

Sermon Text – Sunday, August 9, 2026 – Pastor Paula Kraus

1st Reading: 1 Kings 19:9-18; 2nd Reading: Romans 10:5-15
Scripture for the Message: Matthew 14:22-33 “wind and waves”

We know that Jesus has recently learned about his friend John the Baptist's horrific death, he tried to withdraw only for the crowds to follow him needing his healing presence. In his gracious compassion, he attends to their needs, even transforming five loaves and two fishes into abundant provisions for the five thousand or more who follow him. Now he sends them away, filled and transformed. After dismissing the crowd, he sends the disciples into a boat, and he goes up the mountain to pray in quiet solitude.

Driven by the winds, the boat the disciples were in moved far from the shore, putting some distance between themselves and Jesus. The wind was against them, causing them some difficulty trying to get back to Jesus. The boat, Matthew tells us, was battered by waves; the verb used in the original translation can also mean tortured and tormented, not something usually associated with an inanimate object such as a boat. Maybe the disciples were feeling tortured and tormented realizing their separation from and inability to return to Jesus. This suggests the torment they might feel after their eventual separation from Jesus as he ascends to his father's right hand.

So, who would expect to see Jesus, the human man, walking on water? Even after they had witnessed the “miracle” of the loaves and fishes they might still question whether this was an apparition. Jesus' sudden and unexpected appearance on the scene is disquieting and frightening. Jesus recognizes their anxiety and offers comforting words, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.” He may have been reassuring them not to be afraid because they thought they were seeing a ghost, but he was also encouraging them not to be afraid of the storm.

Peter, knowing that Jesus' could compel his followers to do anything, answers Jesus by saying, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” This statement expresses Peter's initial doubt but also expresses his belief in the power to control the elements that he knew Jesus possessed. Jesus says, “Come” and that was all it took for Peter to step out of the boat in a leap of faith. Peter's faith was strong enough for him to walk on water; he was in fact walking on water. The problem happened because sometimes faith falters in the face of fierce winds and

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rough seas. Peter took his eyes off Jesus and began to sink. Peter trusted Jesus' power to save as he was sinking, he doubted himself but not Jesus, so he held on to trust as he called out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus was there and caught him. What he said to Peter was less of a rebuke and more of a reminder. "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" I wonder, was it doubt that caused Peter to sink or distraction. Peter was human and as humans sometimes we feel that the waves are against us, creating doubt – doubt is a normal human condition.

We can look at the winds and waves as symbols for the cares of the world. When there is separation from Jesus, as the disciples experienced in this story, the cares of the world may seem overwhelming and distract from our true focus. That feeling can cause us to feel tortured and tormented, battered about by the winds and waves of life. But notice how the storm ceased once Peter and Jesus got into the boat. Jesus enters the picture and there is calm, Jesus' presence enables us to deal with the cares of the world without experiencing torture and torment.

The last verses in this scripture reading are, in my mind, the point to the story. The men still in the boat experienced calmer winds and waves once Jesus was in their midst. Their anxieties were calmed and those who were in the boat, witnessing what had occurred, confessed to Jesus "Truly you are the Son of God." Jesus' shows his divinity to his disciples in that moment – truly Jesus is the Son of God.

I am thinking we can learn from this story if we look at it like one of Jesus' parables. A parable about the church. So, I want to take a moment to put this tale in the context of Matthew's time. Matthew's church was predominately made up of Jewish men and women who were believers in Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah. They experienced turmoil as they tried to live faithfully as people who both believe in Christ and as those who want to faithfully observe Torah laws. For Matthew – Jesus is the Messiah, the one Jewish people had been looking for, Jesus is truly the "Son of God." Matthew writes to a church experiencing storms, the winds are against them. Matthew's church was learning to weather the storms of life in a post-resurrection world. Jesus has ascended to the Holy Mountain, he is seated at the right hand of his father, while his followers are "in a boat tortured and tormented" by the seas of life. Matthew writes to assure them of Jesus presence – all it takes is a little faith. "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

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The church, their church and the church of modern times can be compared to a boat tossed about on the seas. If we only notice the wind and the waves, we might not recognize Jesus as he draws near. We can stay in our boats, stay within the four walls of the church, and stay attached to our 'usual' ministries for a safe ride. However, when we hold on to Jesus' power, we can take a risk and step out in faith. All that is required is a little faith to maintain focus on Jesus. In our boat, without Jesus' presence, we don't have much to offer in the way of hope for others. However, a little faith can go a long way – with Jesus we have all we need.

