

Tour of the Holy Lands - Sea of Galilee



We've been waiting for this day. Just imagine, a chance to sail on the Sea of Galilee. We ran down to the dock. The boat that held Jesus and his disciples was a fishing boat, big enough to hold 13 men. We liked the look of one particular boat, which was wooden with plastic chairs, a canvas shade for the sun, a motor, and it held a lot more people. But we loved it and couldn't wait for today's adventure. We eagerly climbed in and sat down.

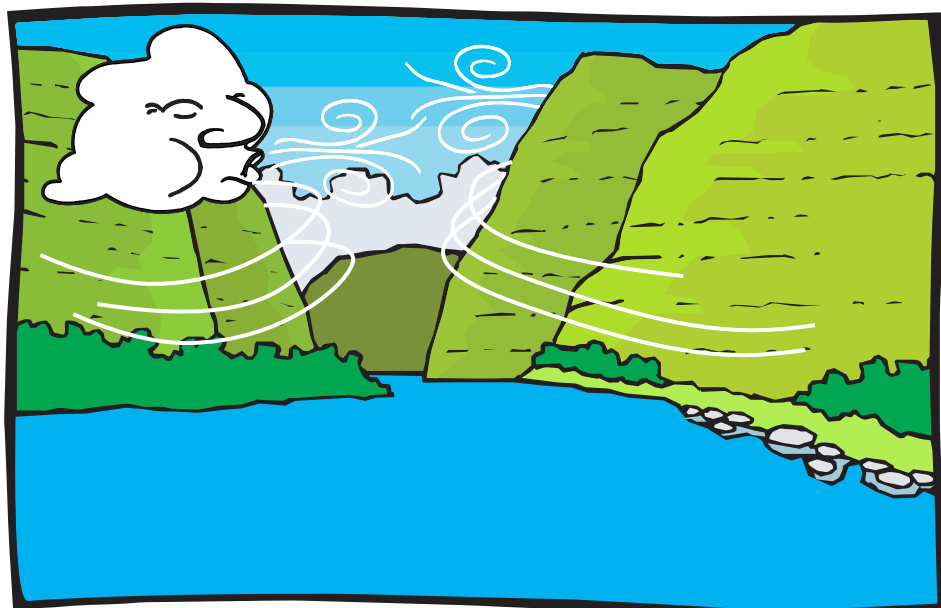




The motor started up and off we headed toward the middle of the lake. Remember, the lake isn't very big, just 8 by 13 miles. The motor was very noisy. Some of us stayed in our seats, gazing at the coast line as it got smaller and smaller. Others jumped up and sat at the edge enjoying the spray on their faces. Some peered over the side into the dark water below. Of course, we all wanted pictures of ourselves on the bow.



Surrounded with high hills it's obvious we're in a basin, 685 feet below sea level. The surface was smooth. We could hardly imagine any type of storm brewing. The boat's captain knew what we were thinking. "Look at those mountains," he said. "The valleys in between are perfect paths for cold winds to come suddenly rushing down across the water to churn it up." He said that those storms happened quite often and were scary. They had a special word in Greek. (Greek was the language of the New Testament.) It was "seismos," which means "shaking" and is often used in relation to earthquakes.





One of our group opened her Bible. She could have read from Matt 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; or Luke 8:22-25. It didn't matter. All of the accounts are similar for this story. She read that Jesus had been sitting in the boat that morning, teaching people who were listening on the shore.



By that afternoon he said to his disciples, "Let's go over to the other side of the lake." So the men climbed in with their teacher. Other little boats followed behind. Then one of those "seismic" winds swept over the lake. By the time Jesus and the disciples reached the middle, the waves were so high that their boat was hidden from sight when it slipped down into the channel between the waves. Water kept beating on the boat and spilling into it so that it was filling up. We were glad for today's calm sea.





Believe it or not, Jesus had found a pillow in the back of the boat and decided to take a nap! And the storm, as strong as it was, didn't wake him.





