



Lectionary 19, Year A

Bishop Don Kreiss, Southeast Michigan Synod

11th Sunday after Pentecost: Gospel Text – Matthew 14:22-33

Matthew 14:22-33

²² [Jesus] made the disciples get into a boat and go on ahead to the other side [of the Sea of Galilee,] 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."

SERMON TEXT:

Dear Ones, dear friends,

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ, who said to the disciples: Take heart, it is I

I am Don Kreiss, the bishop of Southeast Michigan, and I'm so pleased to be with you this morning.

Okay, on to business, on to a story that raises a number of interesting questions about nature of faith, of about what it means to trust each other and most importantly, what it means to trust Jesus.

So, in our story for today, what we see is that Jesus and the disciples have just finished feeding more than 5,000 folks with nothing but five loaves and two fishes. (You remember that story?)

And Matthew tells us that all ate and were filled, and that there were 12 baskets of leftovers collected after the meal ended.

It's a remarkable sign of the breaking in of God's kingdom!

But rather than basking in the glory of having pulled off a miraculous feeding of all those hungry folks, rather than sitting around talking about what that meant in terms of God's kingdom coming near in tangible, edible ways, rather than waiting around to hear all the thank you's

from those he treated to dinner,
before all the folks have had a chance to pull themselves up
off the grass and start the journey towards home,
Jesus gets the disciples together and gets them into the boat.

And he made them get into the boat and
--I think we need to pay attention here--
he sent them on ahead to the "other side."
Now in the geography of the story from Matthew,
we know that means the other side of the Sea of Galilee
--what would be a good-sized lake here in Michigan.

But I suggest to you that the important thing
isn't the distance they are meant to travel,
but the fact that the disciples are sent to the other side.
Which is to say they are sent away from what is familiar,
away from what they have just accomplished,
away from what they're certain about
and on to the next thing.
It is, if you will go with me for a moment here,
a moment where the disciples are sent ahead into the wilderness
(even though this is water and not desert)
a wilderness where they will be tested
and where they will learn something about themselves
and what it means to be Jesus' disciple.

And not only does Jesus send them there, into the wilderness,
that is,
but he sends them there in a hurry,
and tells them to go on without him.

Jesus then dismisses the crowds, but reading closely we discover that *Jesus' first goal* is to clear everybody out so he can go up the mountain to pray. Alone. No disciples. No people. Just him and God his father.

O, Dear Ones, I hope you have some of that kind of time in your life: time that you can take (or find or claim) to be alone with God --to pray or walk or sing or think or remember or whatever, and so to be refreshed and renewed in your life and faith.

After he's done praying, *Jesus' second goal* is to reconnect with the disciples as quickly as possible, which might have been a challenge except for three things:

- 1) they're all together in the boat;
- 2) they haven't gotten where they're going because the winds and the waves are against them; and
- 3) Jesus is not yet done doing miraculous things.

So in the uncertain light of early dawn Jesus does what only he can:

he sets out to join them by the shortest route, which is to say by walking across the sea as though it were as solid as the road from Jerusalem to Jericho.

Meanwhile, wet and weary, the disciples have grown tired of their voyage and forgetful of the miracle they have just seen Jesus accomplish on dry land.

The journey was taking much longer than they thought it should, you see.

And for all their labor at the oars
they weren't getting much closer to their destination.
They were in their own wilderness moment,
even though it was a wilderness of wind and water.
Not everybody's wilderness is the same, you know.

Therefore, when they spot a mysterious figure
coming toward them over the water, their reaction is
understandable
and slightly comic: *It is a ghost!*

And this moment in the wilderness raises up some other points
we need to acknowledge: it is hard to do your best work when
you're tired. We overlook things, we forget things, we get more
anxious,
and sometimes more fearful when we're in need of rest
or at least a chance to breathe.

The other thing to remember here is that in their weariness,
the disciples forget what they have already seen Jesus do;
they are no longer fully mindful of the mercy and grace
they have already experienced.

Do you know what I'm talking about, dear friends?
It's that moment in a journey when you've come so far
that going back is no longer an option,
but when you really can't see how much further you have to go
or exactly how you're going to get there.
It's that moment when, no matter how old you are,
the only question you can think to ask is "Are we there yet?"
even though you know we're not.

But that's the point when the first gospel word is spoken to the disciples.

Because just like the way he made them get into the boat, Jesus "immediately" speaks a word of reassurance that echoes across all the years from then until now, a word spoken to us as well:

Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid!

What good news, Dear Ones! What good news!

But if that word is sufficient for 11 of them, it isn't quite enough for Peter.

Wanting to trust his ears but unable to see clearly, Peter makes a deal:

"Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."

Which is a remarkable thing for Peter to say, on so many levels. Because, and we know scripture doesn't work this way, think about all the other things Peter might have said:

Who is that?

How are you doing that?

Wait! We will row over and get you! or even:

Come closer so I can see who's talking!

But Peter says none of those things, choosing instead to risk it all:
"Command me to come to you on the water."

And Jesus says, ***"Come!"***

Peter gets out of the boat.

Which may be the most astonishing thing in this whole story.

Peter leaves behind his companions, his safety,
his doubts and his fears in order to get out of the boat!

Peter gets out of the boat!

Still in his wilderness of wind and waves.

still unable to see exactly who's calling,
but willing to trust that his ears and his heart know the truth.

And Peter walks toward Jesus!

We can only imagine what the others thought when they saw it,
and if, for the rest of their lives,
they regretted not being as bold--or crazy-- as Peter.

It didn't last, of course.

Peter gets frightened and starts to sink,

Lord, save me!

And Jesus hauls him up, pulling the fisherman into the boat
without a hook or a net.

Which brings us to the last couple of lessons from this lesson:

First, I think we're allowed to smile when we remember that Peter,
whose nickname was "the Rock"

was the one who tried to walk across the water.

It is perhaps a gentle reminder that not everyone is gifted at every
task.

Second, and I don't think the disciples were doing this in this story, but sometimes in the church we do:
do not confuse *being together* with *making progress*.
They're both important, but they're not the same.

We gather on Sunday to tell the story,
to sing the songs, pray the prayers,
and to be fed at the Table,
but unless we take that story with us
to share with those who are not yet here,
unless we invite others to learn what we know about Jesus,
we're missing the point.

But still, dear Ones, no matter where you are in your wilderness,
Take heart! Do not be afraid!
For our Lord has called us to follow him,
to get out of the boat,
and past our fears.

And while we may not yet know how to walk on water,
we can be certain that Jesus is walking with us,
even here, even now.

Amen

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