Our Elder this morning read a passage from the 1st Kings story of Elijah – a prophet of God. Elijah had done remarkable things in the name of the Lord but there came a time when Jezebel and Ahab were determined to stamp out worship of the Lord. Jezebel assured Elijah that she would destroy him as she had done other prophets. Elijah became depressed and anxious. He had doubts about his survivability, even though his zeal for the Lord was strong and active. When he tried to hide in a cave, the Word of the Lord came to him. Elijah would feel God's presence, but God was not the storm, God was not the earthquake, God was not the fire – when things quieted down and there was silence – God was there – had been there all along. When all the turmoil and dust settled, God spoke.

God does not cause the storms and disruption; God does not create the circumstances of storm or the winds that are against us at times. God is however present at these times, and even if we can't feel God's presence because of the storm God is there to 'save' us when we call out. Nowhere in our scripture reading are we told that God or Jesus created the storm that affected the disciples' boat, Jesus was there however to offer calming words and to take Peter's hand and 'save' him when he lost his focus and his faith faltered.

In our reading from Paul's letter to the Romans, we are told "if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. . . For "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'" This confession is our faith, we believe that Jesus the Christ is able to save, we believe that the power to raise him from the dead will also raise us to salvation. Peter believed and trusted and was saved from the wind and waves and saved from sinking.

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The lesson from this “parable” is to rely on God, allow God to direct our path. Trust in self is misdirected and usually leads to miserable failure. Peter on his own could not walk on water and when he took his eyes off Jesus, that fact became abundantly clear. Peter did however recall that Jesus could save him even as he was caught in wind and waves between fear and faith. He called out trusting that his Lord would save him – Jesus was there standing ready to save in the midst of fear and faith.

There is in this a message the world needs to hear, “confess that Jesus is Lord” know that God is with you in all circumstances and things will work out in the end. The trouble begins for all of us, for the church even – when we take matters into our own hands and our focus on the winds and waves rather than what matters - Jesus. We often fail when we devise plans to obtain a desired outcome that will benefit ourselves without Jesus’ guidance. Jesus advised his disciples that they too would drink the cup from which he drank – they too would experience persecution, torment, and torture because of him. This is humanity’s lot in life, torment due to a broken and sinful world, turmoil due to our separation from Christ.

Individually, there are times in our lives when the winds and waves are against us, when our faith falters in the midst of storms. Maybe we can hear Jesus speaking the words to us that Peter heard as he began to sink, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” But – our faith doesn’t have to be large enough to fill a dump truck, it doesn’t have to be large enough to fill a cargo van, it doesn’t even have to be large enough to fill a small vial. We know that a tiny bit of faith can go a long way – in fact, faith that cannot be measured is still faith. Faith that allows us to put trust in Jesus the Christ to be present with us in our trials. The same faith Peter had when he cried out, “Lord, save me!” as he began to sink.

There is one more thing – there is no judgment here whether we stay in the boat or step out as Peter did. Peter was not “foolish” when he stepped out of the boat and the others were not wrong to stay in the boat to wait for Jesus. Peter did not fail until he allowed the winds and waves, the cares of the world, to distract him from the goal. Stepping out of the boat is the truest expression of our faith. How else do we prove to the world what faith is? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who [step out of the boat] and bring good news.” Keep your eyes on Jesus and let him be the lighthouse, guiding you to his chosen destination for you.