

Luke 8:22-25

*One day Jesus said to his disciples, "**Let's go over to the other side of the lake.**" So they got into a boat and set out. As they sailed, he fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger. The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!"*

*He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. "**Where is your faith?**" he asked his disciples. In fear and amazement they asked one another, "Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him."*

On October 30, 1991 a major storm, originally referred to as the “Halloween Nor’easter” and since named the “Perfect Storm” by a local meteorologist and made famous in the movie by the same name, formed off the East Coast. This storm harassed boats from Nova Scotia down to the New Jersey coast. The 70' long liner Andrea Gail went down in that storm and with her went the crew of sword-fishermen, Captain William "Billy" Tyne, Robert "Bobby" Shatford both of Gloucester Ma., Dale Murphy and Michael "Bugsy" Moran of Bradenton Beach, Florida, David "Sully" Sullivan and Alfred Pierre of New York City.

The Andrea Gail began her return voyage from the Flemish Caps, which is some 200-300 miles off the coast of Newfoundland back to Gloucester Ma., on October 26, 1991. The last reported transmission from Andrea Gail was about 6:00 p.m. on the evening of October 28, 1991. Captain Billy Tyne reported his position as northeast of Sable Island. His final recorded words were, “She's comin' on, boys, and she's comin' on strong!” This storm was created by the converging of two large storms and an eastern low.

Wind gusts of up to 150 mph with waves reportedly exceeded 100 feet in height, doomed the Andrea Gail and her crew of six somewhere along the continental shelf near Sable Island, off the coast of Nova Scotia.¹

While facing such a storm what could these men have done to prepare? When a storm is bearing down on the coast what can you do to prepare your ship. The Navy sends its ships out to sea to ride out such storms. Think about that for a moment, to prepare for a storm they take the ships further out to sea. They do not tie the ships up in the harbor and hug the shore. Though many do, and most ships are destroyed. They take to the high seas; they put out into deep water, and prepare to ride the waves.

Are we, the church, prepared for the coming storm? Are we prepared to put out into the deep water, or are we content to play it safe in the harbor and hug the shore, where we will be beaten and battered and maybe even destroyed. Are we going to hide ourselves in the harbor and be drowned? This storm I'm talking about is taking the church where no church has gone before.

If the church, if this church is not watchful and wakeful, it will find itself destroyed by the coming winds and waves. With everyone and everything spinning and whirling in the hurricane force winds Christians are being called to go out to face the storm, not run and hide from it. Jesus is calling to us, do you hear Him, *“Let's go over to the other side.”*

The church, as a whole, is afraid of storms. The people of the church prefer the tranquility of calm seas, and what they believe to be safe harbors. People in the church seek the protection of safe harbors when storms arise. The safest place for a ship in a storm is not the harbor tied to some pier, its out to sea. What storm are you talking about preacher, its nice outside? We're not in any trouble, we're doing alright, and we're paying all our bills and then some. This storm which is getting stronger and stronger everyday; it is the coming together of three smaller storms; the storm of the past, the storm of the present, and the storm of the future. All three of these smaller storms are combining for one major storm the church must face or die.

The church is fighting for its survival, its fighting to stay alive. Some or most may disagree with me, but this storm is coming, and the question is what are we, the church going to do?

Does anyone want to argue that children today live in an entirely different world than the one we grew up in, and more often these two worlds do not speak to each other? Anyone born after 1960 is wired differently than those of 30's & 40's, and anyone born after 1980 has no clue to what I'm talking about. Their world is totally alien to the older generation. The world today has changed. These storm winds I'm speaking of are the winds of change. The question which comes with these winds of change: How can the church get through this perfect storm?

First and foremost the church needs to stop sitting around complaining and whining about how things are and how you wish we could go back to the good old days. Too many people are continually wishing to return to the good old days. If you're honest about everything you would admit they really weren't that good. Does anyone remember the #1 country music song by Tim McGraw "Back

When?” What do you think is the reason it went to #1? It’s because people would rather cling to the past, and stay in their comfort zones, instead of putting out and facing the storms of life. Many people believe just coming to church makes them Christian. Many people believe they just need to come to church and sit in their pew and God will not let anything happen to them or their church. It’s that kind of thinking that has the church in the position it’s currently in.

Don’t blame God for sending the storm our way. The people responsible for this storm coming is you, it’s me, if every person who sits idly by and plays church, rather than going out into the world and being the church. We should see this impending storm, not as something to fear, but as an opportunity to follow and serve Jesus.

