

Willow River Parish—Clear Lake, Deer Park, Forest United Methodist

Matthew 14:22-33

Right then, Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead to the other side of the lake while He dismissed the crowds. When He sent them away, He went up onto a mountain by Himself to pray. Evening came and He was alone. Meanwhile, the boat, fighting a strong headwind, was being battered by the waves and was already far away from land. Very early in the morning He came to His disciples, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw Him walking on the lake, they were terrified and said, “It’s a ghost!” They were so frightened they screamed.

Just then Jesus spoke to them, “Be encouraged! It’s me. Don’t be afraid.”

Peter replied, “Lord, if it’s you, order me to come to you on the water.”

And Jesus said, “Come.”

Then Peter got out of the boat and was walking on the water toward Jesus. But when Peter saw the strong wind, he became frightened. As he began to sink, he shouted, “Lord, rescue me!”

Jesus immediately reached out and grabbed him, saying, “You man of weak faith! Why did you begin to have doubts?” When they got into the boat, the wind settled down.

Then those in the boat worshipped Jesus and said, “You must be God’s Son.”

1. When It Rains

In 1911, the Morton Salt Company started adding magnesium carbonate, an anti-caking agent, to their salt. This allowed the salt to pour freely, even in damp weather. To emphasize their free-pouring salt, they came up with advertising to communicate that idea.

They decided upon the famous umbrella girl image quickly, and then they worked on a slogan. “Even in rainy weather, it flows freely,” said what they wanted, but had too many words. Next, they thought of the old proverb, “It never rains, but it pours.” That was nixed when they decided it was too negative.

Then they hit on one that was just right, one that has stood the test of time and been in continuous use by the company ever since: “When it rains, it pours.” Since 1914, both the umbrella girl—which was an artist’s rendition, and not based on a particular girl—and the slogan have been integral parts of the company’s message and advertising.

Has that slogan ever rung true in your life? Faced with one bad thing, you find that another is close at hand. One bright spot in those challenging times of life is that, even in the midst of the trials, we often sense God’s presence most clearly.

2. **Jesus’ Bad Days**

In Matthew 14, we see a hard couple of days for both the disciples and for Jesus. It starts with Jesus learning of the death of John the Baptist in a most gruesome way—beheading. Jesus and John were the same age and were cousins. While both were still in the womb, John recognized Jesus as the Messiah.

When Jesus learned of John’s death, he wanted to be alone. The crowds would not let Him, and he ended with the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000.

Now the meal was done. Jesus sent the disciples by boat to the other side of the lake, and dismissed the crowds. He then went up on the mountain to be by Himself—finally.

This didn't last long. The disciples in the boat were caught in a storm, and they needed Jesus. Jesus walked to them on the water of the lake. When Peter saw what Jesus was doing, he wanted to do it too. He actually walked on the water for a few seconds, and then his doubt caused him to sink.

The experience caused the disciples to declare Jesus as God's Son.

3. **Fear**

In the story of creation found in the book of Genesis, we read where Adam and Eve had eaten of the forbidden fruit, something which had been specifically denied them. Knowing that God is searching for them, they attempt to hide. It is a scene perhaps reminiscent of many of our childhoods when we had done something that we not supposed to and we literally hid from our searching parents. God finally finds Adam and Eve, as we now that He will, for, after all, where can we go to hide from God? God asks them why they are hiding. Adam said, "Because I was afraid."

This could remind us that fear is so basic to whom we are as humans—it goes all the way back to the beginning of time. To be human is to experience fear.

There seems to be no limit to our fears. In a Peanuts cartoon strip, Charlie Brown goes to Lucy for a nickel's worth of psychiatric help. She proceeds to pinpoint his particular fear. Perhaps, she says, you have hypoglycophobia, which is the fear of responsibility. Charlie Brown says no. Well, perhaps you have ailurophobia, which is the fear of cats. No. Well, maybe you have climacophobia, which is the fear of staircases. No. Exasperated, Lucy says well, maybe you have pantophobia, which is the fear of everything. Charlie says yes, that is the one.

