

Faith is not for the Faint of Heart

Matthew 14: 22-33

It is funny the timing of things. I say this because as a congregation we were supposed to install our new slate of officers weeks ago. Long story short, we pushed this event back a few weeks until today. No special reason for this except that this was the first normal...okay as normal it gets around here, the first normal Sunday after our summer series.

But as everyone has heard me say before, God has an amazing way of making our humble attempts ten times better, especially when God's timing comes into play.

Because who could have picked a better Scripture for today... a day when Midway Christian Church lifts up new leaders for our church, who could have picked a more appropriate Scripture to tie in with this moment in the life of the congregation than our God? Sure, I'll admit that this is the lectionary text for the day and the majority of churches around our nation are taking a look at this text where Jesus calms the storms and Peter ventures out onto the water.

But...But for a time such as this, in the life of our congregation, God's sense of timing is perfect once again...as we are reminded that in the moments of life, moments when we are surrounded by fear, moments when we surrounded by

worry, moments when we are unsure of whether to stay in the boat or take a step forward...God reminds us again that, regardless of what happens, in these moments, Christ will meet us where we are and create new miracles for us along the way.

Now, I bet, everyone thinks we all know how this sermon will go from this point on. We've heard it all before. We will be told to take the risk, to step out of the boat, that we can accomplish amazing things if we only have more faith. Because after all isn't that what Jesus tells Peter after Peter begins to sink? Jesus very clearly tells him and all the disciples after safely depositing Peter back in the boat "Oh, ye of little faith."

Yet, after spending some time with this text this past week, I am beginning to wonder if we do a disservice to Peter with this this type of thinking. After all, Peter has already taken the risk. He has already left everything behind, his family, his work, his home, he has already left everything behind to follow this man named Jesus. At this point in our text, I think it is safe to say, Peter has already literally stepped out of the boat and taken the risk. So maybe instead of Jesus shaming or belittling Peter in this moment, maybe there is something else going on in our text.

And for us to discover this, we have to remember context. We must remember that from the very beginning of Matthew's gospel, one of the main

things he wants to do is reassure his community, his community who has taken risks, his community who has stepped out of the boat and decided to follow Jesus, his community who faces daily persecution. From the very beginning of his Gospel, Matthew wants to reassure his community that in spite of facing such harsh realities each and every day, God has not forsaken them. God has not forgotten them. God is right there, leading them, guiding them, meeting them where they are, creating new miracles of hope for them each and every day.

So it should be no surprise that with this story, this story where Jesus calms the waters, this story where again Peter steps out in faith, it should be no surprise that we find Matthew reassuring his community once more.

And here's why I say this. If we take a look at verse 27, Jesus says something powerful to his disciples. He tells them to not be afraid. It is I.

Now a lot of things get lost in translation, and this is another one of those times. The better translation for this phrase is: "Do not be afraid. It is the I AM." Matthew's listeners would have heard this and remembered. They would have remembered all the times before when God came to be with God's people...When God came to Moses and said, I Am Who I am..., telling Moses to go and free God's people, knowing that the God who was in the beginning, the God who is present now, the God who forever will be, was telling Moses to go. Moses was to

go back and face the ugliness of slavery, knowing that the Great I AM would be guiding him, going along with him on this journey, knowing that he will not be alone.

Matthew's community would have remembered the story of Elisha when he had fled his persecutors and remained hidden in a cave, remain hidden until God came to him in a small still voice, saying to Elisha, "I Am your God. I am returning you to be among my people. I want you to anoint a new leader who will bring them back into relationship with me. I will be with you. You will not be alone."

Matthew's community would have remembered the story of Jesus' birth when the angels declared that this new born baby was Emmanuel, God with us and they would have heard Jesus tell Peter, heard Jesus tell his disciples in their moment of fear, in the moment when the storms were breaking and the waves were crashing, they would have heard Jesus tell his disciples that he was there with them, leading them, guiding them, surrounding them with his power and love. They were not alone.

Hearing the story this way, hearing Jesus' call to the disciples this way changes us. It changes how we engage our faith. It changes how we take risks, how

we step out in faith. It changes us as Jesus disciples, just like it changed Matthew's community all those years ago.

Because you see, Matthew wanted his community, wanted his readers to know that this story is about a group of faithful followers, people who are just like us, people who had already answered the call to serve alongside their Lord. He wanted to remind all of us that "faith is not about doing the impossible, for only God can do that. Rather, Faith is about trusting, trusting that God is still accessible to God's people when we are faced with the impossible." Matthew wants us to know that regardless of what happens, Christ meets us where we are and creates new miracles of hope for us each and every day.

This seems like a good time for a sermon illustration but I'm not going to do that. What I am going to do is turn to our new leaders and say...thank you. Thank you for agreeing to serve. Thank you for agreeing to take the risk. At this time, I'm going to say to our new leaders, "Take heart and know that you are not alone. You are surrounded by a community of faith who walks with you. But more importantly, you are surrounded by a God who was, who is, and who forever will be. You are being lead and guided by a God who meets you where you are, both in times of difficult decisions and in times of greatest joy, know that you are being led by a God who is creating new miracles of hope for God's people each and every day.

Take heart and remember you do not do this on your own. Because if you begin thinking this way, than you are doomed to fail. Remember that only God can do the impossible and that we are not asking the impossible of any of you. We are only asking that you open yourselves up to God's presence working in our community, working in our life as a congregation, working on our nation and world, listening for God's words of wisdom, to guide us into becoming the people of love and welcome that God calls us to be.

And as for the rest of us, I say this...know that these words are not exclusive to the leaders of Midway Christian Church. They have been given to all of us by our God, a God who knew us before we were formed in our mother's wombs, a God who has named us and claimed us, a God who never leaves us alone during the storms of life. These words are for all us as ones who are created in the image of God

Know that God is there, holding us, guiding us, helping us face whatever seemingly impossible task or problem that we are called to face and overcome. Which today comes in light of the events at Charlottesville. These events show us that hate is still very active in our world, that as a nation, as a community, as a people we have a long way to go before the vision of God's peaceable Kingdom comes to fruition here on earth.

So in a time such as this, when the waves are crashing all around us, when the storms of violence and injustice surround us, threatening to overtake us, I say this...Take heart. Know that God is here meeting us where we are, telling us that it is the Great I AM, telling us to not be afraid. Take heart and know that our God is creating new miracles of hope for each and every one of us, calling us to trust that God hears our prayers...our prayers for justice, our prayers for reconciliation, our prayers for wholeness in a time such as this. Amen.