

Courage!

²²Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land,²⁵ for the wind was against them. ²⁶And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. ²⁷But when the disciples saw him walking on the water, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. ²⁸But immediately Jesus reached out his hand and said, "Take heart; it is I; do not be afraid." ²⁹Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ³⁰He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. ³¹But when he noticed the strong wind,³² he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³³Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³⁴When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³⁵And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." *Matthew 14:26-33*

“Courage: Jesus Walks on the Water”

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost
Saturday and Sunday, August 12 and 13, 2017

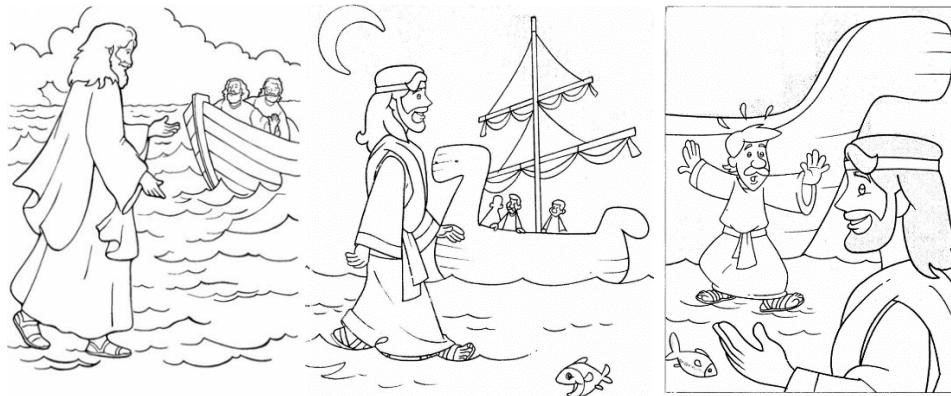
All Services
The Reverend Jennifer A. Crist
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

1 Kings 19:9-18; Romans 10:5-15; Matthew 14:22-33

Let us pray: Gracious and ever-present God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you, O God who catches us when we fall, bring us courage and faith in times of doubt.... Amen

Jesus Walks on the Water....a familiar Bible story, right?

We were taught this in Sunday School, maybe? And we show our children and grandchildren this story in their Children's Bibles.



Most depictions of this scene show a smiling Jesus helping a distraught Peter, often during the daytime. (I found these images under the label: The Most Brilliant and Also Stunning Jesus Walks on Water.)



I even found an image of an activity for children where you could make blue jello and put little cut-outs of a boat, Peter, and Jesus on the surface of the jello. Then if you shove Peter down a little bit into the jello, you can make it look like he is sinking.

Jesus Walks on the Water.....



This story comes right after the feeding of the 5,000, another familiar story that Pastor Brock talked about last week. Right after the disciples cleaned up from feeding the 5,000, in fact collecting twelve baskets of leftover pieces, Jesus commands them to immediately get into their boat and leave. Jesus wants them to head to the other side of the lake, where another crowd in Gennesaret is in need of healing. Jesus will take care of dismissing the large crowd.

Then, Jesus does something he often takes time to do.... he goes up into a mountain to pray. Instead of hurrying from one mission site to the next, he pauses to go and pray and be present with God. To renew himself....to prepare himself....to abide with God before he moves into his calling, his work in the world.

When Jesus joins the disciples, it is actually in the middle of the night and in the middle of turbulent winds. In the ancient Greco-Roman world, the night time was divided up into four "watches" from 6pm to 6am, with each "watch" being 3 hours long. So, from 6-9pm, 9pm to midnight, midnight to 3am, and 3am to 6am. And we are told in Matthew's gospel that this interaction of Jesus and the disciples occurs in the 4th watch: 3-6am. And though our Sunday school images and popular art depicting this story would suggest it occurred during daylight, the 4th watch was pretty much dark. In fact, nautical twilight over the course of a year ranges from about 5:30-6am. So, if there was any light, it was most likely from the moon or the stars or at the most, the sun just barely starting to peak out.

