



## The Eyes Tell The Story – TouchPoint for August 5, 2020

**Matthew 14:22-33 (MSG)** <sup>22-23</sup> As soon as the meal was finished, he insisted that the disciples get in the boat and go on ahead to the other side while he dismissed the people. With the crowd dispersed, he climbed the mountain so he could be by himself and pray. He stayed there alone, late into the night.

<sup>24-26</sup> Meanwhile, the boat was far out to sea when the wind came up against them and they were battered by the waves. At about four o'clock in the morning, Jesus came toward them walking on the water. They were scared out of their wits. "A ghost!" they said, crying out in terror. <sup>27</sup> But Jesus was quick to comfort them. "Courage, it's me. Don't be afraid."

<sup>28</sup> Peter, suddenly bold, said, "Master, if it's really you, call me to come to you on the water." <sup>29-30</sup> He said, "Come ahead." Jumping out of the boat, Peter walked on the water to Jesus. But when he looked down at the waves churning beneath his feet, he lost his nerve and started to sink. He cried, "Master, save me!" <sup>31</sup> Jesus didn't hesitate. He reached down and grabbed his hand. Then he said, "Faint-heart, what got into you?"

<sup>32-33</sup> The two of them climbed into the boat, and the wind died down. The disciples in the boat, having watched the whole thing, worshiped Jesus, saying, "This is it! You are God's Son for sure!"

### **Grace and Peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.**

So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and began to sink,

In reading the story of Peter seeing Jesus walking on the water, and then attempting it himself, I am reminded of the saying,

**"There's one big difference between God and me. God doesn't fall into the habit of thinking he's me."**

I often like to look at the internet and see what others say about the bible passage I am going to reflect on. It is sometimes inspirational – it inspires me to write something different. Take the passage for today. I can't tell you the number of times I read that the problem of the story is that Peter took his eyes off of Jesus. Why, if he had just kept his eyes on Jesus, nothing bad would happen? And while that may be true on one level, (though I'm not sure how you fit the cross into the theology of nothing bad happening) it certainly isn't gospel.

Gospel is not something we do. Gospel is "good news". The good news of what God has done and is doing in the world. It's that old subject, verb, object thing. Who's the subject? Whose activity is the verb? Who is the object? Is the point of this passage that I must keep my eyes on Jesus? Or that Jesus keeps his eyes on me!

One of those sentences is good news, gospel, the truth that sets me free. The other is law, demand, and a millstone around my neck that only makes me drown more quickly. There is no good news in telling me what I need to do, how I need to act, what I need to think and the reason for that is because I don't always do it.

You see, life happens. Things get overwhelming. They overwhelm me. There's a key word in the word

overwhelm. It's the word 'over.' Over, above, beyond, greater than me. At times, life overwhelms me. At times it can underwhelm me, but that's another touchpoint. Over ...above...beyond...greater than me. At times, life overwhelms me. It gets bigger than me and swamps me. The coronavirus has overwhelmed me. Race relations are overwhelming me. The political situation overwhelms me. That's just reality.

And when someone tries to explain it to me, tries get me to UNDERstand, why I am OVERwhelmed. Well, it just doesn't work. It's a contradiction to say I can understand being overwhelmed. If I can understand it – then it hasn't overwhelmed me. No, there are things in life that simply overwhelm me. They swamp me, cascade over me, and I feel myself drowning in a sea of chaos.

It can happen in so many ways. A health diagnosis gone bad. A marriage or relationship gone sour. A job being eliminated. A loved one dying. An addiction that grabs hold. Sometimes it isn't even something so dramatic, just the everyday stresses, the pushes and pulls of everyday life. We can feel torn apart in so many directions that we feel there is nothing left.

Moralizing this story and saying, “just look at Jesus in the midst of the storms of life and everything will be fine,” is both foolish and cruel. The point of biblical stories is not to moralize them, the point of the biblical stories is God. And God's actions and activities in the face of the human condition.

