

## **“Walk On Through the Storm”**

Oscar Hammerstein, was a brilliant song writer, he is best known for his collaborations with composer Richard Rodgers, as the duo Rodgers and Hammerstein, whose musicals include *Oklahoma! Carousel, South Pacific, The King and I*, and *The Sound of Music* and there are many other classic musicals.

He wrote the words to:

***When you walk through a storm***

*Keep your chin up high*

*And don't be afraid of the dark.*

*At the end of the storm*

*Is a golden sky*

*And the sweet, silver song of a lark.*

*Walk on through the wind,*

*Walk on through the rain,*

*Though your dreams be tossed and blown.*

*Walk on, walk on, with hope in your heart,*

*And you'll never walk alone!*

*You'll never walk alone.*

I know that a few football clubs have hijacked this song, which can be unfortunate because people suddenly identify it as a football song but this song should be sung by Christians with faith in our hearts because our Lord and Master Jesus walked through the storm.

Hammerstein's father was Jewish and his mother had English parents. He attended a Church in New York, and I would like to think that our gospel story today inspired him. Because he writes about walking through a storm. Jesus walked through the storm, so we too can walk through any storm with hope in our hearts, for as the lyric says, you'll never walk alone.

That is what our gospel reading is about today.

The disciples were caught in a storm and it challenged their safety and security. It was once said "A ship in harbour is safe, but that is not what ships are built for," how true. Ships and boats were made to sail on seas and oceans and so it is with us.

I remember as a 16-year-old boy, heading out on a 40' fishing boat from Island of Mull and heading to the Crinan canal, and being caught in the midst of a storm; the waves crashing over the boat, as the boat fell into large pockets of the sea, a terrifying storm.

I was downstairs in the fo'c's'le, and I was told to stay put, as the captain tried to navigate the storm. Eventually we sailed through the storm, the beams in the boat had cracked but we made it alive, thankful for being delivered, Yes! somethings in life, you don't forget, and the apostle John and the disciples would have long remembered this encounter, not just for the storm, but also the appearance of Jesus, which we are told terrified them!

All four gospel writers tell a story of a storm on lake Galilee, Matthew, Mark and Luke tell how Jesus was asleep during the storm, and they have to wake him up, and he rebukes the wind and the waves die down, "O you of little faith" he said to his disciples, and they marvelled at him!

At the time of Jesus, a person who wanted to know the right way to live, within their Jewish law, would initiate a relationship with a local rabbi. It was common for followers of a certain rabbi to literally move in with them. It was believed that the closest you could get to God on earth was through the rabbi. They would listen, study, watch, give to the cause, and commit themselves totally to follow their rabbi. This helps us understand the relationship that the disciples had with Jesus. He called them to follow his ways and to walk where he would walk and he would protect them and be with them in difficult times. So, he allows them to walk into the storm and from it comes opportunity to learn and grow as his disciple.

I believe that Mathew, Mark, Luke and John have all placed in their gospels the storm story to inform us of the importance of relying on God to help us in life.

The boat represents our wee world; it may be our family, our homes or our churches, and what the story tells us is that storms can blow up quickly, and threaten our very existence.

Last Sunday we celebrated Harvest and we considered how Jesus fed 5000 people with a boy's offering of 5 barley rolls and two sardines. This was a life changing event for everyone who came to hear Jesus, not only were they fed spiritually by his teaching, they were fed physically with the banquet that he laid on for them – a banquet that would have reminded the people of their rich history, God providing manna for them in the desert; Elijah being provided for at the lowest point of his life with bread, and so it's not surprising that the crowd wanted to carry Jesus off and make him King.

This was the moment that many in Israel had been waiting for; they had been waiting for a deliverer and now they had Jesus. But Jesus did not come for this reason; he did not come to earth to be made a King; he came to point people to God; to save people from themselves – their greed and selfishness and to remind them of a greater Kingdom, than that of this world, the Kingdom of God, which he came to inaugurate. If Jesus was to be their King, it wasn't one of human power and authority but one of grace, service and peace. Jesus wanted to reign as a servant King.

So, Jesus slips out of sight – he dodges the crowd and heads high into the hills. He wanted to be alone, and who would blame him; he had been in the heat of the furnace all day, teaching and healing and then feeding all these people, and keeping his disciples on track. He would have been physically exhausted, and so he finds that quiet space, away from everyone.

We all need that quiet space an opportunity to rest, refocus and step out in faith.

Where is your quiet space? What time of day is it at? Where do you go to renew your strength?

