

My friends, in the computer age every sermon I write has a title, but usually that title functions only as a file name so I can save what I have written on the computer. Tonight, however, I will begin by sharing the title of this talk with you so that you have some sense of what to expect. My talk tonight is entitled *Crab Boat Wisdom*.

I am a fan of the Discovery Channel show *Deadliest Catch*. It's a show about some of the boats that fish for crab on the Bering Sea. This job is considered one of the most dangerous jobs in the world. The show is a peek into a world that most of us never get to see, and I find it riveting.

I know all the boats, all the captains, and many of the crew members. I have my favorite boats and captains, and ones who are not favorites but whom I still like. Before the start of last year's season, it was learned that one of the captains, one who was near the top of my favorite list, had passed away. I was happy to see that the season began with him, Captain Phil Harris, in the wheelhouse of his

boat, the *Cornelia Marie*. To my surprise, his death was part of the final shows of the season.

It began when the *Cornelia* was offloading a boatload of crab. Someone brought some papers to the wheelhouse for Captain Phil to sign, but he was not there. The man went to Phil's quarters and knocked on the door. No answer. He looked into Phil's stateroom, and that episode of the show ended with the man's shocked explanation, "Oh my God!"

Phil had suffered a stroke. He had to be airlifted From Dutch Harbor, Alaska, to the hospital in Anchorage. There he underwent surgery to relieve pressure on his brain.

Phil had two sons on the boat with him. The younger, Jake, had recently confessed an addiction to prescription pain medication to his father. He went with Phil to Anchorage. Phil's older son, Josh, remained with the boat. He had problems to solve. Without Jake, the *Cornelia Maria* was short one deckhand. Worse, only Captain Phil

had the necessary license to drive the boat. Josh needed to find a deckhand and a captain. His family's livelihood, as well as the livelihoods of the families of the rest of the crew, depended on it. Josh was sure that in staying on the boat, he was where his father would have wanted him to be.

That sets up one of the most powerful scenes I have ever seen in all my years of watching *Deadliest Catch*. Josh was in the wheelhouse talking to a deck hand named Freddy. Freddy is a thirty-four years old man from Samoa. His years of crab fishing in the brutal environment of the Bering Sea make him look much older than he really is. Freddy is a simple, hardworking man, and an unsophisticated man. He does things like eats the hearts of the cod used for bait, shouts out magical spells in his native tongue, and performs other magical rituals he believes will bring a successful fishing season.

In this scene, Josh is torn between two correct decisions: remaining with the boat to solve the personnel problems

so they can finish out the crab season, and being with his father and Jake in Anchorage. I am going to share with you the conversation between Josh and Freddy, as close to verbatim as I can:

Josh: I don't know what the right thing to do is.

Freddy: You should take a trip off, Josh. I think it's going to be better for you...you know, just go there be with Jake...we can do this without you know...and your Dad need you more than anything, he wakes up and sees you and Jake there, it be the happiest thing ever, you know...

Josh: But I feel like this is where he would want me to be. This is his legacy, you know? And a legacy lives on, and I feel like he deserves me, you know, that I owe him that, you know, to be here, to make sure that things get done the way he would want then to get done.

Freddy: I'm not trying, you know, to tell you what to do. I'm just your bro, you know?

Josh: But the bottom line is, what do you think the old man would want me to do, Freddy? Do you think he would...he knows I love him, I know he loves me, you know, but I think...he would want me here because Jake **is** there.

Freddy: So what if let's say something really bad happened, you gonna take that for the rest of your life, Josh. So it's nice to be there for him, you know? Just a little bit of advice, bro, you know? Season every year. Crab every year. Dad, no. We each got only one Dad, bro. You know, crab is always catch. We always make money every year. But we cannot catch a Dad every year. You know, if something happen, and we gonna be suffer for the rest of our life, not be there for him.

Josh: I'm gonna think about this today.

Freddy: OK, bro...sorry...

Josh: No, Freddy, it's OK...

Freddy: You know, my old man pass away when I was out here with Phil, fishing. Five days after opilio season he was do some surgery in Australia, and my aunt call and he pass away. The hardest thing ever, you know? I was not there for him. I show up for a dead body. It's the hardest thing ever.

Freddy, the tough Samoan who makes his living doing what is one of the hardest and most dangerous jobs on earth, was crying.

My friends, Freddy is uneducated. He may be intelligent, or he may not be that smart, I do not know. But he is wise, and he shared with us the source of this wisdom, his own past experience with the death of his own father. In broken English, Freddy summed everything up with the words "Crab is always catch...but we cannot catch a Dad every year."

Education, my friends, is a tool. It is put to good use or bad. Jonas Salk and Joseph Mengele used their medical

training in ways that are polar opposites of one another. But wisdom is different from education. Our Bible is full of wisdom literature that has much to teach us. Those who have come before us have much to teach us. And perhaps as we grow wiser during the course of our lifetimes, we accumulate wisdom worth sharing with others as well. Unlike the neutral tool of education, true wisdom is by definition good. Our Bible makes that clear: המכה תישאר—the beginning of wisdom is the fear of God.

On the other side of the coin, let us be open to learning from the wisdom of others, those who have come before us by centuries whose wisdom we learn from the Tanakh and the Talmud and other Jewish holy books, from our elders with whom we share a dinner table at home or a l'chaim after services, from friends who have experienced things we might not yet have experienced. Wisdom knows no limitations. Let us benefit from it whenever and wherever we find it, even from someone from whom we did not expect it, like a simple crab fisherman in the middle of the Bering Sea.

Josh did go to be with his father. Jake left to enter drug rehab. Phil was making an astonishingly fast recovery, but then took a turn for the worst and passed away. Josh was with him. Yasher koach, Freddy.