

## Gripped by Fear (John 6:16-21)

By David Soper

*They had rowed three or four miles when suddenly they saw Jesus walking on the water toward the boat. They were terrified, but he called out to them, "Don't be afraid. I am here!" John 6:19-20*

During my last year of college, I went with a group of friends in the early spring to a remote location on Lake Superior for a weekend of camping and fishing. We were camped at a beautiful spot near the mouth of the Huron River in northern Michigan. The air was still cold from winter, and in fact, the ice had just broken up on the lake the week before. That first morning the wind was blowing hard and the waves were rough, but we were determined to fish. Some of the guys decided to play it safe and walk up the river and fish from shore, but myself, and two others wanted to venture out onto the big lake and fish for Coho salmon. After we launched the boat it wasn't long before we realized how dangerous it was, and that we had made a foolish decision. As we desperately tried to navigate our way back to the safety of the river, we spun sideways into a large wave and it flipped our 20 foot boat like it was nothing. All these years later, I can still remember the slow motion feeling of flying through the air and out of the boat into the dark, ice cold water. I was terrified at the thought of drowning or dying from hypothermia, but God helped all three of us make it to shore, and thankfully, we each recovered in a few days.

It was a defining moment in my life, and not just because of the near death experience, but because I began to understand the power and grace of God in a whole new way. All my life I had been taught about God's amazing grace, but it was more of a spiritual concept to me than it was a personal reality. The very second that my feet touched the safety of the shoreline, I knew deep inside me that God had not merely saved me from drowning, He was reaching out to me to teach me some profound lessons in a way that I would never forget. The fear that gripped me on the lake suddenly became a razor sharp focus on God.

As I sat there violently shaking from the cold and soaked to the bone, I was overwhelmed by the thought that God was giving me another chance. Even though I professed to be a Christian, I had been living in a self centered fog where my highest priority was drugs. There was a battle raging for my heart and I didn't even know it. Jesus went to drastic measures to shake me up and get me to think about what I was going to do with the rest of my life. This is the reality of grace! I had been completely ignoring God and it wasn't until I experienced the fear of losing everything that God really got my attention. My eyes were now opened to the fact that life is serious business. I had been afraid to give Jesus control, but now I was afraid of what would happen if I didn't.

What are you afraid of? Jesus said to the disciples on the Sea of Galilee, and He says it to each of us, "*don't be afraid, I am here*" (cf. Revelation 1:16-18). Jesus himself comes to us. Jesus himself gets in the boat with us. Are you afraid your life won't matter? Jesus is here. Are you afraid of losing someone close to you? Jesus is here. Are you afraid you won't survive the storm? Jesus is here!