

Matthew 14:22-33

Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. ²⁵And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. ²⁶But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. ²⁷But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." ²⁸Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ²⁹He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. ³⁰But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³²When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

How many of you remember learning to ride a bike? I remember the inclination to look at my feet, or everywhere else, instead of looking straight ahead. Eventually, I learned that I didn't fall as often if I kept my eyes on the path. I guess the same thing is true in this new water sport, Paddleboarding. You stand up on a surf-board, and paddle like you're in a canoe. People make it look really easy. And I've heard you have the same kind of inclination to look down at your feet. If you do, the instructor says, you'll fall into the water. What you need to do is look up and out, and you won't lose your balance as much. Tightrope walking, Fear of heights: the same principle works. Look out, not down.

In our gospel story Mt. writes, "*When the disciples saw him walking on the sea they were terrified.*" Jesus does nothing about the outer storm and agitation of the sea, but **addresses instead the agitation of their minds.** "*Take heart, take courage*". Jesus says to Peter, "Come!" After hours of being afraid, Peter recognizes Jesus and moves, for a moment, beyond his anxiety. His desire to be close to Jesus overcomes his fear. He steps out of the boat. And it works. He moves nearer to Jesus, but then he gets distracted. He looks around; the wind is blowing. He looks down; the waves are churning. The storm is still going full force, and he realizes the impossible, "I'm walking on water! How can I be doing this?" The moment he allows his fear of the outer agitation to get inside and agitate his mind, he begins to sink.

This story also reminds me of the cartoon Road Runner when the coyote chases the roadrunner off the cliff. The roadrunner always makes it across the gap, but every time the coyote, halfway across, becomes aware that there is nothing beneath his feet, he stops cold, then plummets down.

But Jesus *immediately* stretches out his hand for Peter, and pulls him to safety. It's only after they get in the boat does the outer storm calm. I can't even begin to explain how Jesus walked on water or calmed the storm. What I can attempt to explain, however, is the spirituality of this event. Throughout my life, I have been drawn to Jesus, but, like Peter, I get caught up in the outer storm and chaos of life as well as my own personal demons and

fears and inner chaos. I take my eyes off Jesus, and begin to fall. The gospel suggests that focusing on Jesus amid the storms of life can transform your way of looking at the world and give a sense of peace. Our task is to recognize Christ's presence with us, calling us. He is always walking toward us. Keeping our eyes on Jesus is a spiritual practice.

And, it's hard work. I have been drawn to various spiritual practices and different kinds of prayer and meditation. It always feels like I am a perpetual beginner. I know how easily distracted I get, how fickle my mind is. How hard it is to enter the deep. The Sea of Galilee can be a metaphor for the mind. Just like the lake, my inner state of mind and being can be calm one moment and agitated and stormy the next. I have also learned, that the state of my inner being can determine how I manage and cope with the outer squalls and chaos of life. It is a continual process and journey. Psalm 46:10 is a good prayer to help calm the inner chaos. *"Be still, and know that I am God."* If you break it up, that verse can take you even deeper in your prayer life. *"Be still, and know that I am. Be still, and know. Be still. BE"*

Peter is learning to navigate the inner storm of his fears. He will come up repeatedly against the chaos in life, as we all do: in storms, in sleepy gardens of Gethsemane, at firesides in moments of denial, on the shores of this lake when he hears Jesus say, *"Peter do you really love me more than everything?"*

Walking on water is not necessarily the greatest achievement of this story. Turning your eyes upon Jesus, trusting Jesus to take your hand, Being Still and knowing that God is, is the real miracle. We will face storms of life. We will fall and we will fail; we will struggle. But turn your eyes upon Jesus. Jesus reaches out his hand to catch you and hold you up - in the love of family and friends, the sustenance of spiritual practice, the bonds of community and the moments of unexplainable peace in the midst of the struggle and the failure.