

## “Walking on Water”

Matthew: 14: 22-33

As I read this Scripture and was preparing this sermon, my mind kept thinking about those moments in all our lives, where fear has taken a hold, where we were not exactly sure how we ended up in the situation, those moments where the storms of life were crashing all around us. I am sure we have all experienced moments like these in our lives. Maybe these moments have happened when we were starting new jobs. Maybe these moments have happened when we were forced to face some harsh realities about life. Maybe these moments have happened when we were called as people of faith to go where we had not expected or even wanted to go. Maybe these moments are even happening now. And some point or another, The storms of life have all found us and we have all had those moments in life where we have felt the waves rolling underneath our feet, the water battering our vessels, and the skies beginning to get dark.

At that point in time, when those moments of fear are happening, it is almost as if we are sinking into the dark murky depths of the sea, filled with confusion, filled with frustration, maybe even filled with hopeless. But we also know that those moments of fear are not limited to life in general. These moments of fear can take a hold of us on our journeys of faith, and we can feel stranded on the path

becoming unsure of which way to turn. These moments of fear can even take a hold of our churches when we enter a new process that calls us to look beyond our doors and see where God is leading us. It is scary. It is unknown. And before we know it, the waves are beginning to roll and the water is beginning to batter our vessels of security and safety.

As I was sitting at my desk, preparing this sermon, I was thinking about the uncharted waters this church has been through over the years and will travel on as we continue surfing the edge. I was thinking of the uncharted waters that await this congregation as we explore what God is up to in our communities and explore how we can connect to these ministry opportunities in our midst. As I began to think about process, it was almost as if I could hear winds beginning to howl and waves starting to crash. Moments of fear began to fill my heart and head as I realized that as part of the Surfing the Edge process, we as a church, that we as a denomination, as a people of faith, are sailing into some uncharted waters without really know how it is all going to turn out when we begin to ask questions like “Where is God working in our community? How will we be asked to step out of our comfort zones? Will we even be able to recognize God’s call to us when it happens? All uncharted waters.

And my moments of fear do not stop with just these questions. I have been wondering what the answers to these questions will be for myself as well as we journey together in this Surfing the Edge Process. As I have been talking with other ministers also involved in this process, I have been wondering “Do I have the skills to lead this congregation in this time of transformation? Can I practice what I preach when it comes to stepping out of the comfort zones or will I fall back on patterns of behavior that may or may not be the best for me or the church but at least I know them as some sort of security, some sort of safety? And the toughest question that I struggle with as we begin this Surfing the Edge process is Can I really open myself up to where God is calling me or will I lead and expect God to follow?

To be honest, I’ve always struggled with that one. I’m like Peter in that way. Throughout my journey of faith, I have said, God if you command me to step out of that boat, I’ll do it. And for some reason, I’m always surprised that God does just that. And I’ll admit begrudgingly that at times I do step out of the boat and I enjoy the free feeling of walking on water for a minute, enjoy the connection of the Spirit and me for a while until the details begin to distract me, until the worries begin to sidetrack me, until the distractions of life get to me. Until I begin to wonder: What am I doing? Why am I leaving the safety of the boat? then I start to sink.

And then like Peter, I fall back on my blame God plan. “Well, God, this is all your fault. I did what you commanded me and look what happened. I sank. Surely, God, you know that humans can’t walk on water. What were you thinking, telling me to step out of the boat?”

And the next part of our conversation are words that I am just now beginning to understand, really listening to as a person of faith and what they say about me and my relationship with God. Jesus responds to my frustration, to my fear, to my blame by putting it all back on me. He responds by saying, “That’s all you’ve ever asked me to do. That’s all you’ve ever wanted me to do. That’s all you would ever allow me to do.” Jesus is reminding me that when I stepped out of that boat, I was leading the process, expecting God to simply follow along.

And once again, like Peter, I am discovering the real lesson behind walking on water just like the disciples did in our Scripture today. The real lesson is That when we take seriously the commands of Jesus, when we take seriously the sayings of Jesus, when we take seriously the calls that Jesus has extended to us as his disciples in our lives, miracles happen because the Spirit of God is there, leading us, guiding us and most importantly supporting us, strengthening us, and lifting us out of fears, just like Jesus did for the disciples in our Scripture this morning.