Don't tell me to believe more, “*I believe, help my unbelief,*” to quote a biblical character. And 'Yes', I realize Jesus asks Peter why he doubts and calls out his little faith. But he doesn't stop there. He doesn't just say, “Hey, Peter, you don't have enough faith. Nice knowing you. Enjoy the underworld.” No, he keeps his eyes on Peter. And saves him. That's the point. Not the criticism.

I know it's hard to believe, listening to some preachers, but God's top priority is to save us, not criticize or condemn us. No. The good news of this text is that even though I may take my eyes off of Jesus, Jesus doesn't take his eyes off of me. That's a little more important don't you think? When I have little faith. When I doubt. When I can't stand on my own two feet. What hope is there for me? When I reach deep down inside of me, and there is nothing there. When the well runs dry and the cupboard is bare. When I can no longer be the hero of my faith story. What hope is there for me? Does it all rest on my shoulders?

A little biblical scholarship.

In the bible, the sea – the ocean – is a place of chaos. We are creatures of the terra firma. The oceans, the seas, are not our friends. They are where the Leviathan and other sea monsters live. Think of the first creation story. The earth is covered in water. There is chaos: “tohu” and “bohu” to use the Hebrew words. Chaos and meaninglessness. Think of the flood story and its destructive power.

So, when Jesus comes walking on the Sea of Galilee, to the disciples, in the midst of a storm...there is a whole lot more going on here than a literal interpretation. The chaos in creation has acted up. The chaos of creation is tossing the disciples to and fro. The chaos of creation has taken hold. The word in Greek says the disciples were tormented by the situation. This is not a weather report. This is a human condition report.

And yet, in the midst of all of this chaos. Jesus stands in the center of it all. Keeping his eyes on us. It does not toss him. It does not dominate him. It does not control him. And yes, there are times I

suppose when we can stand tall with him in it. And yes, there are moments I imagine when we can walk through the storms of life – but this story is not about that.

This story is about those times when we can't walk through the storms. This story is about those times we can't stand tall. This story is about when our faith lets us down. When I have little faith, when I doubt, when I can't stand on my own two feet... What hope is there for me?

When I reach deep down inside of me, and there is nothing there, when the well runs dry and the cupboard is bare, when I can no longer be the hero of my faith story... What hope is there for me? Does it all rest on my shoulders? No, it doesn't. And that is the good news.

Perhaps the 12-step program has it right when the first step is acknowledging that I am powerless. Or as Richard Rohr puts it, "The way down is the way up." When I finally stop thinking I am God and simply acknowledge that I am sinking. When I can no longer be the hero of my faith story and God becomes the hero.

And "No", Peter is not being heroic or a role model by crying out, "Lord save me," as some commentators imply. Look, I've never been drowning, but if I were, seeing someone who could save me and crying out to them is not some heroic act for which I should be given credit. Just sayin'.

And so, when I have little faith, when I doubt, when I can't stand on my own two feet, when I can no longer be the hero of my faith story... There. There is God. Keeping his eyes on me. Giving his hand. Taking me in his embrace.

Just like this meal. This is a night when chaos reigned. This is a night when the disciples were tossed about. This is the night when torment struck. And what does Jesus do? Well, he doesn't even comment on their little faith, their doubt. I think he knows it wouldn't do any good. It was too late to ask them to act heroically. There really was only one option. And it wasn't just giving them a hand. It was giving his body and blood. It was giving his very self.

Just as Jesus walks himself into the middle of the storm on the sea of Galilee. So, he plants himself in the middle of the chaos of the disciples' lives on this night. Being there – in the middle of it all. Keeping his eyes on them. Eyes always on them. So too, he is here. In the middle of our chaos, our torment, our fear and doubt. Not just giving us a hand but giving us his very self. Always with his eyes on us.

On us. On even us – us of little faith.  
Amen.