

Trinity Presbyterian Church
February 26, 2017

“The Waters of Discipleship: Stepping Out”

It must have been an exhausting day. The day began with Jesus and the disciples learning that John the Baptist had been executed, so grief hung in the air around them. But the needy crowds kept coming, so Jesus kept healing their sick. Then around dinner time Jesus tells the disciples to feed 5,000 plus people. It is after an already long day that this happens:

Text: Matthew 14: 22-33

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, 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.”

Intro: They thought he was a ghost. It wasn’t until Jesus spoke the familiar words that they recognized who he was: “Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid.” So Peter musters up his gusto and steps out in faith. It is every disciple’s calling to do their best to step outside of their comfort zones; to journey beyond our own understanding. Now we Presbyterians like to take things slowly—if it were a boat full of Presbyterians out on the water, we would have probably formed a committee to assess the depth, gauge the temperature and even read a few books about how other churches have done it. We like to gather the information so we understand what we are doing before we take action. But sometimes, like Peter, we are compelled to step out in faith with nothing more than our trust in the one who says, “Come.”

Move 1: If we reflect back on our life as individuals and as a church, you have stepped out in faith before. There have been times when you’ve followed Jesus out of the comfortable place, into the waters of uncertainty. Some of you have uprooted your entire lives—left the security of your family and friends to follow a vocational calling to Winston Salem. You stepped out when Jesus said, “Come.” As a church you stepped out in faith when the church became an affirming home for all people. Just last year we asked for an increase of 10% more to hire a DCE for our children and young families. Taking out your calculators you crunched the numbers and

even if it seemed impossible at the time, some of you still did it. You all stepped up, but really you stepped out in faith. Then there was the time you took a great risk: hiring a fresh-out-of-seminary pastor to lead you. During a tumultuous time when questions about Trinity's future kept surfacing—you could've used someone a bit more seasoned—but instead you stepped out into the uncertain waters. You have taken risks as individuals and as a church. You have stepped out before.

Move 2: Of course, when the waves get rough, we begin to sink into our doubt. We grow afraid. We start questioning if we are on the right path or maybe if we've really been called at all. We start feeling some wind resistance keeping us from moving forward: maybe in the form of self-doubt or when we experience push back from others. There was a white protestant church who was starting a Sunday School Study on white privilege. The pastor asked the custodian to put up a message on the marquee in the front lawn that read, "White Privilege: Let's Talk, Wednesdays @ 5pm." The custodian clarified, "Are you sure? What if someone reacts to the sign and wants to harm us? There are crazy people out there you know!" Do you hear it? It is wind resistance, keeping us from moving forward. You see, we feel the resistance and the wind reminds us that we are no longer in the security of the boat. So we begin to waver back and forth. We find ourselves blown back into old patterns which keep us feeling safe. And there we are in the waves, with the weight of doubt on our shoulders, sinking.

Move 3: So maybe in the sea of anxiety we need to confess: we have taken our eyes off of the savior. With everything else vying for our attention we miss our prayer time. Or going to church falls lower and lower on the priority list. In the mail this week, clergy got a new option for our insurance plan. We have incentives to lower our deductible: annual visit to the doctor, exercise regularly. But this year there is a new incentive: prayer. Even clergy need incentives to pray! We have lots of good reasons why we get distracted, don't we? If we have kids our lives are full of managing need after need. It's easy to take our eyes off Jesus when life is swirling in everyday chaos. If we are a caregiver our calendars are full of working all day, then driving mom to the doctor, making sure all her pills are organized in her weekly pill container. Then there are her bills to manage, her fridge to keep stocked. Or maybe we're retired. And magically we are just as busy as we were when we had our 40 hour/week jobs. And perhaps with everything going on we find ourselves missing prayer time, even though we're swimming in a sea of anxiety. It is easy to do, especially when we have taken our eyes off of the savior.

Move 4: But did you notice what happens at the end of the story? Jesus pulls Peter out of the drink and when they get back into the boat, *the wind calms*. You see, in an earlier story, it was Jesus who commanded the winds to stop. But here the wind calms down once they come back into the community. Might imagine Peter drenched, the other disciples putting a towel around him, encouraging him, "Oh, I could've never done that, Peter." "That was a bold move, Peter!"

“Peter, for a second you were actually doing it!” Because encouraging each other is what a community of disciples do—especially when someone is brave enough to take a bold first step off the boat. There was a transgender woman who wasn’t sure she wanted to go to church. Her religious family wasn’t talking to her. The Christians she knew at work kept looking at her funny as she transitioned. But she felt called to go to church, so she went. So she stepped into the church, sat in the back row. As they passed the peace, the community wrapped her in welcome. Of course, shortly after the leaders met—had to discuss who in the congregation might be uncomfortable. But then someone said, “You know, Jesus is on this ride with us. We really have nothing to be afraid of.” The wind calmed, and they moved forward. Because the truth is: Jesus is on the ride with us and we are all in the boat together.

Conclusion: Look, Jesus is still out ahead calling to us saying, “Come. Take Heart. Do not be afraid.” Maybe he sees in us a courage we didn’t know we had. When we step out, God does things we never thought possible. Perhaps...even walking on water.