

Matthew 14:22-33

Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking towards them on the lake. But when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified, saying, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.'

Peter answered him, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.' He said, 'Come.' So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came towards Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!' Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?' When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'

The feelings this text evokes are similar to the feelings of uncertainty we have today. We would love to get away to a quiet place, to settle in and dwell with God, to be able to push aside the turmoil we find ourselves in, but we can't seem to get away from those shifting winds and rough seas that frighten us. We have a lot to fear.

We want to reach out and feel safe, to know that this too shall pass. That the calm seas that are calling us can be found in that outstretched hand that Jesus offers Peter. It is offered to us as well.

Can't we almost feel ourselves cowering in the boat with the disciples, afraid of the wind and the sight of Jesus walking towards us on the water. The impulsive Peter calls out to Jesus, hears his call to come, and Peter steps out fearlessly, but as the fear overtakes him he begins to sink.

How like Peter are we? Stepping out with strength in the beginning, only to let the winds and waves of doubt and fear overcome us. The strong call of Jesus can carry us forward when we listen, when we pray, but it never seems to hold us for long, or more likely we don't hold on tightly enough.

Answering the clear calls of God have never frightened me. Those times I have felt the joy of truly knowing what I was being called to. I felt like that in the call to attend seminary, which took me a long time to hear, I wasn't afraid.

I felt fearless leaving everything and everyone I knew (except my husband) and moving to New Jersey. I felt strong and confident in that, but then when I actually began classes, I was haunted by the fear that I was not smart enough. School had always been difficult for me, and the winds of the words I had heard from the teachers of my childhood, affirming my lack of ability, still rang in my ears.

What had I been thinking?! I couldn't learn Hebrew or Greek, I barely passed high school Spanish. All the brilliant people around me, they must see that I can't do this, that I was an imposter. The rough winds on the sea that had frightened the disciples were all around me, blocking out the words from Jesus that had called me.

So I prayed and I came to understand that Jesus had not called me to be the smarted academic, or to be a prolific writer. My gifts of connecting and creativity were to be strengthened for ministry. I needed to look back up as I was sinking and remember that God does not call us to fail. Our interpretation may lead us to fail, and if we do Jesus is there reaching out to us as he reached out to Peter to bring us back, again, and again. Telling us to not be afraid. I discovered that contemplative practices and my chaplaincy program fed my gifts.

So, I made it through seminary. Often sinking a little, but always being saved from myself. We don't stay up, at least I don't. There have been more times than not that I have given in to some fear, not hearing the call to not be afraid. And I know I will sink again, but I also know I can walk forward when I silence the voices. When I take the time to pray and connect with God, to hear the call to come.

I love the image of Jesus coming towards Peter. Peter's view is not of the back of Jesus, no Peter is looking into Christ's beautiful face. Can you image the love Jesus had for him? Guiding him with his eyes, holding him in his gaze. And we have to remember that Peter walked on the water. He actually did what Jesus was calling him to do. Jesus was saying – you can do what I do. When Jesus called him to come, he did. We seem to forget what we are able to do with the encouragement of God. Peter did start to sink, but he also walked on the water.

What fear keeps you from stepping out to Jesus? Or if you are willing to risk and step out, what makes you turn your eyes from Jesus? When do you sink?

It almost seems ridiculous to ask those questions. We are torn by all the questions of the day. Do we go back to school or not? Can I visit my children and grandchildren or not? Should we be worshiping inside or out? Is it safe to stand up and speak for what I believe in or remain silent? Will I be able to hold everything together or will it all fly away in the chaotic winds of this virus, this culture, this world?

As we stress over these very real fears, we need to take time to look into the face of God and be reassured. To pray and to remember who calls us to come. The more we step out of the boat and experience Christ supporting us, the easier it is to do again. Maybe, just maybe after a while we will not hear the howling wind, only the call to come. And even in this fearful time, people are listening to the call of Jesus. Because we are still doing what we are called to. We are worshiping, we are feeding out neighbors, we are voicing our concerns. Today, we are gathering up another child into the body of Christ, we are baptizing. We are gathering together to share in the Lord's Supper. We are gathering to pray, we remain the body of Christ.

Peter steps out as a representative of all the disciples. For just a moment his fear disappears and he is able to do the impossible, walk on the water towards Jesus. What is it that Jesus is asking you to step out for? What will quell your fear and allow you to do so? We are taking lots of risks these days. We are reaching out to our neighbors in need, not always sure that we will be able to provide what they need, but confident that we will if we stay true to the call.

Worship August 9, 2020
Rev. Kristie W. Finley

And moving into the world of church and technology. We did not really know what we were going to do March 15, but we knew we were called to worship, and we did. It may not be perfect, but we are willing to risk so that we can move forward. Those serving on school boards, making tough decisions are stepping out in risk. The number of people willing to step out and reach out to their neighbors isolated at home is proof that we are will to answer the call of Jesus to come.

Today we celebrate the sacraments – baptism and communion. Two acts that turn our eyes and hearts toward Jesus. As we struggle though the winds and sea, these are sure reminders that we are not alone, we together face Jesus and answer his call to come.

Will you stay in the safety of the boat, or risk stepping out? Will you keep focused on Jesus or get distracted and sink? Look beyond the turbulent waters, the roaring winds, and see Jesus saying Come. Continue to step out trusting in the saving grace of Jesus Christ. Amen.