

Sermon for Church Worship
Matthew 14:22-33
Rev. Sarah E. Sedgwick

Our first scripture reading comes from selected verses from Psalm 105. This Psalm speaks of God's faithfulness to Israel and directs God's people to praise God's wonderful works.

Let us listen to the word of our Lord written in Psalm 105:

Today our second reading comes from the gospel of Matthew in chapter 14, verses 22 to 33. For many of us this is a familiar story about our faith amidst the storms of life. Today let us trust the Holy Spirit will transform us through the reading of God's word.

The Gospel of the Lord. Praise be to you, O Lord.

Although read of Peter's mission work among the early converts in the book of Acts last month, today we find ourselves hearing an earlier story of Peter as he learns to trust Jesus.

You might say Peter has come a long way when we find him evangelizing and ministering in the book of Acts. Peter wasn't always so bold . . . or always able to remain bold.

It's another boat story with Jesus. In this story, Jesus isn't in the boat from the beginning. He is actually practicing some self-care following a very strenuous experience of ministry.

It is not insignificant that Jesus retreats to the mountain while he has sent his disciples out into the raging chaos of the sea.

The mountain in Matthew's Gospel is a place for encountering God and hearing the proclamation of God's glorious kingdom.

In Moses-like fashion, Jesus proves that he is both the leader of the crowds and the intercessor to the divine. He climbs alone to a mountain for his rendezvous with the Father.

He has fed close to 5,000 people and has likely received the news of his cousin John's death and all the stresses of ministry and life have left him weary and needing the comfort of time away to rest and be with his Father.

All Jesus wanted was to be left alone for a while. The Greek text in this passage says Jesus literally "compelled" the disciples to get into the boat. They really didn't have a choice to go on the boat.

While Jesus is alone conversing with the Father, the disciples find themselves in a life-threatening situation. Did they know the storm was going to arise? We don't know. But there they are in the midst of a dangerous storm.

Now the Sea of Galilee isn't that large. Perhaps about 13 miles across, so the fact that they are in the midst of the "sea" in the middle of the night speaks to the severity of their predicament. They couldn't even make it 13 miles across to land because the storm was so bad.

Matthew doesn't describe to us what the disciples are doing during the storm before Jesus approached them, but my guess would be they were doing everything they could to keep the boat afloat.

Some of the disciples were fishermen by trade, so an unexpected storm wasn't something new to them. They surely had fished during a storm before.

Maybe their first thought was that they could endure the storm doing what they knew worked. It makes sense that they would do what has worked before during past storms.

I'd probably do exactly what they were doing – trying to survive with my own strength. Ordering others around, trying to remain brave, and exerting myself to the point of exhaustion.

Admittedly, a lot of us do that when we are figuratively in a "storm." When life feels precarious and when stress erupts unexpectedly, we depend on what we know to get by and to get through it until the storm passes.

The disciples must be exhausted. It's probably between the hours of 3 am and 6 am by the time Jesus arrives. Not only are they tired, but likely hungry and cranky and wet and cold. I'm not sure I'd be at my best at that point either.

When I'm facing a "storm" in my own life, it doesn't always bring out the best in me. I get stretched to the limits of my comfort, my emotions go up and down, and sometimes I feel like giving up.

We all have different responses to stressful moments in our lives and I bet the same was true for the disciples in the boat. They all reacted and responded differently to their stressful situation.

Their first response was fear. Jesus walks towards them on the water in the storm and they all assume he is a ghost. Obviously, we can relate to that feeling of fear the disciples felt in the storm. Admittedly, we become quite good responding this way.

Once they have been reassured it is Jesus, Peter responds in a second way. Peter finds Jesus. He decides that Jesus is the best person to be near in the midst of this storm.

And so, he immediately asks Jesus to command him to walk on water to join Jesus, which is to express his desire to be closer to Jesus.

When you are in a stressful situation it seems wise to find Jesus and go to him. Jesus is our light and our salvation; our lighthouse in the storm. And Peter is not dumb. He knows he is better off beside Jesus.

Know the old saying, “Be careful what you wish for?” That saying might have been learned following Peter’s request. If you ask Jesus for the power you need in the midst of a storm, be prepared for Jesus to fulfill your request.

