



**FRIENDS OF HOPE THROUGH STORMS
(Sermon)**

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KEY TEXT: Mark 4:35-37

Our lives are like a boat trip Jesus took with his disciples across the infamous Sea of Galilee. The decision to venture into the depths of life launches us into unpredictable territory - territory that could spring surprises at anytime. That we are alive means we are sailing across the Sea of Life.

We are going somewhere as directed by circumstances or by our choices. We board the boat not anticipating or picturing anything the Sea of Life may have in store for us. Reaching our destination, and what we will do upon arrival, looms large in our minds. We don't think, wish, and envisage turbulence or turmoil. We don't imagine trouble or trauma that may be lurking in the boat we are traveling in or the waves that look normal to us. "Sailing home, sailing home" is our song as we leave the shore and journey on into the depths of the unpredictable Sea of Life, with or without Jesus. We are sailing to the other side, to our destination without any premonition of what lies ahead once we are at sea.

We cannot predict or foresee what the Sea of Life will throw at us. Even though Jesus may be travelling with us, He does not always warn us of what lies ahead. Jesus tells us to sail to the other side, across the known dangers of the Sea of Galilee, the Sea of Tiberias, the Lake of Gennaserit. We must sail across this Sea of Galilee, renowned for its violent, sudden, and life-threatening storms. We cross this Sea of Life out of necessity, regardless of violent, sudden, and life-threatening storms that may be under the radar.

Jesus tells us to cross, fully aware of the risks involved, and we cross because He has told us to sail across to the other side. Our lives cannot remain at the shore. Whether on not we believe in God, we all must sail across the risky Sea of Life. Our lives must move forward past the Rubicon. We will never progress if we stay on the shores of safety and comfort. Through dangers, turbulences, storms, and risks of death, we must cross to the other side. We must cross the Sea of Life because we are not given the spirit of fear. We must sail across in spite of many known and unknown risks that may be involved or revealed. We sail, not because it is safe to be alive, but because we must cross to the other side. Life must progress. We must move on. We must grow up. We must leave the shore and risk crossing to the other side--whatever the other side may be. We must leave the shores of safety for the Seas and Shores of Uncertainty. The nature of life is as uncertain and unpredictable as uncertainty itself.

Like the disciples that night, our lives may be sailing smoothly across this Sea of Life. Our lives may be sailing so smoothly that the fatigued Jesus would sleep

aboard the boat. Our lives may be so peaceful, but it is the Sea of Galilee we are sailing on. It is the unpredictable Sea of Life. By faith we must journey like Abraham, not knowing where we are going or what lies along the journey. Drought may suddenly rear its ugly head in our faces as we continue with our journey. We may suddenly find that the inhabitants of the land are still there, as Abraham discovered when he got to the Promised Land (Genesis 12:6). Stumbling blocks may come along the way. Even though we may have dreamed of greatness as Joseph did, we may still find the storms of rejection (Genesis 37:4), false accusation (Genesis 39:13-15), imprisonment (Genesis 39:19-20), and being forgotten for a while (Genesis 41:1, 9-13) -- storms that may pave the way to our greatness.

We must sail and cross over through what may appear as detours or threats to our God-given destination. The storms on our way to our destination may be violent, sudden, rough, forceful, painful, cruel, turbulent, life-threatening, or life-taking, as Paul experienced (Acts 27:10). These squalls may be hard knocks or trying crucibles that may toss our world upside down, causing unprecedented panic and uncertainty. We may be gifted with professional skills and practical experience to sail across this unpredictable Sea of Life, but our expertise and experience may not always match to survive all of our life storms. We may be experienced fishers and sailors, but some storms will overwhelm us. Anticipating a storm, we may have brought all the equipment on board, but still some sudden storms will take us by surprise.

Your storms may be spiritual, emotional, physical, economical, financial, relational, or social. Your squalls in the Sea of life may be personal or may be professional. Your storms may be cornering or threatening you in some aspect of your life. They may affect your children or your marriage. They may touch your bank balances or your business. They may come with suddenness like a storm or as a quick succession and as a series of sorrows, as it did for Job (Job 1:13-20). They may relentlessly threaten to collapse your world and upset your comfort zone. All of a sudden, from nowhere, without warning or consultation, your storm may steal your sleep or your job. Like a thief, it may snatch your spouse or loved ones en masse. Your storm may be a car accident that wipes out your entire family and you are the only survivor in the ordeal. Your crucible in the Sea of Life may be your health that deteriorates very quickly or with multiple organ failure.

This is the Sea of Life; this is the Sea of Storms. You cannot predict or choose what Life Storm you will have. The restaurateur does not ask you what menu you want. You are given what the restaurateur decides for you. Life does not let you choose what you want to have from the menu of risks and danger. Rather, life throws a storm at you.

