

“Keep Going and Let God Save You!”

Matthew 13:3-8, 18-23, 31-34, 44-46; 14:22-32

Pastor James York

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Prayer for Understanding Ever present Lord, we thank you for your word, which is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Holy Spirit open our eyes to the signs of your presence, open our ears to your voice and open our minds to your wisdom. Amen.

Joyce Meyer said: “The Bible says to ‘fear not,’ but this does not mean you should never feel scared. It means when you do feel fear, keep going forward and do what you are supposed to do. Or as I like to say, do it afraid.”

Winston Churchill said: “If you are going through hell, keep going.”

Planting a seed is a ‘keep going’ act of love. I remember the tension, fear, and fatigue of spring planting. The anticipation, exhilaration, and joy of spring planting. My parents debated how much to invest in planting. My dad was all in, mortgage all our assets, plant as generous as possible, person. My mom was cautious, let us hold back some of our assets in case the crop fails then we will have resources to buy feed for the livestock and survive to next harvest season, person. Planting is risky. The crop could fail for a myriad of reasons, too dry, too wet, too hot, too cold, erosion, disease, weeds, wind, hail, frost, animals, and on and on. Planting is hopeful. Most years there is a harvest. Some years the harvest is abundant.

As farmers, we carefully selected the seed, matching the seed to the conditions, length of growing season, soil type, anticipated weather, the plants intended use, etc. As farmers we prepared the soil making the earth hospitable for the seed. We planted at the ideal time and depth, fertilized the seed, and protected the seed.

Jesus tells a parable about a farmer planting seed. It is an outrageous, radical, shocking parable for the farmer extravagantly plants seed everywhere. The farmer plants seeds even where there is almost no chance that the seed will be able to grow.

An interpretation of the parable is each of us is the farmer. Each of us is to “keep going”, bless others, be fruitful, multiply, provide abundance for all, by planting seeds. Planting seeds is revealing God’s redeeming grace for all people through our words, actions, and lifestyle. Planting is loving. We are to plant seeds everywhere and with everyone, even our enemies. We are to rejoice and be grateful when the seed grows. We are to be tenacious and keep going, keep planting, when the seed is rejected or dies.

Matthew 13:3-8, 18-23 NLT “Jesus told many stories in the form of parables, such as this one: “Listen! A farmer went out to plant seeds. As they scattered them across their field, some seeds fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate them. Other seeds fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seeds sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. But the plants soon wilted under the hot sun, and since they didn’t have deep roots, they died. Other seeds fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants. Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted! “Now listen to the explanation of the parable about the farmer planting seeds: The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who hear the message about the Kingdom and do not understand it. Then the evil one comes and snatches away the seed that was planted in their hearts. The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. But since they do not have deep roots, they do not last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God’s word. The seed that fell among the thorns represents those who hear God’s word, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life and the lure of wealth, so no fruit is produced. The seed that fell on good soil represents those who truly hear and understand God’s word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!”

Keep planting. Keep loving. Keep sharing God’s redeeming grace freely offered to all people.

Jesus tells parables that teach us to go all in for love, for love will supernaturally, exponentially grow providing belonging for all.

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-46 NLT “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed planted in a field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but it becomes the largest of garden plants; it grows into a tree, and birds come and make nests in its branches. The Kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast a person used in making bread. Even though they put only a little yeast in three measures of flour, it permeated every part of the dough. The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure that a person discovered hidden in a field. In their excitement, they hid it again and sold everything they owned to get enough money to buy the field. “Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant on the lookout for choice pearls. When they discovered a pearl of great value, they sold everything they owned and bought it!”

As Jesus was telling these parables, John the Baptist was beheaded. The disciples grieve John and our world that suffers from hate, violence, cruelty, and war. A crowd found Jesus. Jesus had compassion for everyone and healed them. Jesus modeled “keeping going” in the midst of grief and tragedy with love to transform and redeem lives. That evening, the disciples helped Jesus feed a crowd of over 10,000 people. The disciples are exhausted. They are grieving, frustrated by violence, dismayed by hate, weary from serving and uncertain of what their role is in bringing heaven to earth.

One might expect Jesus to tell the disciples rest, get some sleep, grieve, pray, let come blessings. It is startling that Jesus immediately insist that the disciples “keep going”, get in a boat and cross over to the other side of the lake.

Jesus has taught about love, modeled love and now tells the disciples to love. Jesus invites the disciples to join him in crossing over from apathy to love. The water, sea and storm symbolize chaos, disorder, lack of creativity, hostility, inner discord and the struggle to love. The crossing over to the other side, through the storm is the transformation from hearing love, to seeing love, to actually loving. The crossing over is uniting all of one’s self into a single quest to love.

Under Jesus’ guidance, the disciples cross over, realizing that love is the most excellent way, that love is greater than their troubles, that love is supreme, that love will bring heaven to earth, that love is grandeur than all, that love swallows death.

