

Sermon for
All Saints Episcopal Church, Steenrijk
Leidenstraat at Heelsumstraat
Willemstad, Curacao

Proper 7 (B)

June 26, 2024

DRAFT

A Sermon by the Rev. Joseph Parrish
“Having More Faith”

Mark 4:35-41

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he

was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

The Gospel: Matthew 14:22-33

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 worshipped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

In the storms of our lives, Dear Lord,
help us to keep our eyes fixed on you.
Amen.

There was a dramatic ocean rescue
several ago by an NBC television affiliate
helicopter television crew in Florida. Three
people had been in a boat that was capsized
near the small islands off the northern coast
of Florida on Monday. About 48 hours later
a news crew from the local television station
just happened to fly their helicopter over the
Florida coastal waters. They flew enough
offshore that they spotted a lonely swimmer
several hundred yards from shore. He

looked as if he were about to drown, and he was, but his salvation was the warm 90 degree water, and that helicopter. They swooped down, lowered some safety equipment, and quickly called for help from the Coast Guard. The Coast Guard came almost immediately and brought the swimmer on board. There they learned he was one of three people who had been thrown off their boat as it has capsized in heavy surf Monday. They immediately dispatched the helicopter off in the direction where the small craft had gone down. And they found two people, barely clinging to a buoy marker several miles away--two

women, the man's fiancée and her mother. Again, a swift recovery was made by the Coast Guard who got them aboard. Then they loaded them into rescue baskets that brought the two women into another helicopter that took them to the nearest hospital emergency facility. There they were treated and found to have no permanent injuries. The mother said, "That is the very last time I get on a boat, ever!"

A television interview with the man was shown. He described how he had left the two women clinging to a channel buoy near where the boat had gone down. He attempted to swim ashore, a swim of several

miles. He was a strong swimmer. He finally got within sight of the shore, but time and time again he was pushed back to sea by the strong currents. He was about to go under when he spotted the helicopter. The two helicopter crewmen came close enough to him to get him some immediate assistance, and the Coast Guard responded quickly. The ones who usually report the news were the ones to make the news--true heroes.

The three people's lives were spared due to the warm near-body-temperature water, and the news helicopter. But even in the warm waters, the two women were nearly at

their own ends. The daughter said she kept telling her mother and saying, "Mom, hold on. Hold on." But her mother began to nod off time and again during the long 48 hour ordeal. The daughter kept squeezing her mother and shook her awake every time she would try to fall asleep. The daughter instinctively knew that her mother's body temperature would drop if she fell asleep, and that would be the end of her. The miracle rescue was absolutely amazing.

The three people had not walked on the water. But then again, they did not sink either. In general, the human body is lighter than water. We are about 90 percent water,

but the rest of us has enough body fat and fatty oils that have a lower density than water. So we float. We can't easily sink unless we become water logged, which is why our bodies wash up on shore instead of sinking to the bottom. You may recall the miracle of Exodus. After the people of Israel safely cross the Red Sea, it closes over the Egyptian army. The bodies of the Egyptians begin to wash ashore--they did not sink into the sea.

This miracle of Jesus, the walk on the waters of the Sea of Galilee, is probably showing us the superiority of Jesus to Moses, a common thread throughout the

gospels of Matthew and Mark. Moses and the children of Israel had walked 'through' the waters. But Jesus had walked 'on' the waters. And one of Jesus' closest followers, Peter, was almost, almost, able to perform the same miracle as Jesus, which would make him superior to Moses as well. So there is probably a 'hidden agenda' behind the miracle, beyond the challenge of the disciple's faith. If we as disciples really, really trust our Master, we too will be able to walk on water, do the impossible. Jesus could, and we can too.