Jesus gave Peter the power he was looking for – the ability to walk on water towards Jesus. But just as Peter experiences the ability to walk on water; he becomes frightened by the wind. He goes right back to responding with fear.

And boy, can we relate. How many times throughout our own lives have we asked God to give us what we need to endure our personal storms, only to revert back to what feels most comfortable – our fears.

There have been too many times I can count when fear reigned over the gifts I’ve asked the Holy Spirit to give me so that I might conquer the difficulties in my life.

And just like Peter I falter and question and forget the power of Jesus Christ to carry me through my personal trials and tribulations.

Jesus reaches out his hand to catch Peter, saving him from what Peter thought might be immediate drowning and reminding us that in the midst of the difficulties of life, Jesus is near us even when we have just a little bit of faith.

He doesn’t leave us to figure out how not to drown. Instead, he offers us his hand; his strength and helps us carry on.

The blessing of this story is that Jesus is with both kinds of responses. He loves the one brave enough to be close to him, but will offer his hand to those who respond in fear or doubt.

I don’t even think Jesus was rebuking Peter when he doubted. I think he offered a loving response with a smile on his face, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”

Jesus isn’t going to give up on us when we are fearful. Even with a small seed of faith we can walk on water. We can move mountains. And we can know that Jesus is right beside us in the storm.

But what about all the other people in the boat watching Peter walk on water? I think they offer a third response in this story. And it’s their other response that I relate to best.

I am admittedly a doer. I keep busy. I like to think they are responding to the situation by keeping busy. That's likely how I would respond to the storm.

I'm the one in the boat trying to save everyone else. I take that responsibility to heart.

So, chances are I'm too busy holding an oar or reaching my hand out to keep someone else steady than to think about what Jesus might do.

It's a natural human reaction to get so caught up in our lives that we miss the presence of Jesus. We start thinking we are on our own and all the saving that needs done is by our might and not Jesus'.

And so we work and worry and sacrifice our own well-being so that we might be what everyone else around us needs. And soon enough, we are worn out and exhausted and laying on the bottom of the boat.

What is it for you – fear, boldness, or busyness – in the midst of a storm? Maybe it is an entirely different response from these I've mentioned.

The good news is that no matter what response we offer in the midst of our difficult experiences, Jesus shows up. He goes to the one consumed by fear, the one standing with courage, and the one exhausted.

Jesus goes to the ones who remain in the boat. The ones, like me and maybe you, who get so wrapped in saving ourselves and those around us that we forget to look for Jesus.

Jesus isn't angry with the disciples in the boat. He goes directly to them. Maybe gets right in their faces so they know it's him and ceases the storm.

Jesus does not want us to focus on what we're afraid of—the wind and the waves in this story. We give more power to what we fear, very often, than to whom we love or the path we're on toward Jesus.

Take heart, and keep exercising whatever “little-faith” you have. Christ will pull you the rest of the way through even when your faith or focus fails.

And if you are like the disciples on the boat, exerting all your energies to take care of yourself and others in the midst of the storm, be reminded that the storms in your life will cease due only to the power of Jesus.

No matter how strong the storm, how threatening the waves, Jesus calls us to trust in his love and mercy. Rejoice in his goodness; rely on his power in all things.

A common theme in the gospel of Matthew that is lifted up throughout the stories is the idea that Jesus is Emmanuel, meaning “God with us.”

“God with us” on the boat in the water; walking with us on the shore, sitting by us in the hospital room, holding us while we cry in bed or laughing with us as we delight in a baby’s laughter.

And that is Good News. Jesus remains with us. He remains with us and is the Lord of all Creation as well. Whether or not Peter succeeded in imitating his Master’s neat trick neither adds nor subtracts from the core revelation that whether we stay in the boat with the 11 disciples or hop out of the boat with the 1 disciple, Jesus is with us.

He’s with those of us who stay in the boat and will calm the storm that threatens. He’s with those who try some grandstand move and fail, forgiving the failure and, again, calming the storm that tempted Peter to do something miraculous.

Jesus’ presence and power are the key to this story, not whether we are bold and courageous and impressive.

Our saving, our success, our strength is not dependent upon our abilities, but is made possible by Jesus Christ who adores us, died for us, and will return to us someday.