Matthew 14:22-32 NLT “Immediately after this, Jesus insisted that his disciples get back into the boat and cross to the other side of the lake, while Jesus sent the people home. After sending them home, Jesus went up into the hills by himself to pray. Night fell while Jesus was there alone. Meanwhile, the disciples were in trouble far away from land, for a strong wind had risen, and they were fighting heavy waves. About three o’clock in the morning Jesus came toward them, walking on the water. When the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water, they were terrified. In their fear, they cried out, “It’s a ghost!” But Jesus spoke to them at once. “Don’t be afraid,” Jesus said. “Take courage. I am here!” Then Peter called to Jesus, “Lord, if it’s really you, tell me to come to you, walking on the water.” “Yes, come,” Jesus said. So Peter went over the side of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus. But when Peter saw the strong wind and the waves, Peter was terrified and began to sink. “Save me, Lord!” Peter shouted. Jesus immediately reached out and grabbed Peter. “You have so little faith,” Jesus said. “Why did you doubt me?” When they climbed back into the boat, the wind stopped.”

Over the last two years, this scripture has kept entering my mind and dreams. It has been a comfort and a challenge for my grief, health struggles, caregiving, and ministry. The challenge is to keep going, keep rowing, keep loving, cross over from apathy to love. The challenge is to discern which of the myriad of voices is God. The challenge is to leave the safety and comfort of the known and cross through the storm to the emerging unknown. The comfort is God is with us. The comfort is God calms the storm. The comfort is when we are in sync with God, the supernatural happens.

Keep going, keep loving, and Jesus will partner with you to calm storms, to move you, humanity, and the cosmos to the other side from the fallen and broken shore to the shore of heaven and love.

Often there is tension in scripture. What seems like opposing perspectives come together to form a synergy grandeur than our imagination. This scripture has a synergy of keep loving and relax Jesus will love through us.

Pastor Anna Carter Florence explains: “Jesus asks Peter, ‘Why did you doubt?’ It is a deceptively loaded question, much more loaded than we think. And it instantly begs another: What exactly did Peter doubt? Did he doubt that he could walk on water? Or did he doubt that the blurry figure approaching him was really Jesus? What did Peter doubt? How we answer that question makes a huge difference. Most of the time, to the

detriment of all concerned, we seem to pick the first option: Peter doubted that he could walk on water. Answer the question this way, as many of us do, and we can take Peter to task for his lack of faith. His great sin, it follows, is that he did not keep his eyes on Jesus. Peter let the wind distract him and he remembered that fear was a reasonable response. He was afraid and so he sank. Ah, but if Peter had just had faith, he could have done anything! If he had had faith as a grain of mustard seed, he could have said to the mountain move and it would have moved. He could have walked on water for the rest of his life. He could have raised the dead. So the moral of the story, to continue in this line, is “Ya gotta believe!” Have faith in what you can do through the power of Jesus. It is such a temptation to read the story this way. After all, it would explain a lot, wouldn’t it? Whatever is wrong is due to a lack of faith: we do not have enough of it. We doubted what **we** could do. If we did not we could walk on water. But what if we take the second option? What did Peter doubt? He doubted that it was really Jesus right in front of him. ‘Lord if it is you,’ Peter said, ‘ask me to come to you on the water. Send me.’ And Jesus did and it was going fine for a moment, until Peter looked around and remembered that usually people sink in water. With enough wind and waves, boats sink too. And what if this blurry figure is not Jesus, holding out a hand? What if he could not tell the difference between Jesus and a ghost? What if he had only imagined that Jesus would come to them in their distress? It is such a temptation to make this story only about what **we** can do. It is also about who Jesus is. And here is what Matthew tells us: Jesus is the one who will walk on water to be with us. Jesus is the one who calls to us over the tumult of the waves. Jesus is the one who reaches out a hand to pull us into the boat. Jesus is the one who sits beside us through and past the storm. We are not mistaken in that in God’s love for us, God’s care for us, God’s call to us from wherever we are sinking into a lifeboat of safe passage and the assurance of God’s voice about the wind and waves. Believe it. And go out to meet God.”

I like to plan and be in control. I like to plant. God is inviting me to grow in my trust of God to be with me and love through me. God is inviting me to wonder in God’s transformation of a seed into a plant that bears abundant fruit.

The farmer plants the seed. God gives seeds the ability to grow into a plant. God provides sun, rain, and soil. The farmer plants the seed, and God meets the farmer, and the seed, and God does the majority of the work.

I have come to think of it this way. We are all in a river of God’s grace carrying us to abundant and eternal life, carrying us to peace, joy, shalom, and love shared by all people, plants, animals, and the cosmos. We have choices. No matter the choice, eventually God’s redeeming grace will transform us. One can swim against the current of grace. One can float with the current of grace. One can swim with the current of grace.

There are seasons of sabbath of floating on the river of grace. There are seasons of striving to swim with the current of grace. Sometimes life is a churning rapids, swirling water, disorienting us as to which way the current is going.

All my spiritual directors are adamant that God is always with me. The challenge is to perceive how and what is God inviting me to do, to plant, how is God inviting me to walk on water, how can I let go and let God, how can I swim with the current. Is that voice I hear God leading me to abundant life or a ghost sending me off course. Perhaps, you also are trying to perceive which voice is God’s, which way is the most excellent way of love.

The church is also trying to perceive which voice is God’s. What is God’s desire for the future church. We have left the familiar shore. We are in the storm, a liminal season, a time of rapid change. We are crossing over to a transformed church. God will get us there. We can wrestle with God striving to stay in the past. We can float to the other side. Or we can run on the water, swim with the current of grace, to the wonderful future God has prepared for us.

Keep going and let God save you. Amen