

August 13, 2023

Matthew 14:22-33

²²Immediately [Jesus] made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. ²⁵And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. ²⁶But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out in fear. ²⁷But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.” ²⁸Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” ²⁹He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. ³⁰But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” ³¹Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” ³²When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

A miracle? This is not a miracle story. In Jesus’ day it was believed that people could walk on water – if

they were special, unique. I believe, the world works as we believe the world works.

This story is not about walking on water – well, yes, it is: the story tells us Jesus is special, “the Son of God”, but still it is not about a miracle. This story is about walking with faith through the storms of life.

At first, Peter, full of faith, has no problem stepping out onto the water, but, then, the wind picks up; it becomes stormy. Storms have a way of battering our confidence and feeding our fears. Peter, Matthew tells us, “noticed the strong wind, he became frightened.”

Jesus saves Peter, and challenges Peter: “Why did you doubt?” The short answer is: “Because he is human.”

When we first learn about God and God’s love, about all being welcome, we can get all excited, enthused, ready to jump right in with both feet. But, then, life happens. We lose a job, a spouse, a house, or our health. Maybe we can’t pay the bills. Life happens, and we feel lost and alone, and, like Peter, we begin to sink.

Our faith waivers; our trust in God is eroded and when that happens, we are at a loss of what we are to do. Matthew tells us that when Peter began “to sink, he cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’”

William Sloane Coffin said, “Faith is not believing without proof, it is trusting without reservation.”

Today’s story is about trust; it is about facing the storms of life with a trust that God is present and will help to see us through life’s storms.

To “trust without reservation” is not easy. That is why we gather together. For together we are part of God’s kin-dom, helping each other and the world keep from sinking in the midst of life’s storms.

I feel fairly confident that most of us here have found ourselves in Peter’s situation, perhaps more than once. So, looking back on your life, how many times have you cried out, “Lord, save me?” and been caught by Jesus, just as Peter was? Maybe you wouldn’t say Jesus caught you, but you might, possibly, say sometimes the members and friends of this church aided you in keeping your head above water. In other words, the church, the Body of Christ, Jesus supported you. And, I am hoping, each time you found yourself in times of trouble your faith, your trust in God, grew a little stronger. That is why you are still here.

We are not Jesus or God or perfect, so time and time again we find ourselves faced with Jesus’ question: Why did you doubt? What happened to your trust? Why are you so anxious? Your response should not be that you have messed up faith-wise, rather learn, as Peter did, that we are human after all, so it is not a

surprise that sometimes our faith falls far short of the glory of God.

However, I hope, when you look back on those times when your faith has wavered, you are able to see how, over time, you were caught, were kept from sinking, were lifted up by the faith you have learned and experience in and through the church.

If this is true for you, then looking back on your life, you can see that Jesus walking on water is no more a miracle, than the fact that you are here, lifted up, cared for, loved; your head above water. For being lifted up, cared for, and loved is, in itself, a miracle.

When you stop and look at where God has brought you in and through life, is it not miraculous? Is it not cause to be grateful?

So, the next time the storms of life threaten to overwhelm you, remember how Jesus walked on water and in faith, trusting without reservation, call out for help. Don’t be surprised when you are caught and lifted up, the storm calmed. Don’t be surprised, be grateful.

May God bless each one of us a trusting faith without reservation, which allows us to see the miracle of life all around us and calls forth from us a worship of thanksgiving for the beauty of life’s blessings. Amen.