

Rev. Liz Hulme Adam
Tabor Presbyterian Church
August 9, 2020

Matthew 14:22-33
The One Who Saves
Zoom Worship

I'd like to ask you to remember a time in your life when you overcame a fear or did something you didn't think you could do.

What do you think helped you?

Imagine this story, Jesus walking on the water, as a singed imprint in your memory - Jesus reaches out, coaxing you over the scary waters, where below you could fall into the abyss.

Looking down is looking at what scares us the most. Looking at *Jesus* is looking forward, toward the hope that an out-stretched hand awaits us no matter the circumstance.

We do look down. We see our fear much more readily than we imagine a replacement for the fear. It's built in to our operating system to save us from predators, from danger. Fear saves. But if *all* we have is fear, everything is an abyss.

Again, from Matthew's account, we have Jesus wanting to get away by himself; but he sees his friends on a boat in a perilous situation. He comes to them.

He has compassion for those in fear.

Peter wasn't sure it was Jesus, so he said, "*If it's you, help me come to you!*"

So Jesus complies. And Peter makes his way.

But he got distracted.

O how we get distracted. It's not that Peter *imagined* the wind. The wind was blowing, and when he noticed it, he began to sink. It's not that we don't have our own form of wind. The realities of what scare us are not imagined. They are real - they are: cells mutating; a cough turned to more;

income lost; a new diagnosis; betrayal or lost relationships; the loop-d-loop of our brain. The wind comes to us regardless of our intention, or our hard work. The wind comes. The waves stir, and even if we see Jesus ahead, we can't help but succumb to the elements that surround us.

Jesus caught Peter after Peter asked Jesus to save him.

The older I get the more convinced I am that we as individuals can't handle fear on our own. We need help with it. I think the wind is too persuasive and real. We are wired to respond to threats, and we aren't as much wired to trust. Life kinda knocks the trust out of us.

People disappoint. Our parents aren't perfect after all. We as parents will do harm even when we try our best. The trustworthy people left in our lives are human and get it wrong, and a lot of the time people simply won't get us, not truly get us. There's the saying, "*We come into the world alone, and leave alone.*"

But that's not exactly right. We come in to the world through a protective canal, surrounded by the rhythms and sounds of our mother, and literally connected by a cord to another human being. Until it has to be cut, severed. We come into the world already hearing from it, already experiencing some sense that there are others around. And of all the other mammals we are meant to be held longer, nursed longer, cared for longer than any other mammal. Our need for connection is enormous, vital.

When we leave the world, however and whenever that happens, we journey in our own way but we aren't alone there, either, even if we happen to be by ourselves, like those in the hospital dying of Covid-19. They may be physically alone, but they aren't spiritually alone.

I think they have an experience of a Christ figure coaxing them home over the abyss. I don't know this for sure, of course, because I haven't died, but my husband Erdal nearly did, was brought back to life and had an experience of being accompanied.

But even before death we accumulate crossing the abyss-moments — a divorce, a tragedy, a loss, a wrong move, a time of confusion or floundering, a failure: now, when we reflect back on those times, even if we were alone, we were saved from the abyss. Like Peter. When we need

saving, we get it. This saving takes all shapes and sizes and contours. It may leave us limping like Jacob; we may have to deal with some ugliness about ourselves in the process, but we get saved. We get back on to the boat or dry land or calm waters at some point.

We tend not to ask for help until we **are** knee-deep in the abyss and can't save ourselves.

We can't save ourselves. We need each other, we need other voices in our heads, we need those invisible cords that tie us together as the body of Christ. That body in all its variety lift us from the doom we think is inevitable.

And the worst thing to happen, if we map it out, and play along with our fearful imagination, if we drown, say, if Peter had gone under, there's no way that Jesus, would not have gone to get him. He who had come out to the crowds, then sees his friends scared on a boat, he came to them; there's no way in my trust picture of Jesus he wouldn't go down with Peter into the sea to get him, so he wouldn't be alone.

Now the reason Jesus wanted to get away, if we rewind the scenes, we see that he had heard about John the Baptist. Imagine his heartache at this news. John had been murdered, decapitated, and it is likely that Jesus understood this as foreshadow, that he would be next. So he needed to get away by himself, get some space, grieve, pray. Prepare. Face his own fear.

I imagine Jesus carrying the baton for John, adjusting his plan to be alone, instead going into the crowd to show them that John was right, the kingdom is coming. The kingdom coming is evidenced by the way Jesus healed people from their separations, how he fed them and made them think there is enough for everyone; in the kingdom there is enough for everyone, and then some leftover just in case you think there is an end to the abundance.

The kingdom coming is shown by his extended hand to Peter, who wanted to get in on a trick of nature, let me come to you Jesus so I can defy gravity too!

That's not what it is about Peter. The point is the extended hand, the reach, the compassion, the trust that I will be with you.

I will be with you. Hercules can do great things; that is not why the disciples said "O Jesus you are God's son!" They reason they said "*Truly you are the Son of God*" was because he put an end to their fear. Hercules doesn't do that.

When our fear gets elbowed away by the trust we have in connection, we will know what it means to be saved. The cord was cut at our birth, but nothing you do or believe, nothing you don't do, and nothing that happens to you, will sever your spiritual connection to the one who saves.

Amen.