Even though we are travelling with Jesus, we do not always have the risks laid out beforehand. We are not always forewarned. Our lives may be shaken by the harsh and sudden storms as we journey across to the other side. We may be sailing smoothly to our dream destination with Jesus on board when, suddenly, a storm rears its ugly head in the middle of our peace. Turbulences lead to turmoil, panic, and distress. From nowhere, to our surprise and to our fear, the boat of tranquility is suddenly tossed by the waves of fright. Suddenly, in the middle of our happiness, our faith is shaken, our hope trembles, our peace is threatened, and our world is upset. We are thrown out of balance as our lives are suddenly turned for the worst, without

warning us, without preparation. Life is always brewing a storm for each of us. Satan is always hoping and working hard to destroy us. While we sail across unsuspectingly, Satan is always in search of an opportunity to frustrate us, to destroy us. It could come at any time. It could arise from any angle. This is the Sea of Life.

Jesus promised to be with whoever follows him through thick and thin. **Isaiah 43:2** has one of the most beautiful assurances for our storms:

*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you.
When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned,
Nor shall the flame scorch you.*

Through all the ages, Jesus wanted to inspire hope by several assurances. He also told His disciples that in the world, they would have trouble. Across the Sea of Life, His followers will have trouble (John 16:33) and tribulation (Acts 14:22). They will have trials, storms, and struggles but they were not to despair. They were not to lose heart. They were to have hope. Hope has faith, confidence, belief, trust, courage, optimism, expectation, anticipation, assurance, and so on among other synonyms. We are to have courage and confidence because of Jesus' assurances to be with us through our tribulations.

Hope is the opposite of despair, hopelessness, pessimism, discouragement, fear, despondency, disbelief, distrust, doubt, dread, dismay, mistrust, unbelief, apprehension, and so on. We are not to despair or lose hope. We are not to be despondent or lose hope. Hope is defined as an optimistic attitude, trustful expectation, anticipation of favorable reality, confident expectation, a disposition of trust, a positive attitude against odds, being optimistic in the face of hopeless and despair. Hope is the anchor of the ship in the raging storm.

Paul lets us in on a secret when he tells us in **Hebrews 11:1** that “... **faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.**” Samuel Smiles said, “Hope is like the sun, which as we journey toward it, casts the shadow of our burden behind us ...” Benjamin Disraeli said, “I am prepared for the worst, but hope for the best.” But the most powerful comes from Vaclav Havel who said, “Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.”

In reality, our lives do not always turn out right but it makes sense in the light of Romans 8:28. Desmond Tutu said, “Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.” Havel and Tutu's quotes resonate with **Romans 8:28** which says, “**And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.**” This realization or disposition helps the believers through their storms, knowing God makes all things to work for His children. That means that God allows all the storms, difficulties, and challenges to work to our benefit. This assurance helps the follower of Jesus to be confident of a different reality than what prevails.

Hope says the storm will not overwhelm you, even though it seems so. Hope says you will prosper, even though you are going through the valley of doom. Hope

says that God is working out something, even through the storm. Hope says don't be afraid, don't despair, don't lose heart. Hope gives us the certainty that no matter what happens, God is still on His throne. Hope says to trust God's leading in spite of the circumstances. Hope says to hang in there, help is coming! Hope says through it all God will be with you— He will not leave you. Hope says with Jesus in the vessel, you can smile at the storm. Hope says though the storm rages, you will make it to the harbor. Hope says though the water threatens to engulf the vessel, you will make it to the shore. Hope says your boat may capsize and sink but Jesus has a plan. Hope says you may be thrown into the fiery furnace and all may look lost, but Jesus is watchfully there with you. Even though your loved one may die, hope says trust Jesus. Even though you may lose your job, hope says trust Jesus. Even though you may lose your income, hope says trust Jesus. In Psalm 23:4 David said; **“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me ...”**

Jesus' presence is our hope and assurance in every situation. Jesus is our assurance through every storm and tribulation. Jesus is our certainty through every tremor and uncertainty. Jesus does not only give us hope, He **IS** our hope. He is the one that God gave as hope when Adam and Eve sinned (Genesis 3:16). He is the promised hope of ages that was expected through all the ages who became Immanuel at the right time. He is the one who pulled Israel out of Egyptian bondage (Exodus 20:2) to a land of milk and honey. Jesus was Israel's light by night and cloud by day as they journeyed through the desert. Jesus is the manna and Bread of Life for the hungry. Jesus is the Living Water Israel drank in the desert when they were thirsty; that the Samaritan woman at the well desired to quench her needs (John 4:15). When she met Jesus, her deep needs were met.

