

Denice Leslie  
September 24, 2006  
San Simeon Sunday  
Luke 8: 22-25

### “Jesus—the Calm in the Storm”

I love to watch the surfer movies—they’re all the same: “in search of the perfect wave.” The last one I saw was about a bunch of surfers out surfing in a storm built sea off the coast of Hawaii some place. The waves were beyond mammoth! Huge Goliath’s! The surfers from the air were just little figures zipping the pipe and the force of the water coming down was unimaginable! Deadly. And yet what a marvel to surf a wave like that!!

But you can’t do it if you aren’t willing to take the risk.

Have you ever experienced a wipe out? I’m not a surfer but I loved to body surf as a kid: the thrill of waiting for the wave, the wonderful ride on the wave speeding me along with just my arms out in front of me or hanging on to a boogie board. I could never get enough. I’d do that all day long until I was exhausted.

But occasionally, I’d miss my timing and get knocked silly. Carried like a rag doll in the wave as it crashed and rolled to shore, I crashed and rolled with it—sand and grit and water in my nose and mouth, seeing nothing but dark water and finally bubbles of light and usually a skinned elbow or knee. It was terrifying! But it didn’t stop me from trying it again. It was worth it!

Life is like surfing waves. Isn’t it? Life is worth the risk of living because it’s so enjoyable. Most of the time the waves are manageable and we roll and tumble with the missteps of life but manage to pick ourselves up again and go back for more: wiser than before.

But occasionally the surf is storm built and the waves we’re asked to manage are beyond us. We do the best we can but there are times when life crashes down on us.

Jesus is out with the disciples in a little boat on the Sea of Galilee. He’s napping and a storm whips up. The boat begins to swamp and the disciples are terrified. In spite of some of them being experienced fishers the storm is beyond their control.

They call out to Jesus who calms the storm.

In the early 1870s Horatio Spafford was a wealthy Chicago lawyer and friend of revivalist Dwight L. Moody. In the 1871 Chicago fire he lost much of his fortune. In the 1873 financial panic he lost most of what was left. His wife Annie’s health and his own misfortunes prompted the family physician to recommend an ocean trip away from the states for the family. At the last minute, because of unexpected business demands, Spafford sent his wife on ahead with their four daughters, ranging in ages from eighteen months to eighteen years, promising to join them in a couple of weeks. Six days out and in mid-ocean, the steamer Ville du Havre collided with the English sailing vessel Lochearn and sank within fifteen minutes. From France Mr. Spafford received a wire from his wife, which read: "Saved alone. Children lost. What shall I do?"

Spafford set sail immediately to be with his wife. After six days at sea, the captain notified Spafford that they were at that very moment passing over the place where his four beautiful daughters were buried at the bottom of the sea. Standing in silence on the deck, gazing at the spot where the ship most likely went down, Spafford suddenly turned away and proceeded to his berth. There he sat at the captain’s desk, and wrote a poem.

It became a hymn, set to a gliding melody written by P.P. Bliss shortly before he (Bliss or Spafford? Uncertain) died in a flaming train accident while trying to rescue his trapped wife, this poem became one of the most inspiring songs to come out of the gospel song movement. It is also one of the greatest hymns about faith ever written.

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,  
when sorrows like sea billows roll;

whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say,  
It is well, it is well with my soul.

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Though Satan should buffet,  
though trials should come,  
let this blest assurance control.....

And, Lord, haste the day when... faith shall be sight, the clouds  
be rolled back as a scroll; the trump shall resound, and the Lord  
shall descend, even so, it is well with my soul.

He called out and Jesus calmed the seas.

Was life any calmer? No, HE was centered spiritually, able  
to go out and continue to risk life in spite of its death dealing  
waves.

It's not about magic. It's about faith. And faith is about a life  
long relationship with God. It's about making space and time in  
one's life for God.

The late Carl Jung had a favorite Chinese story. It is a  
story about a village in China that had been suffering a great  
and protracted drought.

The people waited then went through their various rituals  
and incantations to bring the rain, but nothing seemed to work.

Finally, a group of elders in that little village sent away  
some many miles for a famous rainmaker. They waited  
anxiously for his arrival.

