Christ the King—St. Stephen
Scripture Reflection
Nineteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time
2026—A Cycle



What do I see?

As I study the characters in Philip Otto Runge's 1806 painting, "Jesus Walks on Water, Rescues Peter"...
what is the first thought that comes to mind? What do I think of Peter's bold "stepping out" action? Where would I place myself in this (entire) image? Why?

Opening Prayer

Into Your Hands
Lord Jesus,
you call me to step out in faith...
to place my life in your hands...
and wholeheartedly commit to following you.
It's not easy for me to follow where you lead...
to let go of my safety net(s)…
and trust you to provide for me.
Forgive me when I doubt you, Lord.
Increase my faith.
Open my eyes to see past my own self-interest and concerns...
to your broader vision for me... and for the world.
Amen.

Source: Christine Longhurst, Mennonite Brethren (Canada)

Scripture Readings

I Kings 19: 9-13 "Nourished by (his) meal, Elijah walked forty days and nights, all the way to the mountain of God, to Horeb."

Psalm 85: 9-14 "Love and Truth meet in the street, Right Living and Whole Living embrace and kiss!"

Romans 9: 1-5 "You need to know that I carry with me at all times a huge sorrow."

Matthew 14: 22-33 "As soon as the [miraculous] meal was finished, Jesus insisted that the disciples get in the boat and go on ahead to the other side while he dismissed the people."

Introduction to the 19th Sunday of Ordinary Time

In times of crisis and sacrifice, we may wonder, "Where is God? Where can I find the only one who can make all things right again?" This weekend's readings provide surprising answers. The Prophet Elijah and Jesus take center stage featuring both "wind" and "storms."

In I Kings 19: 9, 11-13, the word of Yahweh came to Elijah. "Go, stand on the mountain at attention before God. God will pass by." Elijah obeyed and arrived at a cave where he felt safe. Yahweh then instructed Elijah to go to the mouth of the cave and wait for Yahweh to appear. Yahweh then treated the prophet to a series of wild manifestations of the power of nature (a *windstorm*, then an *earthquake*, followed by a *fire*, then... a *whispering breeze*). Which weather event revealed the true nature and presence of the Divine One? Only the whispering breeze.

The second storm in these readings may seem less obvious. This one howled inside St. Paul, who admitted his failure to the mixed community at Rome, "I carry with me at all times a huge sorrow. It's an enormous pain deep within me, and I'm never free of it. I'm not exaggerating." With these words, the Apostle expressed unbearable grief at the refusal of most Jews to accept Jesus as their true Messiah, and to whom Paul had dedicated so much of his post-conversion life.

In the gospels, we never know where we might find Jesus. After his retreat from the 'loaves and fishes' miracle, we next see him walking on the wind-tossed Sea of Galilee to join his terrified apostles (Matthew 14: 22-33). When the Apostles saw him, they cried out, thinking at first that they had seen a ghost. In the *Bible Diary 2023* reflection for this liturgy, Mary Elizabeth Sperry commented, "The most striking image in this gospel is Jesus reaching out to take hold of the terrified Peter.... If we wish to follow Jesus, gentleness will mark our path."

Reading from the First Book of Kings (19: 9-13)

"The word of God came to him. 'So, Elijah, what are you doing here?'

"'I've been working my heart out for the God-of-the-Angel-Armies,' said Elijah. 'The people of Israel have abandoned your covenant, destroyed the places of worship, and murdered your prophets. I'm the only one left, and now they're trying to kill me.'

"Then he was told, 'Go, stand on the mountain at attention before God. God will pass by.' A hurricane wind ripped through the mountains and shattered the rocks before God, but God wasn't to be found in the wind; after the wind... an earthquake, but God wasn't in the earthquake; and after the earthquake... fire, but God wasn't in the fire; and after the fire, a gentle and quiet whisper. When Elijah heard the quiet voice, he muffled his face with his great cloak, went to the mouth of the cave, and stood there.