The disciples were so afraid. Most people in those days were very superstitious. Maybe a demon had caused the storm. Maybe it was the end of the world coming. Their boat could sink. The captain told us of one from Jesus' time that was found at the bottom of this lake not too long ago. And so, the disciples shouted at Jesus, "Lord save us; don't you care that we're about to die?" Jesus opened his eyes and answered them with those famous words, "O ye of little faith!" He meant that if only they had more trust in God's power and love, they wouldn't be afraid.

We figured that Jesus' trust in God was so great that he could have slept all through the storm. He must have trusted that God was always awake and protecting him.





Then Jesus stood up and rebuked the wind and the waves. He didn't need a rod like Moses did when parting the Red Sea. He didn't need a robe like Elisha did when parting the Jordan River. He just spoke to the storm, "Be quiet!" That command was enough. The raging turned to calm in a single moment. His boat and the others, too, we figured, were all saved. The disciples didn't have to be afraid again.

Jesus must have known that the power of God was there with them to calm the sea. We wondered if he remembered any of God's promises in his Hebrew Scriptures. We found a good one in the book of Psalms, chapter 107, verse 29: "He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still."





The men in the ship had never seen anything like that in all their lives. Yes, they had seen Jesus heal diseases. And that was amazing! But now, he had controlled nature. They asked one another, "Where does this man come from? Who is he, anyway? Even the winds and waves do what he tells them!"

We know if we had been there, we could have helped to answer their questions.





Another one of our group opened his Bible to the story of the walking on the water. He chose Matthew's version (14:22-33) because he liked Peter's part in the story. But there are two others: (Mark 6:45-52 and John 6:16-21). Since we're here on the Sea of Galilee, right where it happened, we hoped we would find out how Jesus walked on the water.

It happened right after the Feeding of the 5,000. We remembered that people were so excited after Jesus fed the multitude that they wanted to crown him king. In order to protect his disciples from that sort of thinking, he made them sail away without him while he sent the multitude away. The disciples didn't want to leave their Master. He had to use strong words to make them get into the boat and go on ahead of him.



Alone at last, Jesus climbed back up the mountain for some quiet prayer time. We were there just yesterday. We knew how he must have felt. It was like being closer to God. And Jesus never made plans without asking God first. We don't remember that God ever asked Jesus to become king. But we did remember the devil making such a suggestion and that happened on a high mountain, too (Matt 4:8,9).



Up there alone, praying, Jesus could also keep an eye on his disciples. One of those storms had come up and they were in the middle of the lake. The waves were knocking the little boat around and the wind was blowing so hard they couldn't go forward. It was night, but in the full moon, Jesus could see them struggling, so he came down the mountain and stepped out onto the rough water. He didn't sink. Like the ax head that came to the surface for Elisha (II Kings 6:1-7), Jesus walked on the face of the water.





Here in our boat, we could imagine the disciples holding on tightly to the sides of their boat in the storm, some scooping out water as fast as they could. Last time the disciples were in this situation, Jesus told them they didn't have enough faith. But last time it was daylight and Jesus was with them. Now it was night and they thought Jesus was still up in a mountain somewhere.





Then all of a sudden, they spotted a figure in the distance. They never dreamed it was a person. They were sure it was a spirit, maybe the evil demon that had caused the storm. They thought they would never fear again on the water, but they screamed. Then they heard a familiar voice, "Be of good cheer, it is I. There's nothing to fear!" We could almost hear a loud sigh of relief from the men.





The next voice is Peter's. We like him. It's true, sometimes that he acts and speaks without thinking. But he does things we'd like to do ourselves if we were so brave. He said, "Lord, if it's really you, ask me to come to you on the water." Jesus said, "Come on." And Peter climbed right out and walked on the water to Jesus. Wow! When will it be our turn? But it didn't last for Peter. He sank. What happened?



Peter's eyes turned to the storm instead of to Jesus. And when he turned in fear to the wind and to the water, he began to sink. He cried out, "Lord, save me!" Right away, Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him. Peter was ready for a rebuke. He was used to it. Jesus said, "Where was all your faith? Why did you doubt?" We loved Peter even more. Yes, he sank into the sea, but at least he walked a little, which is more than we can say for the other disciples. As soon as the two of them were in the boat, the wind died down. This time it didn't take a command from Jesus to be quiet. Why did it calm down? Our guess is that with Jesus there, the disciples' faith returned.



