

We've all heard the story. Jesus is walking on water toward the boat that carries the disciples. This is the first for all of them, so of course they're scared. Is it a ghost? Jesus calls out to identify himself and to calm the disciples. But still, walking on water?

We know from other stories in the Bible that we can always count on Peter to speak up, and this is no exception. Peter calls to Jesus, 'If it is you, command me to come to you on the water.' Jesus calls back and tells Peter simply, 'Come.' Peter walks on water until he begins to doubt and starts to sink. Of course, Jesus reaches out and saves Peter, saying, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?'

As I started to prepare for today, this seemed an easy message. Faith in all of the readings. We hear from 1 Kings about Elijah being afraid for his life because he was faithful. God gave him courage to come out of hiding and then go do as God commanded. Psalm 85 says, 'I will hear what the Lord the God will say, for he will speak peace to his people.' Those who are faithful will have peace, truth, and loving kindness. Today's text from Romans ends with, 'Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

And now we read that Peter walks on water while he looks to Jesus with trust and faith, but sinks as soon as that faith falters. Four readings, all telling us to have faith, hold on to that faith, focus on Jesus, and we'll be okay. Message given. And you're going to love me for the shortest sermon ever.

But I kept thinking there had to be more. Forget the shortest sermon. There's some research to do. So I read some commentaries and some scriptures and some explanations and a couple of sermons from rural pastors. And found this scripture really is more meaningful than my first impression. I also remember that there's another Bible story about Jesus and the disciples in wind and a boat. I needed to look at that story again.

I found it in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, so it must be important. Jesus and the disciples get into a boat and cast off. The wind blows and the waves are high and Jesus is sound asleep. When the disciples, scared out of their minds, wake Jesus up and say, 'We're all going to die,' Jesus simply commands the wind and it is still. In this story, the disciples wonder, as it says in Luke 8.25, 'who then is this, that he commands even the wind and the water and they obey him?'

With this story in mind, I return to the boat of today's reading. Two things come to mind. One, Peter needs to get out of the boat. And two, Peter and Jesus need to get back into the boat.

Several years ago, I had the opportunity to go to Israel and Pakistan, Palestine, sorry, and walk in some of the places that Jesus walked. And it was an experience beyond words. One of the activities of that trip was to go on to the Sea of Galilee in a replica of the boat that was used for fishing in Jesus' time. I don't remember a lot about that boat as far as size, except I know it was big. It's not a little rowboat. It's not the kind of boat that you and I would take if we were going out to go fishing. I don't remember the exact size, but it seems like it was about 25 or 30 feet long, maybe 15 feet wide, and it sat high in the water.

So when Peter decided to climb out of the boat to walk to Jesus, he had to make a real commitment. He couldn't just sit on the edge, swing his feet over, and step onto the water. First, he had to get down to the water. Not easy, especially with the wind blowing and the waves below him, but he was determined. And with that commitment made, Peter confidently heads to Jesus, keeping his eyes on the man he trusts.

But just like any normal human, somewhere along the way, he realizes what he's doing. 'What am I thinking? I can't walk on water?' And he begins to sink. And just like in the other readings, help is there. Jesus reaches down and takes Peter's hand, adding a little rebuke. 'Ye, a little faith. Why did you doubt?'

We know why. This isn't a normal thing for people to do. It might seem fine in the heat of the moment of real trust, but like all people, I know like I would, and possibly you would as well, Peter began to think. He saw the reality around him, the wind and the waves, and fear took hold. Possibly his thought went to thinking, 'I'd like to be in charge of my life, and right now I am not in control.' He might have even forgotten for a while that Jesus was even with him. Fear does that to a person. But Jesus was there. Jesus reached out his hand and brought Peter back to the surface, and they went back to the boat.

This brings me to my second thought. Peter and Jesus had to get back into the boat. Remember the other wind and rain story, and Jesus was sleeping, and then Jesus simply commanded the storm to be quiet, and it was silenced. Remember the reaction of the disciples? They wondered, 'Who is this man?'

This time, the wind and waves are also calmed when Jesus gets into the boat. But this time, the disciples don't wonder. I'm sure all of those disciples were crowded around watching Peter get out of the boat and walk to Jesus. They would have had their own reservations on whether Peter could walk on water. And then they would have seen him sink. And they would have seen Jesus simply reach down and pull Peter up to safety and bring him back to the boat. This time, it's not, 'Who is this man?' This time, it was the definitive declaration. 'You are certainly God's son.' No doubt, just revelation.

They understood Jesus better than before. And they had faith in who Jesus truly was and is.

This age old story matters to us today. We all have or have had situations in our lives where we're sitting in a boat watching the turmoil around us. It could be a big storm or a small storm, an illness, a loss, a big disagreement with a friend, or any of the many issues that face people every day. We need to take a deep breath and get out of the boat. Put our focus on Jesus, knowing he will walk with us through whatever is happening. His presence will provide peace and strength and clarity. The outcome might not happen right away, and it might not be what we hoped or what we expected, but we won't face it alone, and the outcome will be correct for us.

We all have guidance and comfort. Plus, when we keep our focus on Jesus and ask for his help, we'll have a sense of peace and courage and comfort in the process. We might not know exactly why we're going through it. We might forget that Jesus is even there with us when we are in the middle of our problems. But somewhere along the way, we're going to get back into the boat.

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We'll recognize that Jesus was by our side the entire time. We'll recognize that Jesus was guiding us and comforting us and keeping us steady. Like Peter, we falter sometimes, but Jesus will pull us back. Trust. He'll never leave us alone to face our problems alone.

KLC has a boat too, and we're all in it. But we have a crew member who's ready to help us through the wind and the waves. Pastor Leslie has her eyes focused clearly on Jesus. She listens to the Holy Spirit, and she trusts with full faith that we are in good hands with God, and God has a plan for Kihei Lutheran Church. We will also have the help of Pastor JP, who's going to be here next week with us to worship, and to have a question and answer after worship. And then later in November, Bishop Nagler is going to come and have a conversation with us as well.

I invite you to read or reread the synopsis of the Zoom meeting that we had with Pastor JP and the Bishop and come up with your own questions. Pastor Leslie has helped others like us. She can help us understand who we truly are and who we want to be. She and Pastor JP will help us revise the MSP, which is the ministry site profile that gives details about our church and what we can offer a pastor. This revision will help those who want to apply know right up front if we might be a good fit.

But you are the ones in charge. We'll go forward with the work of transition only if a majority of you want to go ahead now with the work that's involved. Be aware that this is what's necessary to move toward getting us a pastor. If we choose not to do it now, which is okay, we will need to do the transition work sometime. Think it over, pray about it, and let us know. Do you want to get out of the boat and move toward finding the leader that is right for KLC? It will take commitment from all of us.

We'll sink from time to time and get our feet wet, but Jesus will always be there, and he will always pull us back to the project at hand whenever necessary. With Pastor Leslie knowing how to guide us, with her focus and our focus firmly on Jesus, we can move forward. The best part is that we already know God has a plan for Kihei Lutheran Church. Working together at the correct time in faith and trust, we will have that plan revealed.

Trust. Have faith. Take a deep breath and get out of the boat with total commitment and total trust in Jesus. Then climb back into the boat with complete understanding. You are never alone.

We are never alone.