

Matthew 14:22-33

Preached for Stone Church of Willow Glen via Zoom by Rev. Samantha Evans

August 9, 2020

## **Stormy Waters**

Well good morning, my friends, and again, welcome to this service of worship. It gives me deep joy to be able to gather with y'all this day. It's just a gift for which I am immensely grateful, to be able to create meaningful spaces of worship with all of you has been and continues to be so very life giving.

Thank you to the Emi, Amaya, and Kaio for your thoughtful and vulnerable sermon. I am so, so glad that Sunny is back with y'all. I'm feeling super moved and uplifted by your reading of the Parable of the Lost Sheep. This is a strange season, and lately, it has often felt like we are lost sheep, wandering in the wilderness, alone. So it's really comforting to remember that God wanders with us, and meets us wherever we are, even in the wilderness, and delights in bringing us back into the fold.

I have been feeling a deep need for this assurance, so thank you girls, for your sermon.

There's another deep need that I have been feeling a lot lately. Because even when I feel comforted by God's presence, assured of God's presence with us and in the world, I have still been feeling this angst and deep sense of foreboding.

The state of our nation and our world feels rather precarious, and the issues that we are facing, issues that have been going on for a very long time, but for some reason the hurdles to equity and justice and peace have been feeling especially insurmountable.

And simply put, the deep need I have been feeling is the assurance that good actually trumps evil. That not only is God with us, and not only is God at work, but also, God and God's ways will always triumph.

And I'll confess my fear friends, and the fact that this deep need comes from a place of fear, and a place of doubt that goodness and mercy and loving kindness will ultimately overcome all the hatred and greed and suffering that characterizes the times in which we are living.

I feel like Peter. I have seen Christ walking on the water, I have been attuned to what God is up to, and I have asked to walk with Jesus in the midst of the storm, but I

suddenly find myself distracted by the destructive winds and chaotic waters, and I feel myself sinking.

And the word to me and to any of you who might be feeling this way is the same word that Jesus offers to Peter. Yes, he says, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" But he says it after he catches Peter, and saves him from sinking. He says it after Peter is safe from the storm, after Jesus assures him that he will always be there.

This episode holds such deep imagery and metaphor. You see, for the disciples, Jesus commanded authority over the most chaotic and destructive threat known to the Jewish community: the waters. The Hebrew Scriptures are full of this kind of imagery.

From the creation story which tells of the Spirit of God hovering over the chaotic waters and bringing order to creation, to the Great Flood, to the parting of the Red Sea to deliver the Israelites from Pharaoh's armies.

This episode, on the top of these chaotic waters, serves to communicate to those who would seek to follow Jesus, who he actually is and what he is actually up to, as well as the power he has to do what he has been called to do.

For it is God who has the power to quell the wind and calm the waters. God who has the power to command us to do the impossible. And God who has the power to save us from sinking in the storm.

And this is the word that the disciples desperately needed. But you should know that it wasn't just this wind storm that was causing them to be afraid.

You see, right before the disciples found themselves on this water, they learned that King Herod had ordered the execution of John the Baptist. John was publicly beheaded because he had spoken truth to power and those in power did not like what he had to say. So, the disciples were afraid of the work they were doing and the cost they might have to pay for doing it.

And I can imagine that they would have wanted to lay low for a while. Wait for the commotion and the suspicion and the controversy to die down a bit before they continued in this work. But of course, Jesus was not interested in laying low.

Shortly after John's execution, Jesus drew a crowd of 5,000 people, who he taught and healed, and when dinner time was upon them, miraculously turned two fish and five loaves into bread into enough to feed every last person.

And to top it all off, after all this, Jesus sent his disciples by themselves onto a boat, that would be tossed by the wind and the waves, threatened by the chaotic sea, literally and figuratively, throughout the night.

It is no wonder to me why they were so frightened. Why they couldn't recognize Jesus as the one walking towards them. Why even when Peter got a few steps onto the water, he began to sink. It's just all too much.

For even though he has seen what Jesus is capable of and experienced what Jesus is all about, it's just too difficult to ignore the wind that has assaulted them throughout the night. He cannot block out the chaotic, destructive waters that threaten to engulf him.

He is still mourning the death of his beloved friend, anxious about the rejection of the religious authorities, rightfully concerned about the powers that be, both human and earthly, that threaten to destroy all of the work they have been doing.

Peter is afraid and he understandably begins to sink.

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Friends, we too find ourselves facing a wind that threatens to destroy us, waters that threaten to engulf us. And I feel like as a people, we are becoming more and more frightened of this destructive wind. We are finding ourselves sinking into despair or fear or anxiety faster and faster.

We are finding ourselves wanting to lay low, to wait, to batten down the hatches and wait out the storm. But friends, Jesus ain't done with us yet. There are people to feed and communities to heal. There are powers to overthrow and waters to subdue.

And these storms which surround are only distractions meant to deter us from the work God has called us to do. I want to point out that the wind that caused Peter to sink had been blowing when he stepped out of the boat. It did not suddenly pick up when he was a few steps out, it had been blowing consistently throughout the night, and he stepped out of the boat in spite of it.

He stepped out in spite of the wind, because he trusted in the work and the ways and the wisdom into which Jesus had invited him to live.

And so, my friends, the word for us this day is to trust in the Spirit of God, who commanded the chaotic and destructive waters and brought forth life. To trust in Jesus, who walking on water, again commanded the waters and proclaimed

authority over the storm. To trust in God, who in raising Christ from the dead, proclaimed authority over the powers that be and death itself.

The word for us this day is to keep on walking, though the storm threatens to overtake us, it will not, it cannot. For even if we feel ourselves sinking, God will grab us by the arm, maybe give us a little scolding, but surely carry us back to our boat.

For Christ has proclaimed over the winds and the storms and the powers that be which threaten to overtake us this day.

Sisters, brothers, and siblings, keep walking, keep loving, keep working for justice. And do not be afraid and do not let that wind distract you or threaten to sink, for God is with us, God is working among us and through us.

God's ways of mercy and kindness shall overcome war and hatred.

God's desire for healing and wholeness and God's authority to redeem and restore Creation shall bring an end to isolation and division, to fear and anxiety, an end to suffering and an end to the destructive storms which seek to overcome us all.

For Christ says to us this day and every day: "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

In the name of the Triune God, who creates, sustains, and redeems us all. AMEN.