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August 20, 2023

Why Did You Doubt?
Matthew 14:22-33

²² Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³ And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain **by himself to pray**. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴ but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land,^[d] for the wind was against them. ²⁵ And early in the morning he came **walking toward them on the sea**. ²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out in fear. ²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, “**Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.**” ²⁸ Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” ²⁹ He said, “**Come.**” So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he **noticed the strong wind**,^[e] he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “**Lord, save me!**” ³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “**You of little faith, why did you doubt?**” ³² When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³ And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “**Truly you are the Son of God.**”

This is one of the most **dramatic and beloved stories** of the Bible.
It’s one of those stories that each time you read it,
you hear something new, something different.
I wonder, did anything stand out to you as you heard it today?
Any pictures jump into your mind?

One thing I noticed this week is that **Jesus is a man of action**—
it says he **immediately** made the disciples get in a boat and go to the other side.
In other words, he compelled them to go.
But **immediately after what?**
Well, this happens immediately after the **feeding of the 5000!**

After that miracle, he sends them off in a boat,
And Jesus goes off to pray alone,
while they get stuck in a storm!
So Jesus decides to go to them—by walking on the water!

They are so startled by this, *they think he's a ghost!*
 And he says *Take Heart, it is I, do not be afraid.*
 Words of calm, peace, assurance.

And that's when *Peter has this crazy idea,*
"Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water"
Jesus says, "Come."
So Peter starts walking on water to Jesus...but when he notices the strong wind,^[e]
he becomes frightened, and beginning to sink, he cries out, "Lord, save me!"

And what happens next?
 It says that *Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him.*

Now this story has a lot of *layers to it.*
 And most of us have heard this story dozens of times, right?
 And maybe we've heard dozens of sermons on it—
 On the *miracle of Jesus* walking on Water.
 On the *strong faith of Peter*, and his walking on water,
 On his *courage to get out* of the boat.
 On Peter *keeping his eyes on Jesus* instead of the wind and waves.
 On Jesus *having the power to rescue Peter*, and calm the raging sea.

And all these are *great layers* of the story.
 They are important messages to hear.
 And usually when there's a great Bible story,
 there are many different facets of that jewel,
 like the different sides of Jesus we see in the different Gospels!
 One thing I've learned is that each time you read a passage from the Bible,
 It's going to show you something new, if you let it.

So, what if today we looked at this story as being *more about Jesus*
 than a story about us?
 What if we hear the message of *Jesus' faithfulness,*
 More than how we should have more faith?

I mean, we often hear challenges from the Bible, to have more faith, right?
 And, that is important!
We all need strong faith.

But sometimes we also need to know that *life is not about us*.

And it doesn't depend on us.

We are *Americans*, which means we have a *pretty high view of ourselves*, and pretty high standards for our lives.

In other words, we are rugged individuals, who think we can handle life on our own.

We feel like we can pull ourselves up by our bootstraps, and make the best of life.

We think that life depends on us.

And sometimes that attitude is *not very mature*.

I remember when my kids went through the *'I do it myself' phase*—they were about 2 or 3 years old, and insistent on doing everything on their own. Sometimes, *we are like that*—saying to God, “I do it myself!”

I think we are so often like Peter,
Thinking *we've got to do something*.

Like we've got to get out of the boat and walk to Jesus on the water.

We've got to keep our eyes on Jesus, not the waves.

We've got to DO something!

But in this story *Jesus is not the one who suggests that Peter get out* of the boat.

He doesn't ask Peter to get out of the boat,
he simply agrees to Peter's request, and says “Come”!

There's a book entitled *“If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Gotta Get Out of the Boat”*, by John Ortberg.

It's a neat book, and I've preached from that angle before!

We do see Peter being brave in getting out of that boat in the middle of a storm!

But what if this is about more than getting out of the boat?

What if this is a story about *God and what Jesus can do in our lives?*

Pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber has a sermon entitled, *“Sinking”*.

And in it she suggests that if we could walk on water,
wouldn't that mean we wouldn't need Jesus anymore?

And I don't think that's the message God wants us to hear in this story, right?

Because, we need Jesus now, more than ever!

And the truth is, *we are NOT God*.

Weber writes, ‘we make terrible gods’. ...

So, we need God to be God, so that we can just be children of God.
 We need Jesus and his power in our lives,
 far more than we need our own courage and strength.

Nadia Bolz-Weber also writes about that tendency we have to rely upon ourselves.
 She says that there is *no 'deductible' of self-reliance*
 that we have to spend before we receive help from Jesus!
 Nadia Bolz-Weber, "Sinking", from the corners, August 13, 2023.

I love that!
 We don't have to know how to save ourselves in the storm!
 And, we don't have to do certain things to earn Jesus' help!

The problem is, so many of us are *Do-ers more than Be-ers*.
 We are more like *Martha than Mary*, busy doing all kinds of things,
 And deep down inside we believe that doing all of that
 Gives us our self-worth.
 It makes us who we are.
 It shows that we are *worthy and valuable and deserving* of God's attention.

And nothing could be further from the truth!
 We are also called to *Be, not just Do*.
 We are called to take time at the feet of Jesus, listening to him, like *Mary*,
 Instead of being so busy, worried, and distracted, like Martha.

