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LESSON 32

SUNDAY,
AUGUST 9, 2020

Matthew 14:22-33 NRSV

22 Immediately he 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, 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, 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.”

Background

Last week, we read about the feeding of 5,000+ people. After this miracle story, we are met with another set of miracles. This chapter is full of both miracles and

tragedy. In your own devotional period, think about the spectrum of stories being told in this chapter. Do you ever experience miraculous events at the same time as tragic events? How do you tend to handle such extremes?

Today's lesson will focus on vocalizing fear.

Read the scripture out loud together.

Discuss with someone in your home. Do you have a phobia of anything? Spiders, heights, the dark, dogs?

What's happening during this passage?

Jesus “made” the disciples get into the boat to the other side. He was tired of the crowds. He went to the mountain to pray by himself. He emerged from his prayer closet in the evening, and by this time, the boat was being beat by the winds and was far from the shore. He began to walk on the sea towards the disciples. The disciples were afraid and said, “it’s a ghost!” Jesus assured them, “it’s me! Don’t be worried!” Peter wanted proof that it was really him. He challenged Jesus.

“If it’s actually you, command me to come to you.” And Jesus accepted the challenge. Peter got out of the boat and began to walk on water himself. He noticed the elements around him and got nervous. His nervousness caused him to lose focus, and he began to sink. He screamed out, “Lord, Save me!” Jesus caught him and said, “why didn’t you trust me?” As soon as they got into the boat, the wind stopped beating so violently. And everyone in the boat was convinced that he was “truly the Son of God.”

Is this believable?

The underlying subtext of this story is that we all know that Humans can’t “actually walk on water.” It defies physics. As soon as you put your foot on water, you will get wet. We may adapt to the elements by learning to swim, but walking on water is a whole different matter. Because of this, the story feels like a fantasy. It is a miracle. How is this possible? Can you blame Peter for being curious?

Why does Peter test Jesus?

Peter needs to experience for himself that this is actually Jesus. And thus far, they have begun to build a relationship in which Jesus proves that he is trustworthy. After all, they have just left a miraculous display of turning a few pieces of bread and fish into a meal for thousands of people. Peter can trust Jesus as he himself

takes that first step on water because he's witnessed the miracle that defies physics and logic before. But as soon as he steps onto the water and sees and feels the elements on his body, he gets nervous. He loses focus.

What kinds of dialogue do you see in this passage? What kinds of dialogue do you not see in this passage?

- The passage begins with Jesus stepping out to pray. We don't know what he was going to pray about. There is no documentation or recording of what he prayed about. All we know is that he needed some space to get away from other people.
 - "It is a ghost!" from the disciples.
 - "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid," from Jesus.
 - "Lord if it is you, command me to come to you on the water," "Lord, save me!" from Peter.
 - *What other dialogue do you see?*

How do you imagine people are speaking in this scene? Are they calm? Nervous? Loud? Frantic?

How does Jesus respond to their fear?

Jesus somehow helps Peter himself defy the "laws" of physics. Jesus says, "come" and it then becomes possible for Peter to walk on the water. By the time Peter looks around at the elements around him, he gets nervous. He calls out, "Lord save me!" because he trusts that Jesus will. After all, Jesus would not invite Peter into the water if he did not have at least a plan B if things went left, right? Peter trust Jesus at least twice. Once, to get out of the boat in the first place. And twice, to save him as he begins to drown. Peter can trust that Jesus will take care of him, even though Peter has somewhat failed his own mission and test.

What questions do you still have of this scripture? How will you commit to journeying with this text this week?

Connection to Today's World

Frequently in children's movies and comedy sketches, writers employ a technique called a "callback." A "callback" is also called an "internal allusion." It is designed to give the audience the impression of intimacy. By the end of the film or sketch, the audience is primed to feel like they have an "inside joke" with the writers. In short, it fosters familiarity through an "a-ha!" moment.



For example, in the Disney movie, *Emperor's New Groove*, the two main characters find themselves in a rut near the middle of the film. They have

to scale a wall or face certain death from a dangerous waterfall. They lean against each other back to back and find a way to escape the trap. Hooray! They find themselves in a similar situation near the end of the film, but this time, both the characters and the audience know that they've made it out of similar situations before. Almost winking to the audience, the characters free themselves from danger yet again.

Callbacks are literary devices that help us move the plot along and understand characters better. Given what you know about Peter in this chapter, how might Peter be calling back to other times that Jesus has saved him? What else do you know about this Peter?

It's important that we find ways to ask for help and refer to other situations when we've been saved from certain doom. It begins with opening our mouths and telling the truth about our situation. Peter could have pretended to be comfortable with the storm, but he wasn't. And still, Jesus found a way to rescue him.

Journal: What scares you? Write it down and save it for yourself this week to pray about.

Closing: Sing/watch “*Jesus Will*,”

For a video, click here:<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-6RVdlXquuw>

*Who opens doors that I cannot see
Jesus Will, Jesus Will
Who will make all my decisions for me
Jesus Will, Jesus Will*

*When I'm in trouble, He gives me a song
In the night season and all the day long
Who makes me do right, when I would do wrong
Jesus Will, Jesus Will*

Prayer:

Dear God,

You know what we're afraid of. You know what brings us comfort. We cannot hide from your thoughts or your wisdom. You are bigger than we can comprehend, and closer than we can imagine.

God, thank you for sending us Jesus. We know that Jesus wants us to trust him. We know that he understands that it is human to be scared. Jesus knows and Jesus cares.

Help us to ask for help, God. Set us free from the chains of pretending and performing strength. Save us when we need to be saved. Let us test the waters when we need to.

In Jesus' name we pray,
Amen

