

Message
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Matthew 14:22-33

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, 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, 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."

There is a lot I love about this passage. I've done this story at VBS, with squirt guns, and the corn starch as I said, the liquid you could walk on, or sink into. With thunderstorm sound effects, and the spooky whooooing of ghosts...

What I was first reminded of was a print that was hanging on the wall of grandma's farm. It was holographic, and when you walked by you see Jesus crucified, and then Jesus walking on the water of this stormy sea with his hand out. It was fascinating for us kids to walk up and down the living room watching this picture. But it was an aha moment, you can take as many biblical courses as you can find and still have those Duh moments, or I guess aha moments... while readings a commentary about this and other gospel scriptures being a foreshadowing to salvation... Jesus had his hand stretched out in his picture, reaching out to take hold, and then was on the cross. So really, I don't know if I should call it an aha, or a duh.... But anyway.

The next thing it made me think of, and this is me driving in the car just pondering the text like I do during the week before I write, but I thought of my dad trying to teach me to ride my bike. My first 2-wheeler. And I had a habit of looking at the ground or my feet. So, I couldn't get my balance and kept falling over. I mean, I could end the anecdote there I guess, but what my dad did was make me stand in the middle of the back yard, put my hands out in front of me and run full tilt into the wall looking at my feet. That taught me quickly to keep my head up.

But seriously, I relate deeply to the humanity of Jesus in this, and many passages actually. But Jesus sending his disciples out in a boat, dismissing the crowds and climbing a mountain to get away from everyone. He did this a few times in scripture. Needed some alone time to talk to God, or just take a deep breath. As an extreme introvert, I can totally relate. I ended each class this summer by climbing what felt like a

mountain to get from the basement of the library, up a very steep hill, then to the top floor of residence to have a few hours of alone time in my room.

Often when we hear this story, we think about Peter, who stepped out of that boat hoping to be given proof and be witness to, and becomes part of Jesus' miracle... and who can't relate to that right? That desire to be party to a miracle, and then maybe letting our faith slip just a little and needing to stretch out our hands for Jesus to catch us from drowning. That's relatable. But even this isn't today's focus.

In reading this passage this time around, my focus is more outward. When the focus is inward, or on ourselves, which it often is, we forget to look out toward Jesus. We want proof, we want to be part and party to a miracle. Our humanity, and the constant energy we have to put into our very survival, makes us understandably self-centered.

And if we looked to Jesus, what would we see?

Now this isn't the first time Jesus has calmed a storm. In Chapter 8, remember a storm came up and Jesus was sleeping in the back of the boat, those disciples, again were terrified. Jesus wakes up and rebukes the wind and waves and the storm is calmed.

Why not this time. Why did he let this storm swallow Peter? Well, he didn't though, did he. He reached out his hand. The reassurance that he was still here. And they got into the boat. But that storm didn't stop until they got back into the boat together.

In Nicholas Schaser's commentary, he states that the Gospel passage uses language that foreshadows salvation. He points to Jesus' action, not Peter's, not ours. We all know we have a little of Peter in us. This isn't news to us. Not me anyway. The important part is Jesus' action. He comes to Peter and the disciples. They were far from land. The waves and wind were battering them into a frenzy to the point where even the vision of Jesus terrified them.

Crisis blinders. That's what I might call them. Doesn't matter what kind of crisis we're in, often times we tend to don a pair of blinders during this time. There's an inward focus. What do I need to do? What can I do to make this better? How do I get myself out of this situation?

And this is another time I imagine Jesus' humanity. I imagine, and I know there is no biblical evidence, but I imagine Jesus standing there, hand out, saying, "Come on guys, I'm right here!! Open your eyes!! Every time this happens, Jeez!!!"

But Jesus does reach out his hand to Peter. And what does he do? He pulls him back in the boat. He doesn't get him a lifejacket, or floaty ring, or set him atop the water, and immediately calm the sea... he pulls him into the boat with the rest of the disciples. Then the sea is calmed. It's these tiny details where we find new meaning.

Not only might we be blinded to the work of God in our lives while facing crisis, but we might turn away from community. Peter might have been fine if he had just stayed in the boat, right? Jesus would have made it to the boat with them, the storm would have been calmed, and Peter would have been in the safe hands of his friends the whole time.

Jesus pulled him back to the boat. Does God want us to set out into a stormy sea alone? Or does God want us to hold on to each other, as we inevitably brave storm after storm together, navigate together, troubleshoot together, hold each other in our weaknesses and bolster each other with our strength?

Now this isn't to scold or admonish us about our lack of vision, or faith, the times we stumble, the times we start to sink. Because it's going to happen time and time again. If it can happen to Peter, who was one of Jesus' closest friends. So how much should we berate ourselves when it happens to us? Oh but we do, don't we.

So, I don't truly think Jesus is exclaiming in some frustrated tone, "COME ON GUYS!!!" Jesus is walking toward us, with his hand stretched out, knowing we are scared, panicked, in crisis, and maybe stepping out of the boat looking for some proof, or looking to be party to a miracle. And he guides us, right back to the boat, so we can brave any storm together.

A couple chapters later in Matthew, Jesus' lessons and parable continue, trying time and again to reassure the crowds, his disciples, and us, that with God, all things are possible.