Some many days later, they saw two men appear on the  
horizon, carrying an old, shriveled man on a modest litter. They  
brought him into the village and set him down.

The little man got down out of his litter, looked around and  
sniffed. The elders came to him and said, "What can we do for  
you?" The old man said, "I will need a little house out of town  
where I can be by myself in silence."

So they gave him a house, and he went there by himself.  
The hours went by - two hours, three hours. In the third hour, it  
began to sprinkle, then it began to rain, then it began to pour.

Crops that had been parched were now fed. Seeds that had  
not germinated were born. The people went to him and said, "What  
did you do?" They thought he would come down into their village  
and perform public rituals and incantations...

The old man said, "When I came into your village and got  
down out of my litter, all I could feel was contention, chaos and  
resentment. I had to get away to pray and be in touch with God.

The lesson here is the need to separate ourselves from the  
world—it's about establishing discipline in our lives.

The word disciple and the word discipline have the same root  
meaning—to mold oneself or pattern ones life after Christ requires  
giving time and attention for that to happen. This is what discipline is  
about—the commitment and perseverance required to do the  
shaping.

I mean after all, it's not like we have any control over the surf  
out there. Its actions are random. There's no aforethought of malice  
in what a wave is going to do. The sleeper wave that swept the  
young Hispanic student off the rocks at Montanyo De Oro wasn't  
lying in wait for him. Waves happen.

The question is: are we spiritually prepared when the waves  
come? Are we anchored in the calm of God in such a way that we  
are able to come back up for air and if we don't, know that our lives  
are safe in God's hands, regardless.

There are waves that we make, yes of course; we aren't just  
hapless victims.

Imagine this scenario: Some shipwrecked men are left drifting  
aimlessly on the ocean in a lifeboat. As the days pass under the  
scorching sun, their rations of food and fresh water give out. They  
grow deliriously thirsty.

One night, while the others are asleep, one man ignores all  
previous warnings and gulps down some salt water. He quickly dies.

Ocean water contains seven times more salt than the human  
body can safely ingest. Drinking it, a person dehydrates because the

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kidneys demand extra water to flush the overload of salt. The more salt water someone drinks, the thirstier he gets. He actually dies of thirst. When we lust, we become like this man.

We thirst desperately for something that looks like what we want. We don't realize, however, that it is precisely the opposite of what we really need. In fact, it can kill us.

The separated life, the discerning life—the life that has spent as much time coming to know God's way of life-- that has sought out the rule of Christ as the yardstick for living—is a storm calmed life. A life that isn't lusting for something thirst quenching—meaning quenching.

In fact, the Christ calmed life is the intelligent life—the rational life—because to know God is the way of wisdom.

God's wisdom is learning to recognize what you've got before its gone—like this beautiful environment. The environment sustains us. It's a gift beyond human imagining. And we arrogantly think we can trash it and not trash ourselves?

To know God is to know a sea of wisdom deeper than the farthest star we can see in a telescope and deeper than the middle of this beautiful blue Pacific Ocean!

And yet this same unfathomable—quite literally unfathomable—God chooses to be made known to us in the form of our creaturely selves. Chooses one of our kind as a vehicle for communication. And we continue to ask God to write the answer to life's questions big for us?? This reminds me of another little story:

A man was hired to paint lines on a newly resurfaced portion of interstate highway. The first day he painted 109 miles, and his supervisor, impressed by such an effort, told him he would recommend a promotion and raise in pay if he kept up that pace. But the next day he was able to paint only five miles. On the following day he did only one mile and when he reported in at quitting time he was fired. "It isn't my fault," he muttered as

he walked away shaking his head. "I kept getting farther away from the can."

Sometimes it is necessary to go all the way back to the beginning to accomplish things. But sometimes we need only take the can with us.<sup>1</sup>

We can take what Jesus gives us anywhere, through any storm because Jesus calms the storm.

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<sup>1</sup> All of the illustration stories for this sermon are from HomileticsOnline, Topical Illustration Index: Water. The last one which I'd read on the HO page before, about the man painting the line down the road was submitted to Homiletics by J. Walter Cross of Bradenton, Florida, for this story).