

Sermons at Christ Church

Building Relationships through Love.

Pentecost 11

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“*Lord Save Me.*” Peter cried. I have a lot of questions on my mind. One is, what is holding you back? What is it that makes you believe that you cannot live a thriving life of faith? What is it that is stopping us from keeping our focus on God? What is stifling our faith? What is holding us back?

There is a book *Unbroken* which is a biography of Louis Zamperini. He became a track star in high school and later became a national track star who represented the United States at the 1936 Berlin Olympics competing in the 5000 meters. He could run a mile in 4 minutes and 21 seconds. It was believed at that time that no human being could run a mile in 4 minutes.

After the Berlin Olympics one guy ran a mile in 4 minutes and 1 second. In response, one doctor said that it was physically and anatomically impossible for any human being to run a mile under 4 minutes. In fact, the doctor said that if anyone were to run that fast, the moment they crossed the finish line, their heart will explode leading to their death. See, people believed that.

It wasn't until May 6, 1954, that Roger Bannister crossed the finish line in 3 minutes and 57 seconds. Roger's record was broken 22 times in 46 days. Some people believed that no one couldn't run a mile under 4 minutes, others did not.

What holds us back is the belief that we cannot do it. We believe we cannot live a life where we entrust all that we are and have to the graceful mercy of God. There is a little book I read many years ago “*As A Man thinketh.*” And I will never forget the line “*As a man thinketh, so he is.*”

If we think we can or cannot do something, we may be right because we are of little faith, and the faith we possess doesn't challenge us to keep our eyes transfixed on the savior irrespective of what is going on around us. What is holding you back, making you believe that you cannot? The same thing that holds us back is the same thing that held Peter back to the point where he started to sink after taking a few steps on the water.

Peter is such an interesting character who always surprises me. He had this quaint faith that is both inspiring and tempered. He had just witnessed the feeding of over five thousand people with five loaves and two fish. He saw the leftovers from the feeding of the crowd. But still something held him back. He was the one who asked Jesus to command him to come to him. But as he got on the water, he choked. He couldn't believe that he of all people was walking on water.

He saw the waves being moved by the strong winds. He felt the water splash on him. He could taste the water on his tongue. But instead of keeping the eyes of his faith focused on Jesus, the one who commanded him to walk on the water, he began to doubt. He lost some of the faith that had inspired him to make his request to Jesus.

A few days ago, I spoke with a parishioner who had lost the mother. A couple of days after the chat, I got another message from the parishioner that the dad also passed away. I have been a priest for a long time, but this is my first experience of such a major disruption in the life of someone I know. How do you maintain your faith alive in the face of such a loss? How do we explain the reasonableness of faith?

A few days ago, another parishioner shared the sad news that he had lost his job. I remember when he lost the job before this last job. I remember it took him a while before he got the one he just lost. I remember my conversations with him, and my constant prodding to keep faith alive. I remember his feeling of gratitude when he got the job he just lost.

And he isn't the only one who has lost their jobs. Many have. And the question is, how do you still hold on to the faith which invites you to walk on water? Like Peter, how do you keep your focus on Jesus when you seem to be carried by uncontrollable water? How do you keep faith alive when your feet cannot touch the ground? Life begins to feel like there is no foundation or ground upon which we can walk. But there is.

In a sermon preached by one of our parishioners a few weeks ago, we got a glimpse into a life that has been challenged by kidney disease. This parishioner's biggest fear is about a degenerative illness which can disrupt his life and his love of traveling the world. The truth is he isn't the only one we know who is dealing with difficult health challenges. How do you keep believing when you know you are sinking?

I am blessed with the privilege of knowing our parishioners. It is a blessing. But with this blessing comes an insight into some of the difficult lives our parishioners live. There are parishioners within this congregation who are dealing with unbelievable financial challenges. Some have lost just about everything. Some make it a point to show up to worship on Sundays. Some are too weary and weighed down by the storms of life that they don't even want to come to church. They haven't lost faith in God, but they wonder if the church would be there to help them hold their lives together. And we are always presented with the choice between being right or being kind.

The question is, how do you keep your faith in God when you are being battered by the storms of life? How do you believe when you are sinking and do not know where the next help is coming from?

Every Christian's reality is one where we understand that storms will happen in our lives. To accept this reality of being a Christian is to understand that life therefore can get rough, messy and desolate. But it is also to understand that God doesn't promise us life without storms when we accept to walk on the water.

Some of these storms can be so devastating that they do not only presents us with every reason to walk away from God, to renounce our faith in God, but they take our focus off the God who first invited us to come walk on the water.

There is nothing scarier than the thought of knowing that you have absolutely no control over what is happening to you, and the worst is the knowledge that your fate may be someone else's hands. You know you are sinking but there seems to be no help.

The remarkable part of Peter's story is that he knew he was sinking but he also knew who his savior was. And all that he had to do was to bring to life that inner voice which speaks of our vulnerability and makes us aware that much as we cannot save ourselves, we know the God who can save us.

And like Peter, all we have to do is to shout that prayer "Lord, save me."

Remember that When Peter's faith wavered because of the raging storms and battling waves, Peter's faith didn't disappear at all. While he was even sinking, he still trusted Jesus as the one who could save him. Peter teaches us that we don't have to begin sinking before we cry our Lord, save me. That should be our daily prayer.

Let not the fear of the storms of life sink us or drive us into despair. Like Peter, cry out Lord save me. Take that step of entrusting yourself and your life into God's saving grace. Take that step.

Listen to a story of a student who asked his teacher this question "Master, how do I find the right path in life?" "Look at the rising sun." The master said. "I don't understand. What has the sun got to do with my path?" Asked the bewildered student. This is what the master said "The sun never asks which way to shine. Your path appears only after you begun walking not before"

The student smiled and took the first step and never looked back. Maybe the path you are waiting for is waiting for your first step. And that first step is the acknowledgement that it is only God who can save us from sinking.

We are indeed people of little faith because faith doesn't come easy to us. But, however, small or infinitesimal our faith may be, that faith has the potential to grow if it is fixed on the Savior.

What is holding you back? Remember, the storms will come, the wind will lift the waves of the sea, we will lose our balance, and we may begin to sink, but we still stand-not because we trust in ourselves but because we keep our eyes transfixed on the only savior we know.

I once read that "If the highest aim of a captain were to preserve his ship, he would keep it in port forever." We are God's ships. We must take the step and venture out into the open seas. There, amidst the raging storms and restless waves, we can count on the faithfulness of the God who saves us. **Amen.**