



Eyes on You – Touchpoint for August 9, 2023

Matthew 14:22-33 (NRSVUE) Jesus Walks on the Water

²² Immediately he made the disciples get into a boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³ And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴ but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. ²⁵ And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. ²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. ²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

²⁸ Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ²⁹ He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and, beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³² When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³ And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Grace and Peace to you 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 always like to look at the internet and see what others say about the Bible passage I am going to reflect on. It is so often times 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? He would have continued to walk on the water. How great would that be? Imagine being able to walk on water?

But I like this quote from Thich Nhat Hanh: "The miracle is not to walk on water, or in the air, or on burning charcoal. The miracle is to walk on earth. You breathe in, you become aware of the fact that you are alive. You are alive and you are walking on this beautiful planet. The greatest of all miracles is to be alive."

Now back to this idea that if we just keep our eyes on Jesus nothing bad will happen to us.

While that might be true on some level, (though I'm not sure how you fit the cross into a theology of nothing bad happening to you if you are Christ-like)... It may be true on some level, but 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.

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 reflection.

Over... above... beyond... greater than me. At times, life overwhelms me. It gets bigger than me and swamps 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 **under**stand being **over**whelmed. 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 Jesus saves Peter. That's the point. Not the criticism of Peter. 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 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 "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.

And while they may not have realized it at the time. He was there. In the middle of it all. 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.

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taize Choir, Remember Me)
Be Still, know that I am God

To Everything There is a Season

(The Concordia Choir, Rene' Clausen)

To everything turn, turn, turn. There is a season turn, turn, turn.
And a time for every purpose under Heaven A time to be born, a time to die.
A time to plant, a time to reap. A time to kill, a time to heal. A time to laugh, a time to weep. *Refrain*
A time to build up, a time to break down. A time to dance, a time to mourn.
A time to cast away stones. A time to gather stones together. *Refrain*
A time of love, a time of hate. A time of war, a time of peace.
A time you may embrace. A time to refrain from embracing. *Refrain*
A time to gain, a time to lose. A time to rain, a time to sow.
A time for love, a time for hate. A time for peace, I swear it's not too late.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Will You Come and Follow Me (The Summons)

(John L. Bell, The Cathedral Singers)

Will you come and follow me, If I but call your name? Will you go where you don't know,
And never be the same? Will you let my love be shown? Will you let my name be known?
Will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?

Will you leave yourself behind if I but call your name? Will you care for cruel and kind,
And never be the Same? Will you risk the hostile stare, Should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?

Will you let the blinded see, If I but call your name? Will you set the prisoners free, And never be the same? Will you kiss
the leper clean, And do such as this unseen, And admit to what I mean, In you and you in me?
Will you love the 'You' you hide, If I but call your name?

Will you quell the fear inside,
And never be the same? Will you use the faith you've found, To reshape the world around,
Through my sight and touch and sound, In you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true, When you but call my name. Let me turn and follow you,
And never be the same. In your company I'll go, Where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow, In you and you in me.

The Meal

Lord's Prayer

(Robert Stone, Salisbury Cathedral Boys Choristers, Salisbury Cathedral Lay Vicars, David Halls)

Benediction

God Be With You 'Til We Meet Again

(Discovery Singers)

God be with you till we meet again; By his counsels guide, uphold you; With his sheep securely fold you.
God be with you till we meet again. Amen