But the disciples didn't follow him into the lonely hills, perhaps they should have, perhaps they should also have spent the night in prayer, but they were obviously not ready for this, rather they made their way across the lake to their home town of Capernaum. Remember they had 12 baskets of food to

deliver – the leftovers from the feast, and they were to deliver this to the hungry people in their home villages.

Amongst them that night were experienced fishermen, who were familiar with the sea at night, but they had left their past life behind them, and now they were a different type of fishermen, they were appointed to be fishers of men; their job description had changed, from searching for fish, to feeding people's hunger; they now were charged with searching for hungry souls that might be brought into the Kingdom of God.

John tells us in his reading that darkness had fallen; the apostle John uses the motifs of darkness and light to describe the spiritual state of the soul; Nicodemus came to Jesus at night, he came in darkness, it was at night when Judas betrayed Jesus, the darkness of the night brings its challenges, and so the disciples were to discover that darkness on Lake Galilee is no fun.

We discover that with the darkness comes the storm. A strong wind which sprang up and the water grew very rough; this is not uncommon on Lake Galilee, as the wind funnels through the hills onto the lake and there on their boat, they struggle against the elements.

John is writing this to his church, to let them see that the Christian faith is not all about lovely warm days, sitting on the mountain listening to Jesus; it is not just about watching Jesus performs miracles; that Christian faith is often about storms which come from nowhere.

The boat is an analogy for the Church and when this gospel was composed, Christians were being buffeted and shaken for their faith. Nero was Emperor and for his entertainment, he would tar Christians with feathers and set them alight in his garden for his guests to watch. Christians were hated.

Their little boat, in the midst of the stormy waters and all they had was their brute strength to row into the storm. We are told that they rowed for 3 – 4 miles; quite an effort, against nature. No longer were they romanticising about Jesus and what he could do; now they were fighting for their lives, the first century church, was in many respects like these disciples, as are many churches today, throughout the world, who live with persecution.

In the midst of their desperation and probably at their lowest point on this journey, they saw Jesus walking on the water, and coming towards the boat,

and they were terrified. It sounds as though they were more terrified of seeing Jesus as they were of the storm.

Jesus walks through the storm and approaches the boat. Their initial emotion is fear. It's not every day that a person can walk on water and through a storm. But Jesus speaks to reassure them, "Don't be afraid: it is I myself."

With those comforting words, they gladly took Jesus aboard; gladly, might be a weak word, suddenly their world view had changed, the one who had power over every storm, had now entered into their boat and entered into their small 1<sup>st</sup> century church. The One who said at the beginning of time, *Let there be light*, was now saying to the storm, *Be still!*

Without Jesus, they had rowed for hours, making slow progress, but with Jesus on board, we are told that suddenly the boat reached the shore that they were making for.

Here is the kind of story that a fisherman like John would love to recall, every last detail would have been engraved on his mind; every time, he thought about it, he would feel that night again; the grey silver of the moonlight as they headed out into the depths, the joy they felt in their hearts as their minds were still buzzing with adrenaline after being with Jesus all day; the sound of the whistling wind building in the distance; the rough oar against his hand, the flapping sail, the sound of surging water, their little boat being tossed about and then the unexpected appearance of Jesus; then the comforting sound of his voice, across the hissing sea, "Do not be afraid, it is I" and then before they know it, the crunch of their boat as they arrive on the gravelly shore of Capernaum.

What a day, what a night!

What did the disciples learn from this story, as I started? I believe they learned, not only to trust Jesus in the daylight, as he fed 5000 people, but to trust him also in the dark, as he came to them walking on water to calm the storm.

Jesus comes to us in our storms of life. He comes alongside us and he says, Do not be afraid, it is I!

Perhaps today, everything is going well for you and you can rejoice in the good things of life, God is good and you can relate to the disciples basking in the sunshine of the hills watching their master feed 5000 people, or maybe

you are with the disciples on the boat, their lives have been tossed about by a storm and these storms can come in all shapes and sizes but remember we have a saviour who comes to us walking through the storm and he calls to us do not be afraid and if we listen to him and allow him space in our lives, in our boats, then we can hear him say, Do not be afraid ,I am with you! And we can sing with confidence...

*When you walk through a storm*

*Keep your chin up high*

*And don't be afraid of the dark.*

*At the end of the storm*

*Is a golden sky*

*And the sweet, silver song of a lark.*

*Walk on through the wind,*

*Walk on through the rain,*

*Though your dreams be tossed and blown.*

*Walk on, walk on, with hope in your heart,*

*And you'll never walk alone!*