

“Jesus Rescues Us”
Matthew 14:22-33 & Psalm 22:23-31
Pastor James York
February 25, 2024

Prayer for Understanding Holy God, there are days where the wind is loud. There are days where the rain tears through the trees and the storms of life beg for our attention. So just as you stilled the wind and the sea, still our wandering hearts. Quiet our restless minds. Reach out your hand to us and pull us into your Word so that we might hear, really hear, your message to us today. With one foot out of the boat, we pray, Amen.

Many of us know what it feels like to be thrown off balance, to feel as if we are sinking. Maybe this looks like an unexpected change, a “too-busy” season of life, devastating grief, fear, a downward spiral of burdens, faltering health, oppressive sadness, or waves of negative thoughts. In today’s scripture we have empathy with the desperation Peter feels as he sinks, cries out, and asks God to save us.

Matthew 14:22-33 NLT “Immediately after this, Jesus insisted that his disciples get back into the boat and cross to the other side of the lake, while he 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, he 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. Then the disciples worshiped Jesus. “You really are the Son of God” they exclaimed!”

You have probably heard many sermons on this scripture. For a moment let them go, clear your mind. Try to forget Peter sinking. With a clean slate, perceive if God has a fresh insight for you.

John the Baptist was beheaded. Our world continues to suffer from violence, hate, cruelty, war, and senseless death. As soon as Jesus heard the news, he left in a boat to be alone. A crowd found Jesus. Jesus stepped from the boat, had compassion on everyone, and healed them. That evening the disciples helped Jesus feed a crowd of around 10,000 people. The disciples are grieving the death of John, frustrated by violence, dismayed by hate, weary from feeding 10,000 people, and utterly exhausted. One might expect Jesus to tell the disciples rest, get some sleep, grieve, pray, let come blessings.

I am shocked that, “Immediately after this, Jesus insisted that his disciples get back into the boat and cross to the other side of the lake.” Why? Is it urgent to bring Good News to people on the other side of the lake? Is Jesus training the disciples for a sleep deprivation rowing contest? Is rowing all night in the dark, crossing a lake with a brewing storm, an aspect of discipleship? Does it connect with repentance, change, and turning? Is it metaphoric? Is it crossing over from a life of grief, fear, and worry in a messy hateful violent world to a world of love?

I am astonished that the disciples do not object, rather they all got in the boat and started rowing. They moved forward. They embraced change. They explored new horizons.

It is now 3am, and the disciples have missed an entire night of sleep. I would be extremely cranky. What keeps you up at night? The disciples have been rowing for eight hours. They are exhausted. Wave after wave is pounding them. Metaphorically, what waves pound on your life? A strong wind hinders their progress. Metaphorically, what are the winds blowing against you? The boat is taking on water. They are about to sink. The rain stings their eyes. In their exhaustion all they can perceive is problems, peril, and mayhem. The disciples mistake Jesus for a ghost. God is always with us. **Jesus spoke to them at once. “Don’t be afraid,” Jesus said. “Take courage. I am here!”**

The verb used for “take courage” means to be emboldened, to take heart, to be full hearted, whole, to show courage. Jesus offers this imperative in many other situations. As Jesus healed the paralyzed man, he said, “Take courage! Your sins are forgiven.” When the woman touched his robe Jesus said, “Take courage! Your

faith has made you well.” When the blind man cried out for mercy. Jesus stopped and said, “Take courage! Come here.” Jesus gave him sight. Jesus told the disciples soon he will be crucified and each of you will betray me. Jesus said, “Here on earth you will have many trials, many sorrows. Take courage! Because I have overcome the world, find peace in me.” Given this context what does Jesus mean when he says, take courage! Be emboldened! Take heart! Be full-hearted! Is it an acknowledgement that we all struggle with a divided heart and that God is making us whole? Is it that life drains our heart, leaving us bankrupt, and God is eager to fill us, making abundant life overflow? It seems to have a healing aspect, a letting go of the past aspect, a crossing over aspect, a receiving of love, peace, and joy aspect. And a unique aspect for each person. How is God telling you to take courage? What does “take courage” mean for you today?