In our text, Jesus has just finished the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand and he turns to the disciples and says: “I want you to sail across the sea tonight. I am going up on the mountain to pray. I’ll meet you on the other side in the morning.”

And you know that the disciples who had spent their whole lives fishing were questioning Jesus’ instructions. “Jesus, now you are a simple carpenter from Nazareth. And I say this with as much respect and courtesy as I can, but Jesus, you really don’t want to go out on a boat a night, especially the sea. You don’t exactly know what could happen. Storms come brewing up and they come up quick. You see, Jesus, at least four of us have had some experience with this when we were fishermen. And we experienced something similar to this a few months ago, remember. We were out on the sea at night, and a storm came brewing, and started tossing the boat about. Now you were with us during that time. You calmed the storm. This time, you won’t be with us. You’ll be on the mountain. What if something happens? What if a storm comes up again? Jesus, It might be best if we just waited for you here and we’ll come across in the morning, when it is safe, and we can see where we are going.” Okay? Really, this was just another way of saying, We’ll lead, Jesus, you follow. And as we read on, we know that this is not what happens. somehow the disciples find themselves obeying Jesus’ instructions and they get into their boat and set off across the sea at night, praying for the

morning to come quickly, praying for morning light to skip a few hours and shine early. And suddenly about 3 in the morning, the waves begin to slip sharply on the side of the boat. The winds begin to howl. And the disciples can hear thunder off in the distance. And it is not too long before the disciples find themselves in a full fledged storm, with no hope of returning to the safety of the shore. They were in the middle of the sea and in the middle of the storm. Waves are rolling and the water is battering their safe and secure vessel.

And Peter looks out and sees this figure. And he calls out, “Lord if it is you, command me to step out of this boat.” And Jesus says, “It’s me. Step out of the boat.” And Peter takes him seriously and he walks on water. A miracle happened!

Now let me stop right there and say that Peter gets a bad rap from this story. Sure he is impetuous and sometimes doesn’t always get the point, but he took Jesus’ words seriously. He follows Jesus’ command and a miracle happened!

The thing we underestimated or view in a bad light is that we think Jesus is there to reprimand Peter, to tell him that because he sank, then he must not have been a very good disciple. And I’m going to say that was just not the case. Jesus wasn’t stupid. He knew Peter was going to sink. Humans can’t walk on water. Only God can. And the last time I checked, none of us including Peter is God.

The thing that Matthew wants us to understand that as disciples of Christ, we will find ourselves in some uncomfortable, even scary places, not because we did anything wrong but because we are taking Jesus' commands seriously. Jesus wants us to sail uncharted waters. Jesus wants us to take his command to love one another seriously. Jesus wants us to take his command to welcome the stranger seriously. Jesus wants us to take his command to go and make disciples seriously. Jesus wants us to take our calling as his disciples seriously, even if it leads us into unknown and scary places. Jesus wants us to practice an active faith that finds courage in God's word and strength in God's presence.

The wonderful thing about this story is the grace that Jesus shows Peter and shows all of us. Jesus was there when Peter began to sink. He didn't leave him alone. Jesus picked him up and said what did you learn? Jesus shows his disciples and us today that anything can happen when we take Jesus' words seriously. Miracles can happen. And he also shows them that he is there securing them when they start to falter.

Jesus shows the disciples and us today that the true meaning of faith is having the courage to step out of the boat, trusting God's word, and the humility to turn to God when we falter.

Miracles happen when we take God's word seriously as people of faith.

Miracles happen when we step out, when we take a risk, when we follow whole heartedly our call as disciples, knowing that God is there, guiding us, leading us and lifting us up when we falter

Jesus is calling us to sail into uncharted waters as we engage in this Surfing the Edge process. We don't know how it is going to turn out. We don't know where it will take us. However the good news that we do know is that when we take God's word seriously, miracles happen!

Today, by engaging in this Surfing the Edge Process, we have said, "Jesus if that is you, command us to step out of the boat and walk on water." Today, we know that Jesus has said, It is I. And today we are asking ourselves, What are we afraid of"? With Jesus, by our side, guiding us, we will make it safely to the other side. Amen.