This call to go and face the storm is greater now than ever before. It’s not for the faint of heart, but then whoever said serving God was supposed to be easy. Jesus warned us, He told us to consider the cost before we say we will follow Him. Counting the cost of discipleship is near and dear to the heart of Jesus. In Luke 14 Jesus says, “*Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow Me cannot be my disciple,*”

and later in the same chapter Jesus adds, “*Any of you who does not give up everything he cannot be my disciple.*” Are you willing to give up the comforts of this harbor and sail out into the deep water?

This storm which is raging can not be managed, and don't for a minute think you can control what is happening. We cannot pick and choose when and where we will witness for Jesus. We cannot continue to live and worship in our gated communities and expect God to bless what we do. We are commanded by Jesus to, “*Go into all the world.*” Notice, Jesus did not say, ‘stay around your house, and if by chance someone nice comes by then you might live the gospel.’ Jesus did not call us to “play church each Sunday.” No, Jesus calls all Christians to **Be the Church** and, to “*Go into all the world.*”

How many of you remember the movie “Forrest Gump? How did Forest and his boat survive the coming storm? Did they hug the harbor? No, he sailed his boat out into the deep. What is certain about this storm is that many churches will be left behind in the storm's wake.

They will be smashed on the rocks of maintaining where they are and what they have, and eventually they will sink and die. What will the church have to give up? What will the church need to take on, to prepare itself for the ultimate mission?

We are in serious trouble people; the Church is no longer the cement which holds society together. Society no longer turns to the church for guidance and direction. The church is no longer the common backdrop of the culture, and even where the church is still present, it's only seen as some faded veneer of what it once was and is rapidly vanishing. Learn from the past, don't live in it. Use what you learned and apply it to live for Christ in the present, not just sit around and exist. All the while setting sail for the future and the deep waters. That's what being the church is all about. It's about time we stop coming to church and start being the church.

In a recent poll, more people recognized the golden arches of McDonalds than the Cross of Christ. Christian bible stories are virtually unknown by our young. As a preacher I can no longer in a sermon say, "You know the story of David & Goliath."

You know why? Because people don't! Do you remember a time when the whole town would shut down on Good Friday? Stores would remain closed on Easter Day and Christmas Day? We no longer celebrate the birth of Christ; it's now a "Holiday Season." Family prayers at meal time, stories and bedtime prayers must be taught to new Christian families. It's not part of their family experience. People are so wrapped up in their own little worlds they could care less what is happening to the church. As long as they have a place to sit on Sunday morning everything is alright by them.

One teacher, during the Christmas season, was sharing with her class all the different stories. She read stories about Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, and the Christmas story. As she read the Christmas story, one little boy raised his hand and said "Teacher, that was a beautiful story, could you read it again?" She did. After the second reading he raised his hand again and asked. It is such a beautiful story, but why did they name the baby after a curse word!?

In America a Jew can be a Jew, a Buddhist can be a Buddhist, a Muslim can be a Muslim, but let a Christian try and be a Christian and total chaos breaks out. Tell me there is no storm coming; we are facing one of the worst storms the church has ever faced. Again, the people responsible for this storm coming is you, and it's me, and what hurts even more is that many Christians today could care less as long as no one bothers them.

Jesus is leading His church into this Perfect Storm not away from it. He is calling to us to "*go over to the other side.*" We can not run away from the storm. We can only prepare ourselves to ride this ship, called the church, out and face the storm. Jesus is the one stable force in the howling wind and raging seas. The best days for the church lie in the future not in its past, but only if we set sail for the deep and leave the shallows. Go out boldly, be a witness. Meet the storm and its challenges head on. Be wise in the way you act towards people of the world. Make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, and seasoned with His salt.

Who knows what gifts God has in store for this church during, and after this storm passes? Are you willing to step up or is the shallow water your home? Jesus asks us this morning, “*Where is your faith?*”

There is an old hymn entitled “The Old Rugged Cross,” with the words, “We shall cling to The Old Rugged Cross,” the question I now pose to you is, will you mean what you sing to God or will it be a lie? Will you cling to the cross? Jesus said, “*I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble.*” *Don’t worry! Be of good cheer. I have overcome the world.*” As Captain Billy Tyne said, “She's comin' on, and she's comin' on strong!” The Perfect Storm is coming and we need real Christians to leave the shallows and “*go over to the other side.*” We need to ride the waves not run from them. Don’t fear, God is already there waiting for us, are you ready to sail out, or are you content to stay tied to the pier? “She's comin' on, and she's comin' on strong!”ⁱⁱ

ⁱ Sebastian Junger, *The Perfect Storm: A Story of Men Against the Sea*, (New York: Norton, 1997)

ⁱⁱ Leonard Sweet, *The Church of the Perfect Storm*, (Abington Press: Nashville 2008) pp. 1-22