

Have Faith
Matthew 14:22-33
Colebrook Congregational Church
Ordinary 17 / July 26, 2015

The episode of Jesus Feeding the 5000 is found in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, & John, and is followed immediately by the episode of Jesus Walking on Water in all three of them. Neither story though appear in the Gospel of Luke, and scholars call it the Great Omission. If you look at the ending of Mark's Gospel in any Bible, you will see that it has two different conclusions, a "Shorter Ending," and a "Longer Ending." There has two versions of the Gospel of Mark, one shorter than the other, and they were easily reconciled when brought together...except the endings. Since Matthew and Luke have both borrowed so heavily from Mark, it is thought that since Luke omits the story we heard last week and today, that Luke's copy of Mark was the shorter one.

Even though we have going in order through the sixth chapter of Mark, I have chosen Matthew's version for this story, because each of the Gospels have slight differences, where I like Matthew's version better than the other two.

According to Matthew, Jesus sends His Disciples off on their own in a boat to head to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which would be the west side, the Plain of Gennesaret. He sent away the crowds, and then retreated to the hills to meditate on His own. The Disciples were experiencing difficulties in their boating, and during the fourth watch, which is Roman for the hours between 3am and 6am, Jesus appears to them, walking on the water toward them, reassuring them that everything is alright. Then Peter goes out to meet Jesus. When he had fear and doubt, he started to sink, but when had faith, he too walked on the water. They then finished the crossing, and performed many healings.

John and Mark differ from Matthew in a bunch of details, such as the direction they were going and the reason for Jesus being away from the Disciples. But the two big differences between them and Matthew is first their emphasis on Jesus demonstrating that He is not bound by the laws of nature by walking on water, and secondly that the part with Peter is not

present. By adding the part with Peter, Matthew changes the emphasis to that of encouragement to the believers. That if they have faith, they too can accomplish the miraculous!

That is why I like Matthew's version better. While it too demonstrates the divine power of Jesus, it also demonstrates how if we are confident with putting our faith into action, we can do miraculous things, just as Peter did.

Discussing this story with a colleague, we joked about the movie, Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade. Henry Jones is flabbergasted that they are being shot at, that they are in real danger, and points out the obvious to Indy. Indy yells back that he knows. Henry replies that it is a new experience for him. Indy responded by fixing his hat, states that it happens to him all the time, then marches out of frame with a look of determined confidence like he knows that he can handle whatever danger is coming at him.

It also reminded me of my time with Habitat for Humanity of Greater Worcester. I was with them during the summer between my two tours of service. Habitat for Humanity builds homes for people who cannot afford to build their own. And in practice, they exemplify what Jesus is teaching Peter...and us. They have the faith that they will be able to make a duplex. That they will be able to raise the money to buy the property, that they will have enough donated materials, that they will have enough skilled workers and enough volunteers to finish the job.

Imagine what they do from the beginning, how daunting that must be. Their goal is to build a duplex, and they start with nothing. Not even an empty plot. And when they have something, they do not have the luxury of waiting for the "right time," they need to go with they have when they can get it. I heard them talk about how they built the frames over the winter in their storage facility, because that was when the two by fours were donated, so they made do in the cold. During work days, we did not know who or how many would show up, or even if anyone would besides the staff and AmeriCorps. But we would go forward, confident in our faith that our task will be accomplished.

Building a house, let alone a duplex, is a massive undertaking. But those Habitat houses are still built. And they are built not by professionals, but by volunteers. Retirees, church folk, businesspeople, non-construction tradesmen, even children. And yesterday, when I drove up to Worcester on I-290 for a Meetup, just past the college baseball diamond, I looked up at the ridge east of the highway, and saw that duplex that I helped build.

When we are part of something miraculous, and we accomplish it, we can have that feeling of, “I got this,” like how Indiana Jones displayed in that scene with his father where he charged into danger against impossible odds. It is a good feeling. A rewarding feeling, that comes from having the confidence of faith that Peter had on the lake. Any one of us, having faith, can accomplish something amazing, even if looks impossible at first. And banded together, in faith, we can accomplish even greater things, house-sized things, and bigger! We need not fear the seemingly impossible! We need not need sink like Peter started to when he faltered. If we are confident in our faith, we can stay above the water with Jesus!

We are now mostly done with the summer, and with the arrival of autumn, we will be starting new programs and restarting old ones. We will be looking at our lists of ideas in Church Council, and asking for more suggestions. Some things will look impossible, but we should not fear. We should keep confident in our faith, and know that we will accomplish these things. In the coming months of planning, I ask that you remember the encouragement of Jesus, seeing the faith of Peter on the lake, and also the attitude of Indiana Jones, and say to yourself, “WE GOT THIS!”

Amen!

Pastoral Prayer

[PAUSE]

O God, you invite us to hold the needs of our sisters and brothers as dear to us as our own needs. Loving our neighbors as ourselves, we offer our thanksgivings and our petitions on behalf of the church and the world.

We thank you for Your blessings, and for the lessons You teach us. We thank You for those You have to help us in our daily lives. And we thank You for the opportunities to serve You through serving our neighbors.

We pray for the forgiveness of our transgressions. We pray for your guidance in living our lives in more loving ways.

We pray for those who are unwell of mind, body, or spirit. We pray for their recovery, we pray for their caregivers, and we pray that you move us to help them in anyway our gifts allow. We pray for those who are lost, that may find guidance. We pray for those who protect us, please keep them safe as they keep us safe. And we pray that you help us be instruments of your divine love.

We especially pray for:

Hear our prayers, O God, and through the ministry of your Son, free us from the grip of the temptations, that we may serve of others in your name in our lives and proclaim your saving deeds to all the world. Amen.

Matthew 14:22-36

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 towards them on the lake. 26 But when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, 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 towards 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 worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'

34 When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret. 35 After the people of that place recognized him, they sent word throughout the region and brought all who were sick to him, 36 and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.