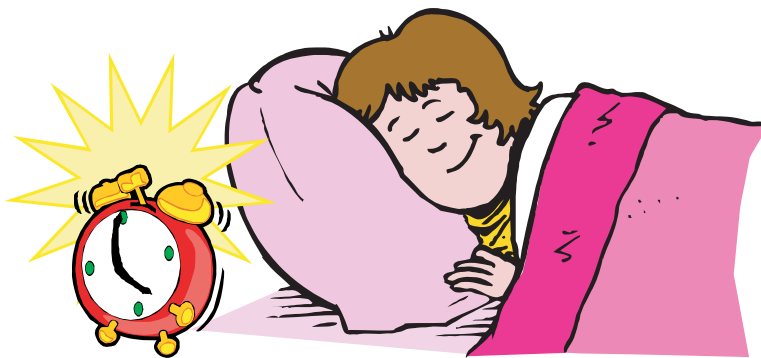
Now, remember the disciples' question after Jesus stilled the first storm, "Who is this man?" Well, now they answered their own question. They said, "You really are the Son of God!"

The other two Gospels, Mark and John, had their own endings to this story. Mark said that if the disciples had really understood the "miracle of the loaves," they would not have been so amazed that Jesus could walk on the water. Hmmm. And in the Gospel of John, as soon as Jesus stepped into the boat, the disciples found themselves at the shore. Wow! Those endings really made us think. We pulled our chairs into a circle and talked about them. We decided that when Jesus walked on water and fed the 5,000, he showed us that when we trust in God's power and love, every single need is met.



Back at the hotel our guide announced, "Set your alarms for 5 in the morning!" Yikes! Not only that, we had to go down to the lake in our bathing suits and towels. Some friends knew they couldn't wake up that early, but most of us wouldn't miss it for the world. Our trip has been so full of adventures!

In the morning we stumbled out of bed, dressed, grabbed our flashlights and ran down to the beach. Our leaders had brought chairs for us. We sat and listened to the story of the Morning Meal from John 21:1-17 in the Bible. This took place after Jesus' Resurrection. We remembered that our friend Peter had promised Jesus he would never desert him, but he and most of the others did just that. They fled for their lives to the Sea of Galilee.





Seven of them ran off here to the lake and their familiar fishing boat. Maybe they thought fishing would bring them comfort. And yet even after fishing all night, they caught nothing. Just then, through the morning mist they saw the outline of a man on the shore. He called out to them, "You haven't caught anything, have you?"

The disciples are ashamed. "No," they said.

The stranger said, "Throw your net on the right side and you'll find."

The nets were the same, the boat was the same, the men were the same, but now their nets were full of fish. The disciples were puzzled. We would have been too.



They must have squinted their eyes to try to see the man. Just then, John caught his breath and whispered to Peter, "It is the Lord." Peter snatched his clothes. This time he didn't run from Jesus, he didn't walk on the water to Jesus, he dived overboard and swam to Jesus.

The others probably said, "Hey what about us?" Peter had left them to pull in that heavy net. As they dragged their load of fish onto the pebbly beach, they saw fish already frying over a fire and a loaf of bread. They watched their teacher divide the fish and bread as he had done before.

Three times he asked Peter if he loved him. Three times Peter said "yes." And three times Jesus said, "Feed my sheep" (lambs too, of course). Jesus must have really trusted Peter to be true to his word this time. Here again Jesus took them from the fishing boat. But instead of making them fishers of men, he made them shepherds.



What a privilege to hear the familiar story of the Morning Meal right here on the shore of the lake they called Galilee. One by one we waded into the dark water and began to swim as Peter did so long ago. We watched the sun come up. Spectacular! The story left us with a lot to think about. When Jesus asked Peter to feed his sheep, he was talking to all disciples through the ages and to us younger ones too. The Bible is full of shepherds who have feeding lessons for all of us.

After our swim we were refreshed for a busy day of traveling ahead of us.

