

Matthew 14:22-33

Intro

Our passage this morning can absolutely stand on its own (and in a few minutes, you'll realize how punny that was!).

However, we are able to garner a deeper appreciation when we hear just a few of the events that take place in the preceding verses. It is there that we hear that the people who had known Jesus the longest (those in his hometown of Nazareth), rejected the person whom he was showing himself to be, that John the Baptist was killed in order for the puppet king Herod to look strong in front of his dinner guests, and how Jesus fed the multitude who had come to be led by his words and healed by his touch.

He (and by extension, his disciples as well) was/were being put through the emotional ringer.

Anyone else know how that feels? Anyone else feeling emotionally exhausted? And *then* the power goes out!

So there's the lead up...to us hearing about the disciples being out in a boat that is being tossed and battered by the wind and waves before Jesus ventures out across the unsteady waters on foot (after his time of Sabbath) to have a fearful Peter challenge what Peter feels to be an apparition to prove who he says he is by inviting him to walk on the choppy waters that were still battering the boat that he and the rest of disciples were on.

See what I mean about a deeper appreciation?

Scriptural stories do not happen in an isolated vacuum. They are events that are experienced by real people who process their experiences through their own contextual prism (like we do) and deal with their emotions in both healthy and unhealthy ways (like we do).

So as you hear these verses, bring all that you've been dealing with (as well as all the stuff you haven't been dealing with) and get into the boat beside the disciples. Recognize the call that is being placed before you, and ask yourself the question, what would you focus on? The scripture reads this way.

Matthew 14:22-33

22 Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. ²⁵And early in the morning he came walking towards them on the lake. ²⁶But when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified, saying, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out in fear. ²⁷But 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.'
²⁹He said, 'Come.' So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came towards Jesus. ³⁰But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!' ³¹Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?' ³²When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'

'The Call and the Chaos'

Jen and I were sitting out on the front porch of the parsonage drinking our coffees, under the unescapable drone of multiple generators (you know, in the midst of a global pandemic), when we saw our neighbor Sal across the street. He said something to us, which, not

surprisingly, we couldn't hear. Then we heard him as he hollered again, 'the locusts are coming next week!'

We chuckled (I think at least in part because we were a little too tired to cry).

Guess what?

He was wrong! Because it only took an hour and a half before, wouldn't you know it, Jen finds the invasive and predatory Spotted Lantern Fly trying to make its way over to our dappled willow tree which, apparently, it finds delicious.

Here was my emotional response to that: 'O, come on!'

I know that I am blessed beyond measure (my family is healthy, I have a job and a home, I have a generator, and food that we can prepare).

But the compounding effect of all the stuff that we have been trying to deal with over these past few months is deliriously exhausting. Trying to navigate and respond to any of the layers of the onion individually is hard enough.

When they just keep feeding into one another, exacerbating previously created wounds? It's no wonder that so many people would prefer to hibernate for the rest of 2020 (wake me up when it's over, thank you very much!).

I can picture the disciples having a certain level of this feeling as they're out there on the boat. Jesus hometown scoffed at him, John the Baptist had been murdered, and even though Jesus was able to miraculously feed the 5000, he did so after you told him that there was no way to be able to feed everyone.

And now you're in a boat that's getting shoved around in a wind storm.

'O, come on!'

That's the emotional setting for Peter and the rest of the disciples when Jesus comes down the mountain and proceeds to walk on water. All of that emotional tilt-a-whirl is still spinning as Jesus responds to Peter's fearful demand of, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water' with a simple response that I absolutely hear being said with twinges of tiredness and even sadness, 'come.'

So I hear this story with the current backdrop of events and I have to wonder, how is God showing up in my life right now and I'm just strait doubting it, because I haven't been able to deal with all the emotional stuff that's already on the plate?

And even if I take the step out of the proverbial boat, how often do I end up focusing on all the stuff that's whipping around as opposed to focusing on the God who has called for me to come, thereby leaving me feel like I'm in need of rescue?

The call of God does not wait until we're ready. The call to come from our Lord is not necessarily put on hold until the issues of our life begin to settle and find meaning.

We may put off on responding...but the call still echoes across even the most chaotic of dins.

So what will we focus on?

The call? Or the chaos?

If all we do is read and react off the events of the story we just heard, then it feels like we're going to be doing the latter (after all, Peter did start to sink).

But when we begin to page through the rest of scripture, we are able to appreciate that the disciples were not necessarily extraordinary in their response to the call. By that I mean, they didn't become junior Jesus's. They continued to have moments when their response to God was a whole lot closer to the sinking into the water as opposed to the standing through the chaos.

What they were was faithful, where even when they experienced that feeling of sinking, they leaned into their faith that reminded them that the God in whom they abide, is the God who is able to do all things, even the impossible things, even around the chaos, if not out and out through it.

This means that even if a response to the call we have heard from God falls flat on its face, we can trust that when that response is done in love (because where love is, there God is as well), then it will lead both the giver (and I also trust the receiver as well) to the next step that God would ultimately have them take (remember: ‘all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to His purpose’ – and yes, we did hear that from Romans 8:28 a few weeks ago).

This is not some sort of a ‘everything’s hunky-dory’ version of faith.

This is a, ‘even when it feels like the plagues of Egypt have descended on you, you are not alone’, and because you are not alone, ‘you can respond to the call of God despite that chaos’ version of faith.

So what will we focus on?

The call? Or the chaos?

Jen and I were on the way back with Austin from a socially distanced breakfast out, when a song came on the radio that really took my attention. In it the singing talked about all the times he had stood on the stage and talked about how God was good and everything was going to be alright, but today, today we was simply not able to muster those words or that belief.

However, as the song moved along, it turned a corner and the singer was able to talk about how even though he wasn’t feeling that level of confidence, he trusted in God enough to

say, no matter what, it is well with my soul. His faith was boiled down to that trust...and it was enough.

The chaos is real (and it's been very loud).

People of God, hear this as well: the call of God continues to speak out into (and even through this) chaos...to come and abide, to come and follow, to come and serve, maybe for you, right not, it ends up being a come and simply trust.

When you hear it, when you see it, when you feel it, respond to it, or at the very least, trust in it. Step forward into the chaos knowing that God is before you and behind you, above you and beneath you. And if you start to sink, and there will be times when we do, remain faithful, trusting that God will even be able to work through that in marvelous and amazing ways. I mean, we are talking about Peter after all these years, which means that the sinking didn't rule at the end of the day. He was able to stand and respond to the call...even through the chaos.

What will you focus on?

After Sermon Prayer

Holy God, as we hear the realities of those in our story this morning, we begin to hear and see our own reality. Our world is chaotic...and Your call to come still whispers into our life. Lord, help us to focus on that call. That call will be different in each of our lives and as we respond to it, Your love will be felt and your light will be shared. Lord, let it be so. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.