

## Keeping Our Focus

### I. Introduction

- Let me begin with what may seem like an obvious question:
  - What is this story about?
- The dramatic details lead us to think it's another miracle story, but with a twist –
  - with Peter getting out of the boat to walk on water just like Jesus.
- But the more I read it, the more I'm led to believe that it's not a story about doing God-like feats,
  - nor is it a story about having enough faith to overcome fear.
- Instead, it's a story about who Jesus is and who we are not.

### II. Adam and Eve: An Old Story Re-told

- Before we get to that story though, let's lay a foundation by remembering together one of the first stories in the Bible:
  - the story of Adam & Eve.
- The Bible begins, of course, with the story of creation,
  - of God creating everything that exists,
  - including human beings made in the very image of God, the "crown of creation."
- But God is greatly disappointed with these first humans
  - when they ignore God's command to not eat the fruit from a particular tree in the garden
  - and instead listen to the alluring tempter,
    - who tells them that the fruit will make them *become like God*.
- So today we remember that from the very beginning of time,
  - we have struggled to accept our place in creation;
  - we've always been enticed by the possibility that we might be able to be more than we are created to be.
- We see that again in this story from Matthew, particularly in Peter.

### III. Matthew's Story

- That story begins with Jesus sending his friends off in a boat

- while he gets rid of the crowds, who have had their fill of bread.
- Once they're gone, he carves out a little alone time up on a mountain where he rests and prays.
- But the sea where he's sent his friends, especially for land-lovers like us, is a place of danger and unpredictability.
  - We'd much rather be where the ground is firm beneath our feet
    - and we feel like we know what to expect.
- So, as we might expect, while Jesus' friends are crossing the sea, their way becomes extremely difficult.
  - Their boat is battered by the waves and the wind.
  - The sea is roiling all around them, and
    - they are worn out from the hard work of rowing against the wind.
- It was then that Jesus came to them, walking on the water in the early light of the morning.
  - Instead of being relieved, though, they were terrified; they thought they were seeing a ghost.
- Now remember, these are the same disciples who have already seen Jesus calm another storm on the sea – back in chapter eight.
  - They are the ones who have been listening to all of Jesus' parables describing the Kingdom of Heaven,
    - one of which taught that faith the size of a tiny mustard seed is all you need to move mountains.
  - They are the ones who first suggested that Jesus should send away the crowds so the people could get something to eat
    - but then watched as Jesus fed every last one of them – over 5,000! – with just several loaves of bread and a couple of fish.
  - Still, despite all the evidence to suggest they had nothing to worry about since they were friends with Jesus,
    - out in the boat, when everything seemed like it was out of their control,
    - like nothing they did was making any difference at all,
      - they were terrified, paralyzed by fear.
    - They didn't expect Jesus to show up, let alone come to them in a way that only he could.
- Perhaps living through a pandemic, and teetering on economic ruin,
  - and seeing the effects of climate change in melting polar ice caps and raging Siberian wildfires

- and more named storms forming in one season than ever before,
- and feeling the foundations of a society built upon privilege and the oppression of entire people groups beginning to crumble,
- and wrestling with decisions about going back to school and working from home and worshiping in person –
- maybe everything we’re living through right now is the wind howling against us and our little boat.
- And if it is, what are we focusing on?
  - What is commanding our attention and guiding our decisions?
  - Do we expect Jesus to show up?

#### IV. Keeping Our Focus on Jesus

- This story illustrates so well how easy it is for us to get distracted, even as people of faith.
  - When we hear it, it’s easy for us to question Jesus’ motives:
    - Why would he “make” his friends get in the boat if he knew their way would be difficult and dangerous?
  - The story tempts us to think like Peter, that maybe we could do a little water-walking ourselves – that sounds kind of cool, doesn’t it?
  - And it lures us toward the trap of thinking that all we need is *enough* faith and – Boom! – we can do the impossible.
- But let’s remember: this is a story about who God is and who we are not.
  - So it’s a story that calls us to focus on Jesus, the one who *is* able to walk on water,
    - and it reminds us too that *our* place is in the boat,
    - even when the rowing is really hard and the going is really slow.
  - It’s a story that calls us to focus on Jesus, the one who, with a simple command, makes it possible for us to do what he does,
    - as long as it serves his purpose and not just our curiosity,
    - as long as it bears the gospel good news to a hurting world.
  - It’s a story that calls us to focus on Jesus,
    - who heeds the cries of all who call to him “Lord, save me!” by rescuing them from certain death,
      - from all that would keep us from being intimately connected
      - to the One whose love for us is never-ending.

- It is a story that calls us to focus on Jesus, the one whose presence calms our fears and quiets the wind,
  - the one who alone is “Son of God,”
  - the one who sees us safely to the other side.

## V. Conclusion

- When our focus is where it needs to be, we see the One who very ably strolls across the sea despite the wind
  - and right out into the rest of the world.
- Without hesitation, he shows compassion for the sick and the poor.
  - Without judgment or criticism, he hangs out with sinners and misfits.
  - And with grace and mercy, he acts with sacrificial love,
    - in life and ultimately in death.
- And when we see this, we see that Jesus is the one who sends *us* out into the world, as well,
  - into the messy and sometimes grueling work of living out justice and mercy in his name.
- Mind you, it is not a call to recklessness,
  - to walk where we have no business walking
  - or to attempt to move mountains that are already perfectly placed.
- But neither is it a call to hopelessness,
  - a life lived in despair and resignation as if there isn’t anything we can do.
- Instead it is a call to bring in word and deed
  - nothing less than the Kingdom of Heaven to a lost and broken world.
- Because when we do, Jesus himself shows up
  - and quiets the wind and calms the roiling seas
  - to bring peace like no one else can.
- Thanks be to God. Amen.