"A quiet voice asked, 'So, Elijah, now tell me. What are you doing here?'"

Personal Reflection

Yahweh had promised to appear to Elijah, but without providing specifics. After a series of spectacular natural phenomena, he still hadn't found the presence of his God. The late evangelist Rev. Billy Graham once said, "God isn't bound by time the way we are. We see only the present moment; God sees everything. We see only part of what God is doing. God sees it all."

"So, Elijah, now tell me, what are you doing here?"

— *When in my life have I heard God whisper these same words in my ear (or something similar)? Bring that memory to life again. What were the circumstances? And what "wrong place" had I lost myself in? How did I respond to God's soul-piercing question?*

Psalm 85 (9-14)

The coming age of peace and justice (A Korah* Psalm)

Lord, let us see your kindness and grant us your salvation.

I can't wait to hear what God will say.
He's about to pronounce his people well,
the holy people he loves so much,
so they'll never again live like fools.
Lord, let us see your kindness and grant us your salvation.

See how close his salvation is to those who fear him?
Our country is home base for Glory!
Love and Truth meet in the street;
right living and whole living embrace and kiss!
Truth sprouts green from the ground.
Right Living pours down from the skies!
Lord, let us see your kindness and grant us your salvation.

Oh yes! God gives Goodness and Beauty;
our land responds with Bounty and Blessing.
Right Living strides out before him,
and clears a path for his passage.
Lord, let us see your kindness and grant us your salvation.

* *During the time of King David, the sons of Korah became the leaders in choral and orchestral music in the tabernacle. Among the biblical psalms, eleven are attributed to them (42, 44-49, 84-85, and 87-88).*

Personal Reflection

This is an uplifting, hopeful psalm. Not a lamentation like many other psalms. Written *after* the Israelites had returned from captivity in Babylon (5th c. BC/BCE), Psalm 85 uses the most universal terms of the human vocabulary. There are times when we struggle to find anything hopeful and uplifting in our personal life, in our work, or in our world. In those dark moments, we do well to recall that our God is ever-constant and bestows only good gifts—though sometimes in disguise.

— *When did I last "see" the Lord's kindness to me, as the antiphon begs?*

From St. Paul's Letter to the Romans (9: 1-5)

[Paul wrote,] "You need to know that I carry with me at all times a huge sorrow. It's an enormous pain deep within me, and I'm never free of it. I'm not exaggerating—Christ and the Holy Spirit are my witnesses. It's the Israelites.... If there were any way I could be cursed by the Messiah, so they could be blessed by him, I'd do it in a minute! They're my family. I grew up with them. They had everything going for them—family, glory, covenants, revelation, worship, promises, to say nothing of being the race that produced the Messiah, the Christ, who is God over everything, always. Oh, yes!"

Personal Reflection

Paul admitted to his fellow Jews in Rome, "You need to know that I carry with me at all times a huge sorrow... an enormous pain deep within me. And I'm never free of it." The great preacher, with all his dedication and skill at evangelizing, had converted only a small minority of God's chosen ones—Paul's own Jewish people by birth. Yet, the great apostle courageously allowed the Roman community he had not yet met—and each of *us*—a peek inside his most private thoughts.

— *How willing have I been to share my most secret fears and emotional pain with another—perhaps not with a total stranger but with a spouse, a family member, or someone I love and can trust with my innermost self? If I did, how did that person receive my sharing?*

The Gospel According to Matthew (14: 22-33)

"As soon as the meal was finished, Jesus insisted that the disciples get in the boat and go on ahead to the other side while he dismissed the people. With the crowd dispersed, he climbed the mountain so he could be by himself and pray. He stayed there alone, late into the night.

"Meanwhile, the boat was far out to sea when the wind came up against them and the waves battered them. At about four o'clock in the morning, Jesus came toward them walking on the water. They were scared to death. 'A ghost!' they said, crying out in terror.

"But Jesus was quick to comfort them. 'Courage, it's me. Don't be afraid.'

