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Matthew 14:22-33 – *The Life of Peter: Life of Faith*

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Matthew 14:22-33

²² Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. ²³ After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, ²⁴ and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

²⁵ Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. ²⁶ When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear.

²⁷ But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

²⁸ “Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.”

²⁹ “Come,” he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”

³¹ Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?”

³² And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. ³³ Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

The Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**)

“Take courage.”

“It is I.”

“Do not be afraid.”

These are the words that Jesus speaks to his disciples on the water.

These disciples have been following Jesus.

They’re learning what it means to be in a relationship with him...

And what they're about to learn is that the life of faith—
 The life of following Jesus—
 Isn't always smooth sailing (pun intended).

The disciples just witnessed Jesus feeding 5,000 men...

This with just 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish.

Now Jesus says, "Get into your boat and paddle to the other side of the lake..."

"I'll dismiss the crowd."

If Jesus knows there's a storm coming on the lake—

Which I think he does—

He doesn't prevent his disciples from going through it.

No, Jesus strongly urges/commands them to set off.

And what they experience sounds pretty scary:

They are sailing across the lake in the middle of the night;

Winds are blowing *against* the way their boat is headed.

These winds are stirring up waves that are *buffeting* the boat.

The word used here can mean batter or even torture.

These waves are blasting/tormenting the side of the boat.

And they're already a several kilometers away from where they set off.

This is frightening!

Getting to where they want to go—

At Jesus' command—

Is hard!

Does this sound like a fitting description of your faith life sometimes?

Like you're going against the wind and waves?

You feel like you've been sent out by Jesus in a boat to cross the lake...

The winds start to pick up...

And waves start to batter the side of your boat.

You know the direction you want to go...

But there are fierce winds against you.

Maybe you're like the rest of the disciples—

The ones who (wisely?) stay in the boat—

They keep at the oars...

Rowing, rowing, rowing against the wind and the waves...

Trying to get to their destination.

You've been working at growing in your faith:

You've tried to establish regular routines of reading the Bible;

Maybe you've been trying to get up early to pray;

Or you were just getting to a place where you were connecting with other Christians...

Connecting with your neighbors...

Volunteering your time to a good cause...

Or giving more of your money.

You were heading in the right direction!

But then the winds pick up:

Interruptions seem to come out of nowhere when you try to read;

Exhaustion sets in and you can no longer sustain your early devotion time;

COVID disconnects you from other believers...

It stops you from connecting with your neighbors...

It stops you from volunteering your time...

From using your God given gifts to serve.

And money is tight now so you have to give a little less;

Maybe an illness or death has battered your faith...

Or just living in a culture at odds with the teachings of Christ has taken its toll on you...

And filled you with doubt about Christ.

The waves torment the side of your boat.

You're using your strength to row...

But it seems like everything is against you...

Keeping you from getting where you want to go...

From where you know you *should* go...

Where God is *calling* you to go.

Or maybe you're more like impetuous Peter here:

You've had a surge of faith (boldness)...

And you've climbed out of the boat.

You've taken a big risk...

Trusting God to clear the way before you.

Maybe God has put a big task before you...

Where it's impossible to succeed unless he sustains you.

You started by walking on water...

Things *were* going well...

But then you see a big wave coming your way!

Your faith waivers and you begin to sink.

Following Christ is *not* easy...

Whether you're in the boat or you've stepped out...

The life of faith is full of ups and downs.

It's full of faithful moments and times (seasons?) of doubt.

Living faithfully for the Lord is hardly ever smooth sailing.

And our tendency with passages like these is to moralize them...

To say, "try harder!"

"Take bigger risks!"

"If I had enough faith I'd be out of this storm by now..."

"My problems would be over."

But this isn't the gospel.

Try harder is not the Good News.

What Jesus is teaching them—

What God is impressing upon *us*—

Is that he is always here...

His presence and his power are with us... (Scott Hoezee):

“Take courage. It is I. Do not be afraid.”

So, why can we take courage in this?

Why can we keep pulling at the oars when the waves batter our boat?

Why can we keep believing when doubt overwhelms our life?

Because **this man we follow, Jesus Christ...is God.**

This is one of the main themes of Matthew’s Gospel:

Immanuel—God with us. (Matt 1:23; 28:20)

And this is the theme that POPS out here.

When Jesus says, “Take courage. It is I.”

What that really says is, “Take courage. I AM.”

If you’re familiar with the OT—

And especially the exodus story—

You’ll recognize that this is how God identifies himself:

God says to Moses, “Tell them ‘I AM’ has sent you.” (Ex. 3:14)

The God of Israel in the OT is the Great ‘I AM’...

And now Jesus says:

“Take courage. Don’t be afraid. I AM.”

Take courage. I’m with you. I am God.

It’s not just lip service either.

Look at all of the evidence here:

Jesus walks on water;

Job 9:8 – “He alone...treads on the waves of the sea.”

He grants Peter the ability to walk on the water;

The wind stops when Jesus gets into the boat (cf. Psa 107:27-30)

And finally, the disciples worship him saying,

“You are the Son of God.”

The only person worthy of worship in the Bible is God himself.

Matthew, unashamedly, says that those in the boat worshiped Jesus!

This man we follow...is God.

We can take courage—

We can surrender our fears...

And continue to wrestle with our doubts—

Because the one we follow has authority over the forces of nature.

The one we follow feeds thousands with a few loaves of bread.

The one we follow comes to us in the storm...

He reaches out his hand to us...

Grabs hold tightly of us...

And saves us...

Never letting us go.

The children baptized here have been grasped by God.

All of us here in Christ have been grasped by God.

We belong to him...

And there is nothing out there able to change that.

So, whether you're in the boat, at the oars battling the wind...

Or you've stepped out and have been able to 'walk on the water'...

But now you've started to sink...

We will all experience a mixture of faith and doubt in this life...

We will all go through struggle and storm.

But Jesus continues to say:

“Take courage. I AM. Do not fear.”

Look to Christ.

In him we find our comfort and strength.

Amen.