Eight hours earlier, Peter and the disciples took courage and got into a boat as the sun was setting and a storm brewing to row across a lake. Love is risky. Love takes vulnerability, faith, and commitment. We are called to take courage. God partners with us to make earth like heaven. We will need courage to love in the face of chaos, to cocreate with God a harmonious, peaceful, joyful world for all. Somedays it takes courage to get out of bed. Somedays it takes courage to take another step, to keep going, to move forward. All the disciples in that boat had amazing courage.

Remarkably, Peter still had more courage, more heart, to get out of the boat and walk on water. Ponder Peter’s courage for a moment. Celebrate Peter’s courage. Be inspired by Peter’s courage.

Even the most courageous person will be overcome with the messiness of life and sink over and over again. Sinking often produces doubt. The word Jesus used for Peter’s doubt literally means “double-stance” or “going two ways, shifting between two positions.” What do you glean from this definition? What are the two ways Peter is going? Does it have something to do with the already and not yet. We all belong to a coming glorious perfect eternal cosmos where we will be whole and full-hearted; and yet, we live in a horrendous cosmos with fragmented and broken hearts. We are called to take courage, to move forward, to cross over by taking courageous risks of extravagant love.

Brian McLaren believes doubt is the passageway from one stage of faith to the next. Without doubt, we are unable to grow, mature, and develop. In this light, Peter’s sinking, his doubt, is what enables him to continue to follow Jesus, to grow in love, to develop into a leader to guide others in the way of God. Next time you are sinking and doubtful, instead of lamenting or judging yourself, take courage and look for the way forward.

This is the reality of life. We will face many emotional, relational, professional, physical, and global dangers. We will likely be exhausted, desperate, and terrified. In those moments, God may seem like a ghost or absent. God is there. The storm, waves, wind, rain may be so intense you cannot perceive God. God is there. God is saying, take courage! Do the almost impossible: love your enemies, row all night. Forgive everyone and yourself, step into the storm. Be non-anxious, gracious affirming, an embodiment of healing in the face of cruelty, walk on water.

When you sink, Jesus will reach out, grab your hand, lift you up, and help you to safety. Keep in mind that God is beyond time. We humans are acutely aware of time. Our rescue may take a lifetime. Our rescue might not happen until we cross over from this world to heaven. However, you are sinking. Jesus is rescuing you.

“Rescue Me”

a poem by Sarah Speed

I’d rather not need rescue.

I’d prefer a five-step plan and a quick-fix solution.

I’d prefer stubborn insistence over honest vulnerability, because rescue requires asking for help.

Rescue names the rising water.

Rescue sees the tired, treading feet.

Rescue feels the swell of the wind and the rain at a slant.

But when the floor falls out and the world is on fire and my small hands cannot fix the hurt welling in me, the prayer that slips out is rescue

rescue

rescue me.

Jesus was fully God and fully human. Jesus sank with his full human nature on the cross. Jesus was terrified when he took on the sins of the world. Jesus doubted. Jesus felt abandoned, even though God was with Jesus. Jesus' nature was fully God and that fully God nature is always in perfect loving harmony with the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. Even though Jesus was the most connected person to God to ever live, he still sank, doubted, and cried out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me". Jesus for a moment could not see God with him in the storm. In that moment, Jesus prayed a prayer from Psalm 22. This prayer is a song of courage, of taking heart, of moving forward, crossing over from distress to praise, moving from sinking to peace, moving from doubting to joyful worship, moving from crucifixion to resurrection.

I am going to read this prayer from The Message paraphrase. **Psalm 22:23-31 MSG "Here is the story I will tell my friends when they come to worship and punctuate it with Hallelujahs: Shout Hallelujah, you God-worshippers; give glory, you sons of Jacob; adore God, you daughters of Israel. God has never let you down, never looked the other way when you were being kicked around. God has never wandered off to do God's own thing; God has been right there, listening. Here in this great gathering for worship I have discovered this praise-life. And I will do what I promised right here in front of the God-worshippers. Down-and-outers sit at God's table and eat their fill. Everyone on the hunt for God is here, praising God. "Live it up, from head to toe. Do not ever quit!" From the four corners of the earth people are coming to their senses, are running back to God. Long-lost families are falling on their faces before God. God has taken charge; from now on God has the last word. All the power-mongers are before God—worshiping! All the poor and powerless, too—worshiping! Along with those who never got it together—worshiping! Our children and their children will get in on this as the word is passed along from parent to child. Babies not yet conceived will hear the good news—that God does what God says."** Jesus rescues us. Amen