"Peter, suddenly bold, said, 'Master, if it's really you, call me to come to you on the water.'

"He said, 'Come ahead.'

"Jumping out of the boat, Peter walked on the water to Jesus. But when he looked down at the waves churning beneath his feet, he lost his nerve and started to sink. He cried, 'Master, save me!'

"Jesus didn't hesitate. He reached down and grabbed his hand. Then he said, 'Faint-heart, what got into you?'

"The two of them climbed into the boat, and the wind died down. The disciples in the boat, having watched the whole thing, worshiped Jesus, saying, 'This is it! You are God's Son for sure!'"

Personal Reflection

Wow! There's a lot going on in this exchange between Peter and Jesus. Let's break it down. Jesus was quick to comfort his apostles. "Courage, it's me. Don't be afraid." Only Peter spoke up, "Master, *if* it's really you, call me to come to you on the water." Notice the qualifying "if." Not yet a confident act of faith. This is what author Elizabeth Gilbert called, "running full speed, face first, into the dark," in her best-selling book, Eat, Pray, Love.

Seizing the opportunity to reward Peter's as yet imperfect trust, Jesus said to him, "Come ahead!"

In this passage, Matthew seems more interested in Jesus' invitation than in Peter's ultimate surrender to his fear of drowning. As we observe this scene, should we scold Peter for giving up? In his gospel version, Matthew doesn't emphasize Peter's doubt. Rather, he focuses on his moment of courage and faith. Though soaked and shaken, Peter might have felt better than any of his shipmates.

A commentary in the *Christian Community Bible* gives Peter high marks saying, "Only Peter dared to attempt something that seemed reserved for Jesus alone. Joining his companions again in the boat… he was *the happiest of them all*."

"Jesus said to [Peter], 'Come ahead!'"

— *When has Jesus invited me to come to him across the troubled waters of my life? Was my answer a faith-filled, "You got it, Lord, here I come"? Or did I choose to stay within my threatened but nonetheless 'safer' boat, like the other apostles?*

For Inspirational Watching, Listening and Reading

Watch

"Why did Jesus Walk on Water?" This is an exceptional description of the "walks-on-water miracle" by Rev. Jay McCarl, *direct from the scene* on the Lake of Galilee (16 *fast-moving* minutes).

Listen

"Walk on Waters" by Hillsong

Read

The Wisdom Pattern: Order, Disorder, Reorder by Fr. Richard Rohr, OFM (Franciscan)
Fr. Rohr shows a universal pattern in all societies and, in fact, all of creation. We see it in the seasons of the year, in the stories of Scripture, in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the rise and fall of civilizations, even in our own lives.
(I read this book and found it mind-blowing, wise, offering hope to a Church and world that's losing hope. I'm now giving it a second reading.—AJG)

Preview of Next Weekend's Scriptures

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Isaiah 56:1, 6-7 "Do what's right and do it in the right way, for salvation is just around the corner."
Psalm 67: 2-8 "The whole country will see how you work, all the godless nations see how you save."
Romans 11: 13-15, 29-32 "There was a time not so long ago when you were on the outs with God."
Matthew 15: 21-28 "A Canaanite woman came down from the hills and pleaded, 'Mercy, Master, Son of David! My daughter is cruelly afflicted by an evil spirit.'"

Closing Prayer

(edited, abridged, and adapted for use here)

A Prayer for Today
Precious Lord Jesus,
I yearn to get closer to you.
I want to spend time communicating with you.
You are my hope.... because you are faithful.
Lord, I am holding fast... refusing to waver.
I trust in your promises.
Fill me with your fullness...
and help me follow you... in everything I do.
Amen.

Source: Benny Hinn Ministries

Unless otherwise indicated, the Sunday readings are from *The Message* Bible translated by Rev. Dr. Eugene H. Peterson (Catholic Edition)
Peterson's translation of the Bible is a highly interpretive paraphrase, celebrated for its readability.
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