A photograph taken shortly after Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans in 2005 shows the devastation of a cemetery in the city's historic district, with trees toppled, debris covering the ground, and several burial vaults broken and smashed. But in the middle of the devastation, untouched by the storm, stands a statue of the risen Christ, arms extended wide, offering a benediction of calm amid the chaos.

This is the image conveyed by the texts we read today – the image of Christ with his arms extended wide over the chaos of our lives and the world, saying, "Peace! Be still!

So, as Christians, we've all heard these texts before. Over and over, we've heard the story of Jesus calming the waves that greet Him and his disciples as they travel to a foreign shore. Since we were children, we've heard the story of God helping David to defeat Goliath. We've heard other similar stories – those of a small army of Israelites winning battles against the enemy, those of Jesus casting out legions of demons who had taken over the life of a man. We've heard stories that illustrate in many ways that God is with us, and God delivers us, and God brings calm out of chaos.

Yet, we still let fear paralyze us sometimes. In fact, we let fear paralyze us often. Sometimes we know that we should step out in faith to do something, but we don't do it because we're afraid we'll fail. Or we're scared we'll get laughed at. Or maybe we're worried we'll succeed, but then everything we know might change. Or we're in a tough situation, and we feel hopeless, and that hopelessness leads us into anxiety and depression.

For example, God might be urging us to make that phone call to someone we used to be friends with, but something happened, and now we're not friends. Something in us wants to make that call to put things right, but fear holds us back, and we don't do it.

Or, as another example, God might be urging us to try a new ministry. But we're not sure we can accomplish it. It's different, and we've never done it before. If we try and fail, we'll look stupid.

Or if we succeed, then we're stuck with life in a new way, and we're not sure we're ready for that.

As another example, we've experienced a rough patch. Perhaps we've lost a loved one or several loved ones. Or we've lost our home or job. Or we've found out we have a debilitating, difficult, or potentially fatal disease. We know we need to move forward in faith, but we just can't. We're depressed, anxious, afraid, and traumatized.

When we're in these situations, sometimes we struggle with trusting God completely. We struggle even though we've heard all these stories of deliverance many times before. We believe the Bible stories we read, sorta, but when the going gets tough, we're not so sure.

Why can't we let go and let God? Why can't we feel safe in the assurance that God is with us, protecting us, delivering us, and calming the chaos?

Perhaps it is because we feel that everything depends upon us, and we know that our resources are limited. Maybe we're afraid that everything will fall apart if we don't hold on and control everything tightly. For many of us, the belief that everything depends on us and we have to manage is ingrained since childhood. Maybe we were the oldest child who was responsible for taking care of our siblings. When one of them got hurt, we were blamed. Or, perhaps, we've experienced betrayal or disappointment from family or friends and figure the best way to avoid betrayal or disappointment is to never rely on anyone else.

I invite us to work on trusting God more. I invite us to turn over some of our fears to God and not take them back again. In other words, I invite us to turn them over to God and then stop worrying about them ourselves. I invite us to write down all the times when God came through for us and to keep this list in a safe place to encourage us when we need it. Because I'll guarantee that God has been with us more often than we've realized. If we think about it, we'll see that.

Some of you may have read or heard of John Bunyan's classic allegory, The Pilgrim's Progress. In it, the main character, Christian, is a model of a person struggling to lead a life of faith. As he nears the end of his journey, he must cross a fearsome river, and he is afraid. He wades into the waters with his friend – another character called Hopeful.

Once in the water, Christian cries out, "I sink in deep Waters; the Billows go over my head, all His waves go over me."

Hopeful replies, "Be of good cheer, my Brother, I feel the bottom, and it is good."

God can deliver us in all these situations. God can bring calm out of the chaos. God can help us accomplish what we need to do – whether it's defeating some giant evil, surviving a chaos or storm, or moving our relationships and ministries to a new level or place.

We can trust God. Whatever God has in store for us, ultimately, it is good.