



Matthew 14:22-33

SPIRIT IN THE DESERT

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

Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” He said, “Come.” 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 beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 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 live and move and
have our being*

The first time we heard the word faith, it was typically connected with the idea of a loving God who gets disappointed and behaves a lot like Santa Claus. God says, “Be good all year and if you are, I may give you stuff. And remember...I am watching you all the time and everything is going on your permanent record. So, trust me because if you do not, you may suffer unmentionable consequences in your life.”

If we had been in the boat, perhaps Jesus' words, “Where is your faith?” might have sounded something like this: “Oh no, I was raised to believe in an all-loving God.”

But so were the disciples introduced to a loving God by Jesus. They had just watched Jesus feed the thousands with five loaves of bread and two fish. You would think that would have been enough for them to chill a bit about being alone on a boat in some choppy waters.

We are all human, subject to the human condition of mistaking our reality for ultimate reality. We were not taught about the difference between my perceived reality and ultimate reality or truth.

One of the things I learned while working with families in conflict is how deeply people feel the need to impose their own perception of a situation as the truth. So convinced are they that their perspective is the right one that family members lock horns, leading to frustration and, at times, heartbreaking outcomes.

Ok I need to take a breath on that one. I am experiencing a little bit of trauma from all the years of working with difficult parents raising normal teenagers.

Back to my perceptions on faith.

I am thinking Jesus was speaking only to his disciples. It is probably a good idea to keep our own perceptions of faith out of the way when interpreting. First look at how we define faith and our personal biases and let them go.

I think faith is not how we feel, but how we respond to our perceptions. Let me explain.

Most of us did not grow up being taught the word perception. Instead, we were taught that there are sharp divisions that must be judged as right or wrong. While this important for us as children, for safety and security, we must become more non-dualistic as adult disciples of Jesus.

Perception is my view from where I stand. If I can somehow let go of the need to be right, I might be able to see myself and others' perceptions without judgment. In that place of contemplative seeing, I do not need to control it or fix it. I can suddenly welcome the possibility of a fuller, more expansive reality that lies beyond my comprehension.

I can now listen to the other family members' perception with great curiosity and learn how they see the same situation. But in our human condition the need to be right makes the ego large and imposing, demanding we all must get on "the same page." Even now, like children, we panic in the face of turbulent waters and believe God is not with us.

Imagine a baby at feeding time. The mother places the baby in their crib. Now what was once a comforting place for baby becomes a cell with bars. The mother (or father) leaves the room. She is completely out of view as she goes to make the babies bottle of milk. She lets the baby cry because there is a bigger purpose.

To the baby, she is gone forever, and the crying and screaming do not stop until she finally returns. With chest heaving and face wet with tears, the bottle goes in the baby's mouth and the crying stops.

The baby may not remember these moments because mom always returns. The baby did not understand she was in the same house preparing what the baby desperately needed. It was the baby's perception that was incomplete, but nevertheless was the baby's reality.

Fear and doubt can be perceived as obstacles that must be removed before we can move forward. Faith and doubt are often perceived as disappointments to God. But what if we stopped seeing fear and doubt as obstacles? They are part of the human condition. They need not define us or dominate us, nor do they have to disappear before we can move forward.

Perhaps we can simply acknowledge their presence on the journey and invite them into the boat—but not give them a vote on the decisions we make.

To live a life of faith is to remember what was previously revealed to us when we were on the shore. To live this life fearlessly and joyfully is to accept my reality as incomplete.

There comes a time when we need to stop acting like babies who have no prior experiences with these things. Yet sometimes we want the bottle, and we want it now, so we inflict on God and others the

wails of an infant. We demand that the world around us change and that people see things from our perspective.

Perhaps Jesus said, “Where’s your faith?” to his disciples because they knew better. They had been with Jesus long enough to trust his words: “I’ll be right back.”

Maybe Jesus asked the disciples, “What did I say to you before I went away to be alone? I didn’t say, ‘Hey guys, let’s go halfway across the lake, get scared, and die.’ I said, ‘Let’s go to the other side.’”

Jesus had every intention of getting them to the other side, regardless of how much the boat was tossed around. I doubt Jesus walked on water because of their wailing in the crib. He may have done it anyway. They simply created a lot of drama along the way.

It takes faith to go to the other side without knowing everything there is to know. It takes courage to trust enough to take action without being given a guaranteed outcome.

Faith is not the absence of doubt or fear. It is action taken in the face of great fear and doubt.

Fear and doubt can be perceived as obstacles that must be removed before we are able to take a step forward. They can even be

perceived as disappointments to a God we are trying to please. But I refuse to perceive them as obstacles anymore. They are part of my human condition, yet they do not need to define or dominate me. Perhaps we can invite them into the boat as we journey forward—but they do not get a vote on the decisions we make.

Our perceptions are important to understand but they are not necessarily true. Our perceptions will drive our responses to the world around us if we do not seek to see contemplatively—if we do not value the perceptions of others without needing to agree with them.

If we do not follow the deep wisdom voice within us that says go to the other side, we will miss the adventure.

Faith is what fuels a radical life of adventure. It allows us to live in the moment and see divine presence even if we are not feeling it. It is the joy of living a life of uncertainty. If we do not accept that we possess limited understanding and live with uncertainty, we risk becoming nothing more than disillusioned religious robots—satisfying the sacraments while forsaking the sacred.

But... this is just my perception.

Amen