For Abraham, Elijah and the widow, Jesus was the Provider that provided a way of escape. For Joseph and John He was the Preserver that strengthened and restored the rejected and deserted. For Isaiah, Jeremiah, John, and Stephen, Jesus was the endurance through their crucibles, the one who strengthened their resolve in martyrdom. For Moses and John the Baptist, Jesus was the Lamb of God who died to save. For Rahab and Mary, Jesus restored them to dignity and pure life. For Joshua and Gideon, Jesus was the victorious chief commander through risky wars. For Caleb and Paul He was the source of courage no matter what He faced. For David and Peter, Jesus was their joy of salvation, forgiveness, and restoration when they sinned and dismally failed. For Joseph's Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar, Jesus was the intelligence behind intelligences that guided them when they were not sure of the future. For Jacob and David, Jesus was their limitless shepherd.

For the demoniacs and the lame, Jesus is God's healer among us. For the patriarchs and disciples, Jesus is our leader who leads us through spiritual darkness and apostasy. For the prophets and apostles, Jesus is the reason for preaching hope to the hopeless. For me, Jesus is the most intimate Friend I could ever have through my life's journey. Jesus is my hope when I am hopeless. Jesus is my help when I am helpless. He is my assurance when I am unsure. Jesus is my strength and energy when I am discouraged. Jesus is my direction and director when I am lost. Jesus is my joy when I am sad. Jesus is my courage when I am afraid. Jesus is the anchor in my life. Jesus is my journey and my destination. Jesus is my sustainer and protector. Jesus is my safety and my security. This assures me through my storms. Through my storms,

trials, and troubles, Jesus has been there. Through my valleys and plains, Jesus has been a reassuring friend.

There were storms that were sudden and sad--Jesus was closest. There were times my boat was swamped--Jesus brought stability and hope. There were times my boat capsized and my friend, Jesus, helped me survive. There were times I thought I had sunken never to come up again, but Jesus restored me. Jesus has been the Master of all my storms. In every situation, in every storm, every crisis, in every trial, in every trouble, Jesus has been my hope and assurance. Indeed, I can say, with Jesus in the vessel, you can smile at the storm. I have smiled through the deaths of loved ones. I have smiled through various crises. As I look through my brief but dramatic history, I can testify that Jesus has been my Shepherd who kept me afloat through hope.

Horatio Spafford was a successful and wealthy Presbyterian elder and lawyer in the 1860s. He wrote a song that has been my inspiration in my storms. He was a prominent partner in a "thriving law firm," and he had invested significantly in real estate in Chicago. October 8-10 in 1871, the Great Fire of Chicago razed the entire city as if it was Sodom and Gomorrah. The fire was recorded as "one of the largest US disasters of the 19th century," and it killed hundreds of people and "left more than 100,000 residents homeless."

A significant portion of Spafford's estate was destroyed in the fire, adding grief to the tragic loss of his only son in 1870. On November 21, 1873, his wife, who had sailed ahead of him to England, sent him a telegram, "Saved alone. What shall I do?" Two hundred twenty-six lives were lost aboard the steamship his entire family had boarded. Anna Spafford had survived the tragedy, but their four daughters had drowned with the luxury ship that sank in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean within 12 minutes. Eleven year-old Annie, nine year-old Maggie, five year-old Bessie, and two year-old Tanetta were Horatio and Anna Spafford's four daughters that Anna had sailed with across the Atlantic while Horatio had to remain behind for business.

Immediately after receiving Anna's telegram, Horatio boarded a ship to fetch his wife. As the ship he boarded was passing his four daughters' watery grave, the captain of the ship called him to his private cabin to show him the spot of the shipwreck. According to his daughter born later, that moment for Horatio Spafford was like "passing through the valley of the shadow of death." It was while passing through the place of his childrens' deaths that he penned the words of the hymn many of us love, "*It is Well, it is Well with my Soul.*"

This is where Horatio's faith should have collapsed after a series of tragedies. His life had suddenly capsized. The Sea of Life was throwing a violent storm at his heart. His serial and multiple grief -- loss of four daughters in one incident -- was rolling like torrential "sea-billows" or the large sea waves he may have been watching. Indeed, though Satan was feasting on him buffet-style, striking repeatedly, his faith was his anchor through his storm. Horatio's hope was firmly rooted in God and His assurance: Let this blessed assurance control. He chose to trust God whatever his "lot" was. Even though sorrows were raging like sea-billows, it was well with his soul. The enemy of souls was attacking Horatio so that he would lose his hope and hold on God, but he chose to be a friend of hope. He chose to be a hero of hope.

In the raging storms of life, let's remain friends of hope. In the middle of our crisis, let's let our hope hold as an anchor in the sea. Even though our storms rage like sea-billows, let this blessed assurance control. Let us trust God even though we do not understand His plan. Through hope we survive Satan's attacks. Friends of hope we are. Friends of hope we must be. Let's remain friends of hope to survive through the Sea of Life. Let's remain friends of hope through life's storms.