

Matthew 8:23-27. Let's call this the "Ishmael United translation".

*A little boat on a big big sea
Me and my Lord on Galilee
A little cloud appeared in space
A little rain dropped on my face
I said "Help me Lord think I'm gonna drown"
He said "I'm in de boat and it won't go down.*

*The rain it caused the winds to blow
The little boat rocked to and fro
Our Lord was nowhere to be seen
He'd gone asleep in de cabin
I said "Help me Lord think I'm gonna drown"
He said "I'm in de boat and it won't go down.*

*De rain and wind it brought the gale
Water on the deck we had to bail
We could see no coast guard or life boat
We could see no way we'd stay afloat
I said "Help me Lord think I'm gonna drown"
He said "I'm in de boat and it won't go down.*

*A little boat on a big big sea
It's now as calm as calm can be
Our Lord told de weather to behave
With Christ awake we're now all brave
I said "Help me Lord think I'm gonna drown"
He said "I'm in de boat and it won't go down.*

Matthew 8:23-27. There is a more traditional translation, of course.

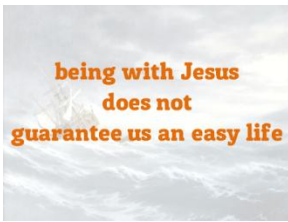


²³ Now when He got into a boat, His disciples followed Him. ²⁴ And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves. But He was asleep. ²⁵ Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!"

²⁶ But He said to them, "Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?" Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. ²⁷ So the men marveled, saying, "Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?"



It's Thanksgiving. Normally we might look at something more positive, more uplifting . . . or more earthy, more harvesty. But I thought that today it might be good to be honest as we remember to be thankful. We aren't always honest. With others. Or with ourselves. I know - it's almost heresy to say that. But it's also truth.



Maybe . . . maybe it's time to face facts. Maybe it's time to admit the obvious: that *being with Jesus doesn't guarantee us an easy life* (more heresy, I know).

I was in grade nine. My English teacher (to my shame I don't remember her name) was leading us out of the "this is what you should believe" realm into the "think for yourself" realm . . . giving us topics to research and to defend. In class debates.



We were watching two teams debate. It was rebuttal time for Bruce. His opponent had clearly set out his argument. Looking back, I think he must have been pretty strong – forceful – in his position. And now it was Bruce's turn. And he stood up and said something to the effect that "Everything that my opponent has said is pure bunk. Rubbish." And he continued like that for his two minutes. Focussing on how ridiculous what the opponent had said.

You know what's bunk? You know what's rubbish? Some of the teaching that comes from the church. There are some leaders today teaching that if you have enough faith your life will be blessed with everything that you could ever need and everything that you could ever want. I wish that I could believe that. I wish that I could be so blessed. But the teaching is bunk. And if you don't like the word *bunk* and you don't like to hear that the teaching is rubbish I'll use a more palatable term – the teaching is unscriptural. Oh, if you pick and choose your Bible verses you can talk yourself into believing it . . . but Jesus had nothing to do with a prosperity gospel or a life that did not run into troubles.



Here's what happened that day: *when [Jesus] got into a boat, His disciples followed Him. And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves.* [Matthew 8:23-24]

I see that as a metaphor for life. The waves come and the waves go and the storms come and the storms go. Pain comes and pain goes. It is part of life.

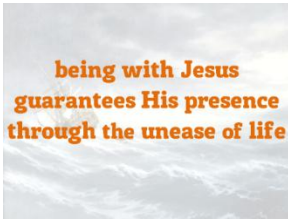
If floors me. Flabbergasts, gobsmacks, whatever, that people have the attitude that they can do whatever they want in this world and that God will protect them because they are followers of Jesus. So going to church en masse without a face covering and singing lustily (not that kind of lust) and sharing potlucks and and and . . . and expecting God to keep them safe from COVID . . . where in the Bible does it say that?

I know, in Mark 16 we read that *these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.* [Mark 16:17-18] We know these verses are often bracketed in our Bibles as not in the original manuscripts (although some people would say I'm just using that as an excuse not to believe). But I don't get it.

People get sick. People die. It's a fact of life. My faith – or my lack of faith – will not keep me from getting diabetes. My eating habits might, but my faith won't.

I am going to have good days. But every day isn't going to bring me peaches and cream and unicorns and rainbows. I am going to have bad days as well. I am going to have days of clear sailing and I am

going to have days when I have to run to port. Even as a Christian. Even as a follower of Jesus. Being with Jesus doesn't guarantee us an easy life (or not being infected with the Coronavirus).



However, *being with Jesus guarantees us His presence through the unease of life.* Here's what happened that day: *when [Jesus] got into a boat, His disciples followed Him. And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves.*

Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!"

But He said to them, "Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?" Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. [Matthew 8:23-26]

Eugene Peterseon wrote *By this time these disciples should have known who they were with, and what happens when they are with Him. But they are more worried about the weather than they are trustful of their savior.* And then he asks *Would you have been afraid?* That's a good question. Would you have said *Help me Lord think I'm gonna drown* or would you have heard *I'm in de boat and it won't go down.*

We need to trust. Instead, we are more likely to complain about our situations than to trust God in them. We are more likely to cry out *do something* than to ask for direction in and through our situations. Jesus asked the disciples *why are you so afraid?* I think He asks us the same question. Life happens. Life is happening. Why are you afraid?



