

Matthew 14:22-33

Problem: I become paralyzed by fear when I can't see God in the chaos.

- Getting Leeann off the mountain in a thunderstorm. She just froze and could not move. We had to start carrying her down in the midst of thunder, lightning, wind, and rain. We ran down a scree field on the side of the mountain. Suddenly, I noticed that she started to run with us. We all threw ourselves into the bushes and covered up until the rain passed. She later thanked us for pulling her down the mountain with us. "I was so paralyzed by the chaos around me that I couldn't move," she said. "It was only when I saw those bushes that I could get myself to start moving again."

- As much as I was frustrated by her at the time, I can see myself in Leeann's actions. Maybe you can too. Our world is so chaotic, so confusing, so scary at times, that we don't know what to do and become paralyzed.

Solution: Jesus walks toward the disciples and reminds them that he is with them. This frees Peter from being paralyzed by fear and energizes him to take a risk and get closer.

- One of the interesting things that many of our gospels do to establish a point or move the story forward is introducing pairs of stories that are similar. This story has a "twin" story..The story of Jesus calming the seas in Matthew 8 (which was our text for the last two weeks) In fact, the whole structure and Greek phrasing of both stories is almost exactly the same to begin with except with one big difference: Jesus is not with the disciples in our story today. So this chaos is happening all around them, battering the boat. I know I would probably be paralyzed.

- The Greek tells us this event happens during the "4th Watch" which means it is between 3-6am when Jesus comes walking toward them. So not only do the disciples think that they are alone in this chaos, they also probably can't see Jesus walking towards them because it is dark. So you can imagine their surprise when all of a sudden they realize there is this figure out there.

- Immediately Jesus gives what scholars call a "theophany" or a "link" to the God of Israel. It is translated in English as "take heart, it is I; do not be afraid", but in Greek it is just two words: "Ego Eimi": I AM. This is God's exact response to Moses at the burning bush: I AM.

- This a powerful moment in this story, I think, because it shows both us and the disciples that even in the midst of unthinkable darkness and chaos, God is not only there, but seeks to come closer to us.

- Here is the crazy part of this story and where it becomes vastly different from it's "twin". If you remember, in it's twin story, Jesus get's mad and says "have you little faith?" He then calms the winds and the disciples are still afraid and saying to each other: "Who is this guy?" In our second story, as soon as Jesus says do not be afraid, the disciples don't seem to be afraid anymore. Instead, Peter does something very

amazing and risky. He says: "OK, I am going to come closer," and gets out of the boat. He gets out of the boat.

- Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes: "Peter had to leave the ship and risk his life on the sea, in order to learn both his own weakness and the almighty power of his Lord. If Peter had not taken the risk, he would never have learned the meaning of faith... Unless a definitive step is demanded, the call vanishes in thin air, and if [people] imagine that they can follow Jesus without taking this step, they are deluding themselves like fanatics."¹

- In other words, we learn the meaning of faith by taking the risk to get out of that boat. Living a life of faith is getting out of the boat.

Implication: God coming to us in the chaos frees us to take the risk of "getting out of the boat" and seeing more.

-I just came back from Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp this week. It was an incredible week to get to know kids and youth as well as journey with them in topics of faith. One of my favorite responsibilities of being a "camp pastor" is leading discussions called "Pastor Ponderings." These are sessions where the pastor sits in the hot seat and takes questions from campers ranging from "what is the hardest part about being a pastor" to "why does the devil have horns" and everything in between. One of the sessions was with an older junior high cabin where the councilor had the kids write out their questions. We didn't get to all of them for our discussion, but the counselor did hand me one that we didn't get to. It read: "what if there is nothing beyond our life on earth to look forward to? What is the purpose of me being on earth? I'm scared and would appreciate advice." I later sought out this young woman camper and talked some of these things through with her. She has come from a rough home background and lives with foster parents. You can tell she struggles with trusting people in her life and that includes trusting God. At the end of our discussion, I said: "I know you don't have this all figured out, but there are people who want to walk with you in this. I am so impressed by your courage to even submit this question." Immediately her face relaxed and she began to tear up. "Thank you" she said.

-Just as Jesus came to Peter in order to free him from being paralyzed, I believe Jesus also came to this young woman at camp and empowered her to write this question and be noticed. He came so that this young camper could get out of the boat.

-Paul Tillich writes: "*Decision is a risk rooted in the courage of being free*"

- God comes to us in the midst of chaos and accepts us for who we are so we don't have to worry about that stuff. We are freed to figure out how we are going to get out of the boat.

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer (as quoted by Charles Cousar in [Texts For Preaching, Year A](#), p. 441)

- Our world needs people to get out of the boat in whatever form that means. Our world needs our church to have the courage to get out of the boat.

-This fall, a sub-committee led by Peter Metcalf, president of our congregation, will be leading a facilities audit, a process by which we take stock of what our facilities is now and what kind of ministry we want it to be. Do we want our building standing empty for most of the week, or is there something else we can do with our church building to make it more of an community anchor and symbol of Jesus' ministry for Bonner and the surrounding area? Who knows where it will go, but stay tuned for giving your input in this process. I firmly believe this is our church getting out of the boat.

- "No storm can shake my inmost calm while to that Rock I'm clinging. Since Christ is Lord of Heaven and Earth, how can I keep from singing?"

- Let's get out of the boat and proclaim Christ together. Amen.