This miracle story probably gives most scholars the greatest difficulty in offering

rational explanations. I have seen the discussion in adult Bible class videos that attribute the opening of a dry channel in the Red Sea or Reed Sea by natural physical means. A strong wind and a large Red Sea sandbar are postulated, with some evidence of the latter, the sandbar. As the wind prevails over the Dead Sea surface, the water actually will 'pile up' on one side of the sandbar away from the route Moses is to take. This sandbar acts as a temporary sort of dam, and the waters actually recede in an area of the Reed Sea such that dry sea bottom appears. The wind also dries the sea bottom enough for foot traffic to cross. But

it is too boggy for the heavy Egyptian chariots. So they become bogged down, and a small shift in wind direction releases the waters, drowning the Egyptians. Of course, then one has to postulate some unusual physical circumstance had caused the fortunate wind in the first place, but that seems a gentler solution for God to take care of. Isn't God in charge of the winds anyway? Nowadays, it will be the El Nino or the El Nina that have caused this or that high temperature or cold temperature, and this or that drought or flood. But ultimately the timeliness of a miracle is what seems to

be something that no one can really explain away.

In the disciples' case, however, they were alone in the boat without Jesus. It just happened that Jesus had spent an inordinate amount of time in prayer after he had fed the five thousand. And perhaps in the great power of the Spirit, he walked on the surface of the Sea of Galilee. He did not always do that, of course. You will recall his stilling of the storm at sea. "Be still," he commands, and the winds subside. But he had been asleep in the boat, not walking on the water.

In a story attributed to Samuel Clemens, whose pseudonym is Mark Twain, two men

travel to Israel to the Sea of Galilee to see where Jesus walked on the water. One goes up to a fisherman and asks, "How much to take us to the place that Jesus walked on water?" And learning it was a large amount of money, he returns to his friend and says, "It's a fortune to take a boat. No wonder Jesus walked!"

Jeff Willock and others tell of a late breaking story about the Sea of Galilee. It seems that the Israel Tourism Office has opened a brand new attraction on the Sea of Galilee. It is a 262 foot clear plastic bridge built just below the water's surface. One is able to appear actually to 'walk on water' by

walking along this transparent bridge in the Sea of Galilee. The Israeli Tourism Office estimated that up to 800,000 tourists a year will want to walk on water on this new bridge. Since the new bridge will not have handrails, they are hiring a number of lifeguards to save those who 'stray from the path.' The project has been built with the financial assistance of the Israeli government. Can you imagine the consternation of the disciples had they known Jesus was preparing the way for a multimillion dollar tourist attraction at the Sea of Galilee?!

In 1986 a fishing boat was discovered buried off the shore of the Sea of Galilee that has been carbon dated to the first century. The boat, dubbed, the "Jesus Boat," is twenty-six and a half feet long, seven and a half feet wide, and four and a half feet deep. It could possibly have been fitted with a central mast for a sail. It would have had a sailing crew of five, four of whom would have been rowing the boat, and one would be steering. In addition to these five, another ten boatsmen could have been on board. This is based on estimates of the average size of people in the first century--men about five and a half feet tall weighing

about 140 pounds. So, all twelve disciples and Jesus, and at least a couple of other friends could have been aboard such a boat as the so-called Jesus Boat. Up until 1986 several scholars had scoffed at the stories about Jesus and the disciples in a boat on the Sea of Galilee, since such boats had not previously been found. But the Jesus Boat has changed that.

So, can you imagine the twelve disciples out on the dark Sea, some miles from shore? The Sea of Galilee is approximately the same size and shape as Staten Island, New York City--about seven miles wide and twelve miles long. [The Sea of Galilee is

almost, a third the size of Curacao which is 7 miles wide by 38 miles long in size.] So it is quite easy to imagine someone in a body of water the size of Staten Island or a third of Curacao being terrified if they were far from shore. The waters are whipped into a quick frenzy when the winds roll off the nearby hills that tower up to 1,500 feet above the Sea's surface on the north, west, and east of the Sea. As the air currents channel across the barren Israel country side and over the hills, their sweep across the water's surface is known to produce quite violent storms. Clinging to their twenty-six foot boat, or one that may have been even

smaller, the miles to the invisible dark shore would have seemed quite daunting, indeed alarmingly far away. And their terror in the night was confounded by the appearance of their leader who had insisted on staying behind to pray.