Remember that story of *Mary and Martha*?
 Mary is sitting at Jesus' feet listening, and Martha says— "*uh Jesus, tell her to get
 in the kitchen and help me!*"
 And Jesus says "*Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things,
 Mary has chosen the better part, and it will not be taken from her*".

That story is NOT that Martha is bad and Mary is good.
 It's not that doing tasks is bad.
 If we were always like Mary, nothing would get done in church!
 But if we are always like Martha, we have *no peace, no center, no calming time to
 recharge our batteries*.

It's not that doing stuff like Martha is bad—
 it's the *worry and distraction that hurts us*.

And it's the idea that *doing stuff can save us, or make us worthy, or get us God's attention---that's not true!*

Sometimes all we need to do when the storms of life come, is **TRUST**.
And REMEMBER.

In the story, Peter starts looking at the raging sea, and that's when he starts to sink. *When Peter noticed the strong wind,^[e] he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!"*

Lord, save me.

Peter doesn't think to himself, everything is fine—Jesus is here.

Jesus works miracles everyday.

No, he says, Lord, Save me!

I'm thinking it was likely far more dramatic than that!

The scribes may have edited Peter's comments for the audience!

Then, Jesus reaches out to rescue him, and says,

"You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

He doesn't say, why couldn't you walk on the water?

He says, *why did you doubt?*

Now, I used to hear those words this way:

"You of little faith! Why did you doubt?" in a stern tone.

But what if Jesus said it this way:

"You of little faith, Why did you doubt?" in a loving tone.

In other words, don't you know **who I am by now?**

It's like Jesus is saying---**remember how I just helped you feed** over 5,000 people with just 5 loaves and 2 fish?

Remember how I cast out **demons?**

Remember how I restored a **leper?**

How I healed a man who could **not walk?**

How I raised a small **girl from the dead?**

How I healed a woman who had been **suffering for 12 years**—just by the touch of her hand on my coat?

Remember how I **restored sight** to the blind, and **speech** to those who were mute?

Remember how I called you—as my disciple?

This week that one little phrase jumped out at me in this story—

WHY DID YOU DOUBT?

Have you ever heard *Jesus say that to you?*
 What if he is saying it to you, today?

When have you doubted Jesus' faithfulness, and goodness?
 When have you doubted that God would come through for you?

Nadia Bolz-Weber says that *Faith is not US doing the impossible,*
 Faith is remembering that *God has done the impossible!*

Faith is knowing that
 God *has been* faithful,
is faithful,
 and *will be* faithful, now and always.

Faith is remembering what God has done.
But it's so hard!

I struggle with this every single week!
 Every week I think, I don't have anything to say in my sermon this week.
 I'm going to crash and burn.
 This will be the week I fail.
 Every week I have moments in prayer or meetings that I think--
 I don't know exactly what to say, I don't know exactly what to do.
 This will be the end of my career as a Pastor.
 Or I come up against something with my daughter, and I think—this will be the
 thing that she has to go to therapy about, for the rest of her life.

But somehow, *God ALWAYS comes through for me!*
 Giving me words, thoughts, and guidance that I need.
 Every week, every day, every moment.
 Not that I get everything right---it's still imperfect me.
 But I realize time and again, that God is with me.
 It's not that I am making it happen—it's that *God is providing!*
Every. Single. Time.

When have you *learned this—in your life?*
 When has God given you the words? The thoughts? The guidance you need?
 And what about strength? And courage? And peace?

Stop and think about that for a moment.

Stop and REMEMBER.
Remember what God has done in your life.

Isn't it amazing what God gives us, ***just when we think we are lost?***
 When the waves of life are crashing over the sides of our boat?
 Can you remember God's faithfulness in ***those moments?***
 In ***those seasons*** of your life?

You know, I ***do not think there is any formula*** for life.
 Rough seas do not mean that God is far away, or that God has abandoned us.
 Calm seas do not mean that God is near.
 The truth is, ***God is ALWAYS near, regardless of the storms or calm seas.***

The truth is, we live in a messy, fallen, imperfect world
 And, ***we WILL face storms in life.***
 Our boat ***WILL be battered*** by the waves.
 And we ***WILL be afraid.***

But ***Jesus WILL come to us***, especially in our times of need.
 And He will ***calm*** the raging seas.
 He will ***reassure*** us, saying: do not fear.
 Jesus will ***rescue*** us when we try crazy things, like walking on water.
 And Jesus will ***remind*** us to trust, and have faith.

And when that happens,
 We have the opportunity, just like the disciples, to ***recognize the power of Jesus.***
 We have the opportunity to ***thank Jesus*** for his help, assurance, and provision.

At the end of this story,
*When they got into the boat, the wind ceased.*³³ ***And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."***

There are so many times when Jesus can say to us,
you of little faith, why did you doubt?
 Don't you know who I am by now?

And after he calms the waves all around us,
We have the opportunity to *confess*, just as they did,
That Jesus is the *Son of God*.

Our *Friend*.

Our *Lord*.

Our *Savior*.

And we can WORSHIP Him!

Friends, that is the *Good News* of the Gospel today.

Jesus is always *with us*, life *depends on Him, not us*.

And for that Good News, all God's people can say together, Amen.