And in the Greco-Roman world, there was a preoccupation with superstition and apparitions. So, in that time and place, in the darkness with the waves pitching a boat too and fro, with just the faintest light beginning to creep into the hills, it would have been quite frightening to see a person walking toward you on the water.... even if that person looked like Jesus. The disciples had been with Jesus near the water before, but he had been inside the boat or on the shore, never before walking on the water. Think how strange all of this would have been.



We hear that after the disciples notice this ghostlike Jesus walking on the water, Jesus immediately speaks to them, saying, "Take Heart! It is I. Do not be afraid!" A better

translation of Take Heart in the Greek is, "Have Courage!" And Peter? Peter initially seems to have a great deal of courage.



I don't know if any of you have ever tried to disembark from a boat into the water, but it can be awkward. Peter would have had to fling one leg out, test the water to see if it seemed he could stand, shift his weight from the leg in the boat to the leg out of the boat. Can you imagine that moment of the shifting of his weight? And then, then he would have had to let go of the boat. Now that's courage. To let go of that which is solid, that which you know can

hold your body up, to now rely on a fluid substance, water, that has never before been able to hold a standing person? Now that's courage....

A brief story of courage from Guatemala: There once was a 15-year-old girl who went with her Catholic school to visit and spend time with children at an orphanage. While she was there, she met a boy and asked him about his story. The boy followed her around all day, and asked her if she promised to come back. She promised and she did come back to visit that boy and that orphanage. And she doubted that a 15-year-old girl could really do anything that would make a difference, but she began to imagine a ministry to street children. You see, getting to know the children at the orphanage, she had learned about why so many of these children had ended up on the street before coming to the orphanage.



Often, the families of these children were abusive. Sometimes the children had been abandoned. Sometimes the families simply couldn't take care of these children, and so as they became older, they were sent to find food and jobs for themselves at very young ages. These children often made their way to the city, where they found other children trying to survive as well. At night, they would often pool the money they had made shining shoes or selling flowers or newspapers to rent a room and stay the night. There could be a dozen or more children sharing the same room.

The 15-year-old girl from our story turned 16 and decided she just had to try to do something. She asked the principal of her high school if she could use a storage shed at the school to set up a table with a little bit of food and drink for the street children to come to right after her school day was complete. She would stay there for hours feeding these children and listening to their stories. She often snuck the children in at night to allow them shelter when they couldn't find a room to rent. A couple of other teenagers noticed what she was doing and asked to help. All of them knew this was a big societal problem, and they doubted if it would make any difference at all, but they had to try. They acted out of their faith with courage to begin this program that would a few years later lead to two of them opening an orphanage for street boys.

And this also was a huge risk. These young adults, now married to each other, had no experience in preparing paperwork for the orphanage, or in dealing with the emotional needs of street children, but they began anyhow, trusting that they would work through the bumps in the road, the waves in their sea of street children. God was with them.



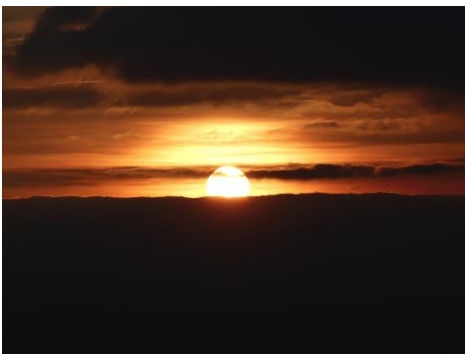
They began by finding land and building their first buildings to house the street boys who would enter. They had to outfit the orphanage with everything.... kitchen utensils, furniture, clothing, workers, children, everything. But little by little, they did it.

And Peter did it too! He climbed out of that boat. He let go of the

side of the boat; and he began walking toward Jesus. And then the reality of the storm hit him. Removed from the safety of the boat and the community of the other disciples, Peter was on his own and the wind was hitting him and jostling him and he was afraid. Who knows if he was literally or figuratively sinking, but he cried out to Jesus, "Lord, save me."

²²Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land,²⁵ for the wind was against them. ²⁵And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. ²⁶But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. But Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; it is I. Take heart, for I am with you and will not leave you alone." ²⁷He said, "Come," if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ²⁸He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. ²⁹But when he noticed the strong wind,³⁰ he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³²When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." *Matthew 14:26-33*

Courage!