Jokes abound about how Jesus must have known where the stepping stones were in the Sea, but these seem to make light of what appears to be a true miracle over nature. Did Jesus walk on water? Could Jesus walk on water? That depends on how much faith one has in the fact that Jesus was indeed God Incarnate. If Jesus was God Incarnate, God in the flesh, then whatever Jesus does is

OK, we reason. But then our human side takes hold, and we think, 'Naw, Jesus was a human being like me. He couldn't walk over the water.' But then we float back to our faith that he was God's beloved Son, the God who made the seas and all that are in them. God surely can do as God pleases. Walking over water is a mere bit of triteness relative to creating the heavens and the earth. So we can reason that Jesus did actually walk on water, but that he was still human. God can do anything. But then we, like Peter, want to make our faith real. So imagine yourself stepping across the edge of the boat and feeling the warm water under

your foot. Then you take the other foot and place it outside the boat as well. You are walking on water! But then you feel the raging storm around you. You take your eyes off Jesus, and suddenly you are in the dark surf up to your neck, and slipping away. You cry out to Jesus, "Lord, save me." And the strong hands of the carpenter lift you up again, and you both get back into the boat. Would you too not worship him as your Lord, the Son of God?

Our lives are lived between storms. In our storms as individuals and as a congregation we often lose faith and feel ourselves sinking. Maybe it is a sudden

death or illness that 'throws' us. Maybe it is a change of economic circumstances.

Maybe it is a change in a dear friend upon whom we depended. There are many possibilities of storms in our lives. Maybe the city becomes almost entirely Spanish speaking. Maybe there is a fire. Maybe a tree falls on the roof. Maybe, maybe, maybe. What do we do then? The first faith-filled action will be to trust God to get us through this. Then something distracts us from our faith, and down we begin to sink in despair, anguish, hopelessness. Right then we remember to call to our God once again.

And God always hears our cry, and comes to us through our storm.

If today you are in such a storm, may we give you a lifejacket to help your faith?

May we tell you that you are the apple of God's eye? May we recount the mercies of God in our lives? May we give your hope by our own story of survival? Let us each here be Jesus for each other. Let us be the body of Christ for the world. Let us give hope to the hopeless. Let us keep our eyes on the real Master of the universe.

Robert Nelson Spencer before his death in 1961, two years before John Kennedy became the US President, penned two new

stanzas for the hymn tune, Melita, which is known as the "Naval Hymn." The last verse reads in Hymn 579 in the Episcopal hymnal reads, "O Trinity of love and power, our people shield in danger's hour; from rock and tempest, fire and foe, protect them wheresoever they go; thus evermore shall rise to thee glad praise from *space*, air, land, and sea." This was several years before John Kennedy set the nation's eyes toward landing a man on the moon. But the Goddard Space Center was readying a rocket to take John Glenn into three orbits of the earth. Now several dozen have gone to the moon, and there is now a joint

American-Russian and International presence in a space platform orbiting earth permanently. What we now only imagine, will one day be fact--cancers cured, Alzheimer's eradicated, AIDS conquered, aging largely reversed, church denominations united. All these miracles depend on our faith, and the faith of those who step out of the boat.

May we take heart and worship the One who is always there, looking with longing eyes to see our trust in him. Let us put our hand in the hand of the one who stilled the waters.

Amen.

Description:

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June 26, 2024

“Having More Faith”

Mark 4:35-41

Jesus walks on water. Peter tries. Jesus saves him. When did we step out in faith and try the impossible, with the thought that God was leading us and would help us?

Tags: Jesus, water, Sea, boat, storm, helicopter, Coast Guard, television, save, Mark Twain, bridge, walking, trust, space

station, naval hymn, surf, Curacao, Staten
Island