THE ORIGINAL CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

A Sermon Delivered on July 11, 2021

Mark 6:45-51 “Jesus Walks on Water”

***Walk Right In***

In our story from the Gospel of Mark this morning we see the disciples in peril at sea and in their distress Jesus walks right in, sits right down, the winds cease and the waves return to calm.

That’s the way faith works. When we are at wits end, it is the Lord who walks right into the scene, meets us right where we are, and joins us in the thick of it. And with the Lord comes a centering presence. We can say following the encounter, “Surely, God was in this place!”

The miracle stories hold up because the world continues to be in need of miracles. Don’t we all wish for a miracle to happen? We want peace in the Middle East. A safe outcome for Afghanistan. A treatable diagnosis. A cure for what ails us.

What compels us about the story of Jesus walking on water? Is it the miracle itself? We know that gravity has a greater pull on us than the surface tension of water can sustain an adult. Yet we do float. So is it all in the technique?

No, what is truly compelling about Jesus walking on water is that first he sees and then is concerned for what is happening to his loved ones. They are in trouble. They need saving. He goes right away. Jesus just walks right in.

What was Jesus walking into? What did he find? A boat full of anxious, yelling, desperate people. You know that the first thing to do in order to save a drowning person is to do everything other than jump right in. To avoid the risk of drowning you attempt safe methods.

When we jump right into a boat full of anxiety ridden people fearing for their lives the big risk is that we too will either join them in their state of great anxiety or also experience our own demise in the situation. What would we do?

This is when to remember the biggest takeaway of the story of Jesus walking on water. We are not Jesus! It is Jesus who can walk on water. We generally cannot expect to ever walk on water in most circumstances. Why do try? Why do we want others to?

When we ask a person to do a task that is beyond human strength or capacity, we literally are asking for someone to “walk on water” for us. Remember that the laws of physics hold. When someone tries to walk on water soon they will sink.

By faith, the Lord of Creation, the Lord of Saving Grace, the Lord of Sustaining Strength, never sinks. Our assurances of faith are that God has already overcome evil with the good. Just a little light can dispel the deepest darkness. Love endures all things. Love lasts.

What compels Jesus to come walking towards his disciples on the surface of the sea? Afterall he was engaged in deep prayer. Remember he had told them to cross over to the other side while he remained alone to pray with God on the mountaintop.

The gospels attest to the fact that Jesus was so close to the Lord in heaven that while in prayer, Jesus was able to enact the saving work of God on earth in person. The line between the Lord in heaven and the Lord on earth is very thin in the person of Jesus.

We may think of it this way: the reason Jesus could walk on water is because he was still deep in prayer at the time. His heart, mind and strength was focused fully on God in faith. The heaven-sent miracle in which Jesus is drawn into doing is because our needs on earth are so great.

When we are in worship, in meditation, in deep mindfulness, we have traveled to a higher place in our soul. It is a lighter place that the Spirit lifts us up to beyond our usual state of swirling tides of stress that would knock us down and pull us under like a rip tide.

Jesus comes to the disciples in the fourth watch of the night. That is like 3:00am. What are we doing up at 3:00am? That is a time when dreams, worries, hopes, fears, sleep and shadows all mingle together. For the ancients it was considered a holy time of the spirit world.

So was Jesus a ghost, a spirit to fear? At first the disciples don’t recognize him. It’s the fourth watch of the night and their immediate moment is fraught with peril. Were they so near death and dying that they were seeing things? In that desperate state comes a familiar and soothing voice.

Jesus says to them, “Take heart. It is I. Don’t be afraid.” That’s faith that comes walking right in and sitting down in the boat with us at our absolute worst moment. Don’t be afraid. Follow your faith. God is near. God will help us. Look for heaven right here!

There is a beautiful people by Elizabeth Barrett Browning which goes, “Earth’s crammed with heaven, And every common bush afire with God; And only the one who sees takes off their shoes—The rest sit around it and pluck blueberries.”

Yes a blueberry bush is a blueberry bush, but it’s aflame with holy mystery. So too is a perilous sea crossing and this world’s need for peace and your own pastoral concerns for loved ones and this caring community. The earth is crammed with heaven and sometimes it comes walking to us by land, sea and sky.

The love of God sees us, comes to us, walks right in and sits right down with us to pray. Amen.

*A prayer from Psalm 107*

*Oh give thanks to the Lord for God is good. God’s steadfast love endures forever. Some went down to the sea in ships. They saw God’s wondrous works of the deep. God commanded and raised the stormy wind and waves. They mounted up to heaven and down to the depths. They cried out to the Lord in their trouble. God delivered them from their distress. God made the storm be still, the waters quiet. The Lord brought them into their desired harbor. Let us thank the Lord for God’s steadfast love. Let us praise the Lord for God’s wondrous works. May all find safety and security in God’s sea of love. Amen.*