In this story from Matthew, we see Jesus responding to the disciples immediately. And he responds to Peter immediately as well, by stretching out his hand and catching Peter as he falls. "You of little faith, why did you waver? Why did you doubt? Why did you hesitate? Did the storm scare you? Did the separation from your community of friends scare you? Did being outside of the boat scare you?"

Why did Peter waver and doubt? Well it could have been that it was dark and scary and he thought he might be seeing a ghost. Or it could have been the storm and wind and jostling around with constant sprays of water being splashed up into his face. Or how about, people aren't normally able to walk on the water? Of course, one would doubt that.

Knowing that which we know about water, you and I would not expect to be able to walk and stay standing on water, would we? I don't think that Jesus was being hard on Peter when he asked: "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

You know, we often look at doubt as a bad thing. We have forever labeled the disciple Thomas as doubting Thomas, which carries a negative connotation, doesn't it?



However, Courage requires doubt.

Courage requires trust in the midst of that doubt.

Courage comes from faith.

And faith.... comes from God.

Remember the young married couple who began the orphanage in Guatemala? Well, a few years after starting that orphanage, they arrived one day to find that their workers had teamed up and left, taking all of the contents of the kitchen and the bedrooms with them. The orphanage was left an empty shell with children who had nothing. This was devastating to the directors, but they picked themselves up and started over. They began partnering with other orphanages, which is how I met them.



These directors are Karen and Estuardo of the orphanage Hogar Miguel Magone, where two of my sons came from.... the same orphanage that Tree 4 Hope partners with in Guatemala to provide long-term hope to the children who call it home through a variety of educational and empowerment initiatives.... soon to be expanded as we begin building our school for girls, Hope Academy.

People who come to Guatemala and meet Karen and Estuardo are always surprised to hear their story, and how they were stepping way outside their comfort zone to move into what God was calling them to do.... shifting their weight from one foot in a solid and predictable world into a fluid shaky and often chaotic world. And it is still not easy..... and they need courage each day to continue....and they find their faith brings them courage.

Courage!

²²Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land,²⁵ for the wind was against them. ²⁶And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. ²⁷But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. ²⁸But he said to them, "Jesus, it is I, do not be afraid." ²⁹And he said, "Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid." ³⁰And Peter answered him, saying, "If it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ³¹He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. ³²But when he noticed the strong wind,³³ he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³⁴Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³⁵When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³⁶And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." *Matthew 14:26-33*

And don't we also need courage each day?.....our faith brings us courage to do hard things.

To confront a person we have hurt and ask for forgiveness.... that's hard, right? That requires courage!

To tell someone we trust that we are suffering from abuse or addiction and need help to move toward

wellness.... that's hard...that requires courage!

To try something new and different that is outside our comfort zone with an open mind and heart.... not easy

To stand in solidarity with our sisters and brothers experiencing violence and racism, that's really hard.... That requires courage!

To move forward in life even when we feel great loss...

All of these things take courage

Jesus spoke "Have Courage!" two other times in the gospel of Matthew, in stories of healing. Jesus told the paralytic man who was in bed, "Have Courage, Son! Your sins are forgiven!" and then the paralytic stood up and was healed.



And remember the woman who had suffered from a bleeding disorder for many many years? The one who followed Jesus and touched the fringes of his robe? Jesus said to her: "Have Courage, Daughter! Your **faith** has made you well!" Jesus connects courage and faith and forgiveness.

And all of these are entwined together into the identity of Jesus, Son of God, who says, "It is me. Do not be afraid. I am who I am. I will be who I will be."

Jesus, the one who died so that we might live.

Jesus, the one who promises to be with us, no matter what.

Jesus, the one who catches us when we are sinking.

May we find courage through our faith to go where God is calling us to go

And when we can't find courage, may our faith community share their courage with us

Have Courage

Don't be afraid

The great I AM is with you

Ready to catch you and me when we fall again, and again, and again

And thanks be to God for that! Amen!!

Courage!

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,^l 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,^l 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." *Matthew 14:26-33*

Copyright © 2017, Jennifer A. Crist. All rights reserved.



www.trinitycamphill.org