Think of what Paul went through: whipped, beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, robbed, sunburned, cold, naked, hungry, ignored, forgotten, abused . . . yet his response was *that's all you've got Satan?* He heard the promise of God: *My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness* [2 Corinthians 12:9]. Do we want to live in the promise or do we just want God to fix things up and put a pretty bow on our lives?



Paul is only one example. Elijah and Jeremiah (and the other prophets) and . . . well, read your Bible and you'll find people who struggle with life just as we do. We think *ya, but they were saints . . . they were something to God!* So are you – *you're something to God!* We think *ya, but God was watching over them giving them special strength.* Same with you. We just don't realize it. Or don't believe it. But the promise *I will never leave you nor forsake you* [Hebrews 13:5] wasn't just for "them" – it was for us too.

Sometimes we need a bit more faith. Sometimes we need to realize that when we cry out for help He is there for us. Like He was for Peter. Peter, that one night, who was in a boat and heard the voice of Jesus and (as THE MESSAGE translates) *suddenly bold, said, "Master, if it's really you, call me to come to you on the water."*

He said, "Come ahead."

Jumping out of the boat, Peter walked on the water to Jesus. But when he looked down at the waves churning beneath his feet, he lost his nerve and started to sink. He cried, "Master, save me!" [Matthew 14:28-30] And Jesus

reached down, grabbed his hand, and pulled him up. And when we are sinking . . . and we will sink . . . He will pull us up as well.

It may not be the way we want Him to. If we are sinking financially He may not send us a cash infusion (as nice as that might be) – He may remind us that our spending priorities are wrong and challenge us to change them. If we are struggling emotionally He may not take away the darkness fully and immediately – He may send us someone to give a word of comfort. If we are hurting physically He may not end the pain or heal the illness – He may simply give us the strength to bear it.

Being with Jesus doesn't guarantee us an easy life. Being with Jesus does guarantee you His presence through the unease of life. But *we need to learn to trust God who is in control – if we give Him control.*



Verse 24 says *He was asleep*. He was asleep! Didn't He know what was happening? What's that saying? *if you can keep your head when everybody round you is losing his, then it is very probable that you don't understand the situation*. How could He keep His head? How could He sleep through the storm? Didn't he know the situation?

He was asleep. Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" ... He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. ²⁷ So the men marveled, saying, "Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" [Matthew 8:24b-25, 27]



Who is this man? *Who are you? I must know* said Inigo Montoya to the masked man. *No one of consequence* was the reply. Not helpful. *Who was that masked man?* asked people as the Lone Ranger rode away (today, that could be asked of any of us – who is that masked person?). *Who is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?* They didn't understand – yet – who He was.

But are we any different? We say that we have committed our lives to Jesus. We say that we are following Jesus. But most people don't follow Jesus – they follow their own idea of who Jesus is, and for many He is the One that will look after them as they want Him to look after them, and they are disappointed when He lets them down.



My friend Phillip was like that. He started attending a church before I moved to the city. He had been invited to be part of the young adult group and had found a place there, and was learning about Christian living. Learning about prayer. Learning about commitment. Learning about Jesus. Excited as a follower, I think. Until one day . . .

One day when we were together he came into room where we were meeting in a huff. *Forget that*, he said (or something like that). We were taken aback. *What's going on*, someone asked. He told us his story: he had been out for a motorcycle ride and (well, I don't remember what exactly had happened, but) he lost control of his bike. Going over 60 miles an hour (this was long enough ago that we still traveled in miles) – going over 60 miles an hour on the highway and he lost control of his bike and wound up in the ditch. He got up, brushed the dirt and the grass off, restarted his bike and rode off again. He was mad about it all.

And when he came in – stomped in maybe – he explained that before he left on his ride he had prayed for travelling mercies but had been in that accident. 60 miles an hour . . . on a highway . . . losing control . . . and walking away without a scratch . . . and mad at God for not protecting him. Wanting to be looked after in a specific way, not just wanting to be looked after.

But Phillip is not alone in that kind of thinking. We wind up in bad situations and blame God for not keeping us out of them. Maybe you've read Jon Krakauer's book Into the Wild about Christopher McCandless, a young man who hitchhiked from the continental USA to the Stampede Trail in Alaska, where he headed down a snow-covered trail with only 10 pounds of rice, a .22 caliber rifle, several boxes of rifle rounds, a camera, and a small selection of reading material. He survived for 113 days; there is speculation that he ate some poisoned plants.

At the end of the movie a number of people are interviewed about the young man's death, and one of the people interviewed blames God for it. Bad choices had nothing to do with it. Choices made because we have free will – because God doesn't stop us from doing fooling things – had nothing to do with it. It's easy to blame God and not take responsibility. Sometimes there are consequences to the decisions we make. And God lets us make them (we'd be mad/irate/annoyed if He didn't let us do what we wanted to).

Consequences. People smoke for years and develop lung cancer. People eat all sorts of junk food and develop diabetes or have heart attacks. At least they are only harming themselves.

Drunk drivers. Families destroyed. Sexual assault. Families destroyed. The actions of other people influence our lives.



Life is stormy. The wind blows. The waves crash. The boat tips. We cry out *"Help me Lord think I'm gonna drown"* . . . and He says *"I'm in de boat and it won't go down."*

Although being with Jesus doesn't guarantee us an easy life, being with Him does guarantee you His presence through the unease of life. Trust Him. Jesus does not always calm the situation but He can calm our heart.