Sometimes we feel like that we are afraid of everything. We are afraid of ourselves—of people—of the future—of the past—of life—of death.

4. Disciples

The disciples were terrified. They think the figure coming toward them on the lake is a ghost. Jesus says, “Don’t be afraid.”

Peter’s impulse, in the face of that fear, is to walk on water himself. Did the others think “Oh, I’d like to try that! Yes, Lord, call me out on the water, too.” What made Peter think he could walk to Jesus across the water. It seems that he is trying to test Jesus.

Jesus invites him to come.

Peter’s impulses are far ahead of his rational mind. Peter goes out and walks on the water. Then his brain catches up. Distracted, he loses...what—concentration—faith—trust—crazy-making adrenaline? The wind frightens him, he gets back in the old groove, and down he goes. Peter shouts for help and Jesus rescues him.

It seems that Jesus chides Peter for lack of faith, but what if He is complimenting Peter? “Why did you doubt, ye of little faith? You had it.” Like a parent teaching a child to ride a two-wheel bicycle, you let go and the child sails off in perfect balance, but in a moment of self-consciousness, he falters and falls. The parent calls out, “You did it! You were doing it! You can do it!” Perhaps that is what Jesus meant.

Jesus meets Peter’s panic with an outstretched arm and the gentle encouragement of a loving parent. Perhaps Peter’s failure opens the way for a deepening of faith more secure than success might have offered—the

loving presence of the One lifts him from his terror. Peter may not remember how he walked on water, but he will remember how he was saved.

5. **Miracle**

That night of the storm was a turning point for the disciples. Matthew suggests that the miracle is greater than the one we see.

We enter the story as the crowds have been fed and sent home. Jesus' disciples are sailing back across the lake, and Jesus finally has some solitude in which to grieve John. His time is cut short when His disciples are overwhelmed by a freak storm. Characteristically, Jesus lays aside His own grief to rescue his friends. This is the first miracle.

The storm at sea is a small reflection of the storm of grief that Jesus and His followers are facing. It is also a small prophecy of the greater storm of crucifixion to come. Jesus demonstrates what He will later promise—His presence is always with them, and he will always be there to rescue them.

The second miracle is the disciples' response of worship. They worship Jesus and recognize Him as God's Son. It is only a short leap from God's Son to Messiah.

6. **The Times**

We live in an embattled tie. Conflicts in politics, problems with economics, and a global pandemic have put the icing on the proverbial cake of usual issues. Most of us already feel we are up to our necks in alligators. Now we have entered hurricane season to boot. How much more can we take? How much longer can we fight?

Let's face it—we are a tired, fatigued, tense, and nervous bunch right now. Just when we think we've ridden the final wave another rises up and heads right toward us. What shall we do?

When I think of prepping and preparing for adverse conditions, I think of athletes. Athletes train themselves not only physically, but mentally and spiritually, in order to accomplish ever more rigorous feats. We need to prepare ourselves mentally and spiritually for the adverse conditions.

7. **Missing the Rocks**

Three ministers were in a boat together fishing. One of them, suddenly realizing that he had left his tackle box in the cabin, stepped out of the boat, and walked on the water over to shore. Just then, the second one said he had forgotten his faithful fishing hat on the front seat of the car. He too stepped out of the boat and walked on the water over to the shore. When they had both returned, the third minister who had watched this remarkable demonstration with mouth open and eyes wide, reasoned to himself, "My faith is as strong as theirs. I can do that too."

So he stepped out of the boat and promptly sank to the bottom. His two friends dragged him out, but once they got him into the boat, he was determined not to be shown up. He stepped out once more, and immediately sank again. As his friends pulled him out, he sputtered, "My faith is as strong as yours. Why can't I walk on water?"

The first two looked at each other and one finally said, "We'd better tell him where those rocks are before he drowns himself."