***Shiloh United Methodist Church***

Matthew 14:22-33 Rev. Tyler Amundson August 9, 2020

***Unraveled By Uncertainty***

Matthew 14:22-33

Common English Bible

**Walking on the water**

**22**Right then, Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead to the other side of the lake while he dismissed the crowds. **23**When he sent them away, he went up onto a mountain by himself to pray. Evening came and he was alone. **24**Meanwhile, the boat, fighting a strong headwind, was being battered by the waves and was already far away from land. **25**Very early in the morning he came to his disciples, walking on the lake. **26**When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified and said, “It’s a ghost!” They were so frightened they screamed.

**27**Just then Jesus spoke to them, “Be encouraged! It’s me. Don’t be afraid.”

**28**Peter replied, “Lord, if it’s you, order me to come to you on the water.”

**29**And Jesus said, “Come.”

Then Peter got out of the boat and was walking on the water toward Jesus. **30**But when Peter saw the strong wind, he became frightened. As he began to sink, he shouted, “Lord, rescue me!”

**31**Jesus immediately reached out and grabbed him, saying, “You man of weak faith! Why did you begin to have doubts?” **32**When they got into the boat, the wind settled down.

**33**Then those in the boat worshipped Jesus and said, “You must be God’s Son!

Intro for series:

Into September we will be exploring scriptures that seem to unravel us, the characters and the understanding that God always works in the clean places. The hope of this series of messages is that we take seriously how God unravels us, our tidy expectations of life, and instead invites us to be spun into something unique that God has for our lives. This unraveling series will be full of connotations and metaphors drawn from our scriptures to help us grasp with our senses what God is saying to us, what the great weaver, spinner, and artist wants us to know about where we are being sewn into God’s tapestry and story.

Sermon:

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

God of unending surprises,  
This life is a tapestry of moments woven together, and we long to be weavers of love. Today we gather and pray that you would unravel our bias.  
Unravel our assumptions.  
Unravel whatever it is that keeps us from you.  
And as you do, clear space in our hearts for your Word.  
We are listening. We are praying.  
Amen.

How many times have I heard this scripture about Jesus walking on water and Peter’s mishap of faith? A lot. And every time I hear it my brain is always trying to figure it out scientifically. Did Jesus just know where the rocks were? Could he have trained turtles to be in the specific spot of his steps? Is Jesus just really buoyant? Is he able to manipulate the physics of water? Or maybe he just has one of those jetpacks that pulls water up and helps you fly? Or maybe there is something that happens after a storm that makes walking on water easier?

And every time I try to figure out the reality of this situation I miss the point of the scripture story.

The disciples have battled a storm all night long in their boat. Then they see Jesus crossing the choppy sea. He walks on the water and they are in awe of the moment. Then Peter is like, “If it is you then order me to come to you.” Jesus says simply, “Come.”

Then Peter climbs out of the boat…we love this part. Even though we have heard the story so many times and we are trying to figure out Jesus’ feat, we love the anticipation of Peter walking toward Jesus. There is something almost simultaneously satisfying and disheartening about the next moment when Peter begins to sink. Satisfying that Peter’s seeming arrogance drags him down. Disheartening because of what we hear most preachers talk about when we hear this sermon, “Peter sank because his faith was too little.” We often hear a focus on Peter’s little faith and Peter’s walk when we hear this scripture story shared.

I used to be a lifeguard, so I have seen a few people try and walk on water. Like Peter, it didn’t go so well. One time, I was lifeguarding a pool on December 31st before going to a friend's house to celebrate the new year. I know what your thinking, Tyler you have lived in Colorado, Washington and Montana…where were you lifeguarding in late December. Well it was late December back in 2002 and I was lifeguarding a hot springs pool. Which as you can imagine is as hard to make out what is going on in the pool, as it was to determine if it was Jesus’ during a storm on the sea. There was steam rising off the pool, and it was cold, so I was bundled up in winter gear. The shifts were 3 hours a piece, and I was almost done. No problems…and then it happened.

A young boy who I had been nervous about, who had been holding onto the wall moving around for about an hour, but seemed comfortable in the pool suddenly disappeared. Then I saw him splashing because he couldn’t keep his head above water. By the time I saw him, others swimming had noticed. So, they helped him to the side of the pool. When I got to him I saw his eyes look up and then he went limp.

Others helped and I pulled him out of the pool. He was not super responsive, but he had a pulse. I was just about to go grab my CPR gear when I heard him cough a little. We rolled him on his side and he coughed up a good amount of water. He continued to be un-responsive, but he was breathing.