Praise be to our Lord. Amen!

Liturgy and Scripture Readings

Call to Worship

L: God speaks peace to the faithful, to those who turn to God in their hearts.

A: Surely salvation is at hand for those who fear God.

L: Where God dwells, steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other.

A: Faithfulness springs up from the ground and righteousness looks down from the sky.

L: God gives what is good, so let us respond with abundant praise!

Hymn: Crown Him with Many Crowns

Call to Confession

God makes no distinctions among us. The same Lord is Lord of all and is generous. Indeed, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Confessing our sins, we depend on God’s generosity and grace.

Let us confess our sin and receive new life by reading together

the Prayer of Confession, following by a time of silent confession:

Prayer of Confession

Gracious God, you call us to step out in faith, trusting in you for all things. We respond to your command but then sink in doubt and fear. We hide from the challenges of bold discipleship. We are not able to fulfill your commandments, for our purposes are never in full accord with yours. Forgive us, we pray, when we confess with our lips but do not believe in our hearts. Help us to practice our faith in all circumstances. Lift us out of sin into the arms of your mercy. We pray in the name your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Silent Prayers of Confession

L: Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Jesus is Lord!

God raised him from the dead and we are saved through him. This is the good news we believe in our hearts and confess with our mouths:

In Jesus Christ we are forgiven!

This is the good news to share with all people!

Prayer of Illumination

As we prepare to hear scripture read, let us pray together:

Gracious God, your word is very near, on our lips and in our hearts. As this Word is read and proclaimed, by the power of your Holy Spirit, make it become in us the word of faith. Then send us in joy to bring this word to others who also need the good news of salvation. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Readings: Psalm 105:1-6, 16-22, 45b; Matthew 14:22-33

Sermon: Be Careful What You Wish For

Affirmation of Faith – The Apostles’ Creed (Traditional)

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord. Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come again to judge the living and the

dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Prayers of the People and The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors; Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Presentation of Tithes and Offerings and Prayer of Dedication

Because God cares for all without distinction and is generous to all beyond measure, so we, God's people, are to care for all with generosity and gladness. We bring our offerings to be used for God's good purposes in the church and in the world. Let us pray:

Generous God, we thank you for your call and claim upon our lives. Because there is so much more we can become, and so much more we can do, we pray that our faith will increase; that our practice of generosity will be enlarged; and that our joy in believing will encourage others as we share with them the good news of Jesus Christ; in whose name we pray. Amen.

Hymn In Christ There Is No East or West

Charge and Blessing

Step out in faith, trusting that the God who has called you is able to keep you from falling and holds you in love. And may the steadfast love and faithfulness of God surround you; the peace of Christ enfold you; and the Holy Spirit encourage you; now and forever. Amen.

Psalm 105:1-6, 16-22, 45b

God's Faithfulness to Israel

- ¹ O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name,
make known his deeds among the peoples.
- ² Sing to him, sing praises to him;
tell of all his wonderful works.
- ³ Glory in his holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.
- ⁴ Seek the Lord and his strength;
seek his presence continually.
- ⁵ Remember the wonderful works he has done,
his miracles, and the judgments he has uttered,
- ⁶ O offspring of his servant Abraham,^[a]
children of Jacob, his chosen ones.

¹⁶ When he summoned famine against the land,
 and broke every staff of bread,
¹⁷ he had sent a man ahead of them,
 Joseph, who was sold as a slave.
¹⁸ His feet were hurt with fetters,
 his neck was put in a collar of iron;
¹⁹ until what he had said came to pass,
 the word of the Lord kept testing him.
²⁰ The king sent and released him;
 the ruler of the peoples set him free.
²¹ He made him lord of his house,
 and ruler of all his possessions,
²² to instruct^[a] his officials at his pleasure,
 and to teach his elders wisdom.
 that they might keep his statutes
 and observe his laws.

Matthew 14:22-33

Jesus Walks on the Water

²² Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³ And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴ but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land,^[a] for the wind was against them. ²⁵ And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. ²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out in fear. ²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.” ²⁸ Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” ²⁹ He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he noticed the strong wind,^[b] he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” ³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” ³² When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³ And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”