainly showed his implicit faith and trust in Christ. True, he should have showed this faith in a different manner.

However, with a gracious nod the Lord told him, **“Come!”** But shall Peter pretend to do as his Master does? If a Pharisee would have made this request, demanding a sign, he would have been met with a rebuff, but it was a different matter when Peter was involved. The Lord knew that it came from a sincere and zealous heart.

The Lord is always pleased with the expression of His people’s love, even though mixed with many infirmities. Let us always be willing to do something, to come forward with all kinds of offers. The Lord knows how to correct our errors.

Remember that Peter did not want to walk on the water in order to *“put on a show,”* but to go to Jesus. And after the Lord had given Peter the signal, Peter left the boat and actually ***“walked on the water to go to Jesus.”*** What a wonderful experience for Peter, actually walking on the waters of the sea, borne up by the everlasting arms!

And what a wonderful experience when you know that what you are doing is in accordance with the wish and by the direct will of Christ! Just like walking on the water and treading on the water.

Christ’s power did not fail, but Peter’s faith gave out. ***“But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid”*** and began to sink. As long as Peter fixed his eyes on Christ, all was well. He walked on the water. But he feared the wind. It is one thing to look at the storm from the deck of a ship and another thing to face it in the midst of the waves. Then he began to sink and cried out, ***“Lord, save me!”*** Here his faith failed.

Our eyes must always be fixed on Jesus. As long as our faith is strong, our head will always be kept above water, but when our faith staggers, then we begin to sink. We read in Psalm 42:11, ***“Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; For I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God.”***

Peter prayed, ***“Lord, save me.”*** It was a short prayer, only three words, but it was a good one. His faith was weak, but his prayer was strong. We read in

Psalm 50:15, <sup>15</sup> *Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.*”

“*Call upon Me in the day of trouble.*” When we are in need, actual need, we do not need much instruction on prayer. Our need will drive us to it. *I will deliver you - immediately Jesus stretched out His hand* and saved him. He “*caught him*” just in time, just as he was going down. Then they climbed into the boat.

Peter was rebuked. “*O you of little faith, why did you doubt?*” Now, faith may be true, yet weak. Faith may be strong enough to bring us out, to put us into motion, but not strong enough to carry us through. And therefore Christ tells him, “*O you of little faith.*”

Peter’s cowardice is rebuked. “*Why did you doubt?*” What reason was there for it? Remember, I told you ‘*Come!*’

Let us remember that it is the business of faith to dissolve doubt. The stronger we believe, the less we doubt. Strong faith will always keep our heads above water. And a strong faith is needed, especially on a rainy day and in the stormy sea.

Contrary winds. Winds against us. They come, they blow, they frighten, but in the end, they cease!

### 3. The Contrary Winds They Stop

The winds stop. This is the last point. <sup>32</sup> *And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.* Surely, with Christ in the ship, the winds stopped. There were no contrary winds any more. And if there were any winds at all, they were favourable breezes.

And so amid the rippling waves of a smiling sea and the gentle lights of a Passover moon, a joyful crew could quickly reach port and moor their boat on their familiar shores.

And why not? Jesus is with them who gathers the winds into His hands, binds the waters in a garment, and whose word even the stormy winds fulfil. We read in Psalm 148:8, <sup>8</sup> *Fire and hail, snow and clouds; Stormy wind, fulfilling His word.*



So in conclusion there are contrary winds, winds against us. They come, they blow, they frighten, but in the end, they stop! Thus also in life. The Lord tells us in our text *“Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.”*

So, often in life, when for the moment we are engaged in battling contrary winds, our faith becomes weak and doubt creeps in. Then the Lord has reason to tell us, stretching forth His helping hand and grasping us, *“O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”*

May the Lord grant us stronger faith! May He grant us zeal and love to do His will. With Him in our ship, the winds cease. And with Him as our Pilot, we shall safely reach the heavenly port.

Let us conclude with the words of the hymnist

Jesus, lover of my soul,  
Let me to Thy bosom fly,  
While the nearer waters roll,  
While the tempest still is high.  
Hide me, O my Saviour, hide,  
Till the storm of life is past;  
Safe into the haven guide,  
O receive my soul at last. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

---

<sup>1</sup> 1 Pet. 4:12

<sup>2</sup> Matt 8:24, Mark 4:35

<sup>3</sup> Acts 14:22

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 6:33

<sup>5</sup> John 6:19

<sup>6</sup> John 6:17

<sup>7</sup> Rom. 12:11-12

<sup>8</sup> John 2:4

<sup>9</sup> Hymn 408 v 3

<sup>10</sup> Job 9:8

<sup>11</sup> Psalm 104:3

<sup>12</sup> Mark 6:48

<sup>13</sup> Matt 8:23-34

---

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 28:20

<sup>15</sup> Hymn 409