

## Take Heart

Jesus' disciples had been very busy and were tired. Being men who fished, they went out in a boat to relax and to find new energy for their mission. Jesus did not go with them but went into the nearby hills to talk to God in prayer. He went to the mountains to draw strength from their eternal presence. He needed time to be alone with God and to listen for God's voice in the quiet evening hours. He stayed until three o'clock in the morning, perhaps unaware of the storm that was churning the waters of the lake into rolling waves. In their boat, the disciples were afraid, and they were not expecting Jesus to come to them. Yet there he was, walking to them on the water. They took some time to recognize him. Jesus said to them, "Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid." (Matthew 14:27)

Peter, always filled with enthusiasm, started to walk toward Jesus, but he began to flounder and would have fallen had not Jesus reached out and taken his hand. Peter had to step out of the boat to know that Jesus was ready to help him in his troubles. How often do we let our doubts and fears cause us to sink into despair and sorrow? But the winds must come and bring the rain, or the land will be a desert. The trials and difficulties in life are like the fire that tempers steel and makes it fit to be turned into tools.

A vacationer watched with curiosity as a lumberjack jabbed his sharp hook into a log, separating it from the others floating down the stream. When asked why he did this, the worker replied, "These may all look the same to you, but a few of them are quite different. The logs that I let pass grew in a valley where they were always protected from the storms. Their grain is coarse. The ones that I hook and keep apart from the rest came from high up the mountains. From the time they were small, they were beaten by strong winds. This toughens the trees and gives them a fine, beautiful grain. They too are good to make into plain lumber. They are used for the finest woodworking."

Like trees on the mountains, we can grow strong when we are rooted in our faith. If we live our lives without the winds or rains of adversity, how will we grow? Will we be soft and easily broken, or have we been tested and grown strong on the journey? When we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, we can stand unafraid through the storms of life and walk on the troubled waters.

We sometimes speak of the paralysis that comes from being afraid. Fear can stop us from acting or doing what we need to do. This is sometimes called the "deer-in-the-headlights" response. The wind and the waves can upset our plans, turn our dreams into nightmares, and leave us drowning in regret. But Jesus said, "Do not be afraid." Just as he asked Peter to leave the boat, he asks us to leave behind the things that make us fearful. As we live out our lives, we may have many fears – for our personal safety and health or for our ability to care for our families. Events in our country and the world cause us to be afraid: wars, diseases, and natural disasters. But, through it all, Jesus says, "I am with you." The living Christ offers to us the courage to walk on life's turbulent waters when we fix our eyes on him.

### PRAYER:

In all the troubles of our lives we turn to you, O God. We are afraid, we are unsure, we feel alone. Walk with us in the storm. Be present in our doubts and in our fears. Help us to hear your gentle voice and to know that you are with us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.