

I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day Sermon Guide

In this message about finding peace during life's storms, Pastor Carl Gulley explores how Jesus's response to the disciples during a turbulent sea voyage parallels our own journey through anxiety and fear. Through examining the four spaces where tension can arise — within ourselves, between relationships, in others and between others — we learn how to cultivate the faith of Jesus rather than just faith in Jesus, ultimately discovering how to be a non-anxious presence in an anxious world.

This sermon emphasizes:

- Just as watching a recorded game removes the anxiety of an unknown outcome, having faith like Jesus allows us to face life's challenges with peace
- There are four key spaces where tension and anxiety can manifest: inside ourselves, between ourselves and others, inside others and between others
- We often spend too much time trying to understand what's in others' minds — a space that belongs to God
- The disciples had faith in Jesus but needed to develop the faith of Jesus — the ability to rest peacefully even amid storms
- The Christmas carol "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day" illustrates how encountering God can transform despair into hope and peace
- Taking regular pauses to check our internal state helps prevent spreading anxiety to others
- Being a non-anxious presence can powerfully impact spaces filled with grief or tension
- We are invited to come to Jesus "just as we are" in our storms and struggles
- Jesus doesn't rebuke our little faith but invites us into His greater faith
- Like Rembrandt's painting of the storm, we can identify where we are in our faith journey and bring that honestly to God

Key Scriptures

"On that day, when evening came, He said to them, 'Let us go over to the other side.' Leaving the crowd, they took Him along with them in the boat, just as He was; and other boats were with Him. And there arose a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up." (Mark 4:35-37)

"He was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke Him and said to Him, 'Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?' And He got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Peace, be still!' And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm." (Mark 4:38-39)

"Be still and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10)

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." (Galatians 5:22-23)

Table Questions:

1. When was the last time you experienced a "storm" in your life — how did you handle it compared to how Jesus handled the literal storm?
2. Which of the four spaces (inside me, between you and me, inside you, between others) do you find yourself most frequently dealing with tension? Why do you think that is?
3. Pastor Carl mentioned taking 60-90 second pauses to check in with ourselves. What prevents you from taking these moments and how might you incorporate them into your daily routine?
4. How do you typically respond when you sense anxiety or tension in a room? Do you tend to add to it or bring a non-anxious presence?
5. In Rembrandt's painting of the storm, which figure do you most relate to right now in your faith journey? What does that reveal about your current relationship with God?
6. What's the difference between having faith in Jesus and having the faith of Jesus? How might this distinction change how you approach challenges?
7. When you're in the midst of difficulty, do you tend to immediately bring it to God or try to fix it yourself first? What drives that response?
8. How can we practice being a non-anxious presence for others who are grieving or struggling — especially during the holiday season?
9. What assumptions do you commonly make about others' thoughts or intentions? How might practicing "asking questions instead of making assumptions" change your relationships?
10. Which aspect of the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness or self-control) do you most need to cultivate right now to help you navigate your current "storm"?