Then suddenly out from the inside of the facility burst the manager of the club. I had been in many a fights with this man, because he always had to be right. And he often took steps past safety to make sure people were happy. The opposite of a lifeguard. The manager came running over and without much of an ask picked the boy up. I was glad there was no neck injury. He took the boy inside the facility and I followed where he laid the boy down. We got blankets on the boy.

I was then asked to go speak on the phones to the ambulance that was heading to us. I had the most detail about the boy and what was going on. I knew he was breathing ok, but wasn’t able to respond. As I left I said to the facility manager, he is ok just keep him warm.

After being on the phone the ambulance arrived and we got the kiddo to the hospital. He ended up being just fine, we learned he had some previous trauma in his life that caused his body to go into shock.

I also learned from my direct supervisor that while I was on the phone, the manger had decided to try and give the kid rescue breaths. This is for when someone is not breathing, you breath into their mouth. This was the manager who was not a trained lifeguard, and who had already tried to play hero before I assured him that moving the victim would be safe. My manager smiled and said, “The boy was breathing, the manager just gave him extra breaths.”

I can’t help but imagine the additional trauma the manager inflicted in that moment, to a boy in shock. He did not need the extra breaths, but because the manager didn’t like to rely on others…had to be the hero…he offered breath where it was not needed.

If you read the scripture carefully you will find that it is when Peter sees the wind that he begins to sink. I love this phrasing, other translations say, “hen he noticed the wind.” Whatever it is…the wind never stopped blowing. The breath never stopped moving from God, the living being.

One of my favorite authors, researchers and storytellers Brene Brown says:

“Spirituality is recognizing and celebrating that we are all **inextricably connected** to each other by a power greater than all of us, and that our **connection** to that power and to one another is grounded in love and compassion. Practicing spirituality brings a sense of perspective, meaning and purpose to our lives.”

Peter puts too much faith in his own self staying on top of the water, instead of recognizing that it was others who held him up. It was when the wind made him aware of the feet he was using, that he sank in the face of the Spirit of Christ.

How often do we do this? We cause harm by placing wind where it is not needed. We notice in hindsight that God was at work when we over exerted our authority or energy to control a situation. We sink because we assume it all rests on us, even when the wind, the Spirit, has been moving it all along. We try like Peter to be a hero, to achieve feats like Jesus, and we in turn sink.

This year alone I have seen so many pastors, health care providers, workers, and humans try to accomplish so much in the face of changing realities. We have tried to provide miracles in the face of pandemics, community upheaval and God knows I have seen everyone try and solve it on social media. Perhaps we would do best by following Christ example to withdraw for a few moments of reflection before we try to walk on water. Are you trying to be too much and sinking? Remember what happened after Peter sank.

And this is the other thing about this story we often miss. We focus on Peter’s walk, Peter’s sinking, and Peter’s faith.

What is Jesus doing when Peter is sinking?

Is it not interesting how little we talk about Jesus’ reaching? I think it is because we are still stuck on Jesus’ feet on the water. The true power in this story is the reach of Jesus to pull us up and give us the perspective to calm the storm itself. Perhaps we should consider the connection Jesus demonstrates here that it was in his withdrawal to be alone with God, that he became connected enough to help his disciples with storm. Jesus’ demonstrated the need to step away and trust God will place us where we need to be, that it is when try to be all things to all people that we feel overwhelmed by the wind and sink.

And when this happens we need to remember the faith of Christ is reaching for us and pulling us up.

Pulling us up and knitting us together. Reminding us of our connection to one another, our unity in a God of love that connects us.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

I believe in God, the Great Sewer—  
Who weaves us together in community,  
Collecting our loose ends and turning them into belonging.

I believe in the Holy Spirit—  
Who hems us in before and behind,  
Catching us when we fall and writing us into God’s holy narrative.

And I believe in Jesus Christ—  
Who loved and claimed the people society had thrown out, refusing to disregard

anyone as scrap.

I believe God has woven part of God’s self into the fiber of our being, Making us inherently worthy of love and belonging.

I believe the fabric of my life is weak,  
That I am prone to error and need God’s handiwork to remind me of love.

I believe in the Church, and that like a quilt of different fabrics, She is designed to be as diverse and beautiful as God’s creation.

And I believe that when life unravels,  
God is there to stitch my wounds together,  
To hold me in the palm of God’s hand, to tell me of love, And to invite me into a new journey.  
Amen.

Fire alarm at Chrysalis…trying to be hero….God did work…

* 10 Minute – Why does Peter offer to leave the safety of the boat to join Jesus on the water? What are his motives? What is he trying to accomplish?
* What are the stormy seas that threaten to overcome you? Our community? Our congregation?
* How might our congregation/group offer support to those sinking?