

Sermons at Christ Church

Lord, Make Me an Instrument of Your Peace.

Pentecost 11

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The winds that scare us into unbelief. Peter was an interesting man. He seems to always be the one to take the lead, to throw the jelly on the wall and see if it will stick. I learned about trial and error in math when I was in middle school. It wasn't fun but I think Peter is a trial and error kind of man.

Here he was with his friends in a boat on the sea. A friend who was in the water at the beach admitted to me quite recently that water is always good. But the water on which the boat carrying Peter and his friends sat wasn't being good. The wind was so strong that it powered the waves to beat heavily against the boat. It can be scary being on a boat with high winds.

But as they wondered about when the wind would cease, something very strange happened. They saw something walking towards them on the water. Afraid, they wondered what it was. It is a ghost some said. Matthew uses the Greek word *phantasma*-which connotes the appearance of the divine, to describe the ghost. But as the *phantasma* drew closer, they realized that it was the man who calms all of our fears and promises us not to be afraid when the winds of life scare us.

They noticed that it was the man they knew, the man with whom they broke bread. The man who is so different they had no problem referring to him as divine. Peter, in his enthusiasm, calls out to the teacher with these words "Lord if it you, command me to come to you on the water." The simple response was "Come." Come, don't be afraid, come. It is me, the Lord, and I want you to come.

But as he got out of the boat and started walking on water, the enthusiastic faith with which he got out of the boat and began walking on the water wavered. He couldn't believe himself walking on the water. Who am I to be walking on water? He may have asked himself.

But every step he took on the water towards Jesus was fraught with some fear-he thought that the very same person who invited him to come on the water would let him sink.

The winds that scare us into unbelief. Peter's walk on the water reminds me of the refrain in Bobby Brown's song-Every Little Step. It goes like this:

Every little step I take, you will be there
Every little step I make, we'll be together
Every little step I take, you will be there
Every little step I make, we'll be together

Peter was somehow unconvinced that Jesus will be there or they will be together. The wind scared him so much that he descended into unbelief. But the man who proves to us, over and over again that he is God, and has total command and control over the winds, seas, storms and water, pulled him up and out of the water as he began to sink. O ye of little faith. He says to Peter and his friends. The winds that scare us into unbelief.

I have never walked on water nor have I even attempted to walk on water. In fact, I don't even know how to swim and so I try as much as possible not to go on the water. But I have been in situations where life felt like walking on water and then suddenly, I began to sink. The winds that blew toward me scared me into unbelief. I could feel my little faith wobble into unbelief.

At each stage of weathering the heavy winds which were sinking me, I also knew that I could be saved. God can save me. I only have to scream out, *Lord save me*.

I am sure you have also been in situations where life felt like walking on water and then suddenly you began to sink-not necessarily because of an error on your part, but because the winds that came your way were so strong.

I had a nephew who was a medical doctor. He was educated here in the United States and then returned to Ghana to work as a medical doctor. His decision to work in Ghana was an anomaly because the traffic is from Ghana to the US. He would have made a whole lot money being in the US than in Ghana. But whilst in Ghana, he lost his dad. He couldn't deal with the loss and so he resorted to drinking. And then a few years later, he lost his mom. He had just returned home from a trip only to find his dead mother.

He was so upset he couldn't help himself destroying some of the priced items in their house. The drinking exacerbated. He sank ever so deeply into drinking. A once promising career in medicine, turned into a tragedy when he died by motor accident. He had probably been drinking all night.

Joseph thought he was walking on water. He was his father's favorite and he had made him a coat of many colors. He's been having dreams which point to a future where he would be lord over his brothers. But his brothers had a different plan for him. And when they had the opportunity, they connived to kill him.

But Reuben wouldn't let that happen-Reuben saved Joseph from his own brothers. Instead of killing him, they sold him into slavery, thinking that by getting rid of him, his dreams wouldn't materialize.

The Bible is silent about what held Joseph together when he innocently encountered his hostile brothers, when he was lowered into the pit and when he was eventually sold into slavery. What held Joseph together when he sojourned in Egypt?

I want to believe that Joseph didn't feel abandoned nor did he question his faith in the God of his fathers.

Years later, Joseph would remind his brothers that although they meant evil, God had a different plan for him.

Remember what the prophet Isaiah says: *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,*" declares the LORD. *As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."*

We cannot minimize God's plan for our lives nor can anyone disrupt God's plan for our lives-it is enough for people to put barriers in our way but they can't stop God's plan for us. It is God who saves us when we're sinking. But it is up to us to know that we are sinking and then scream for help.

Sometimes we sink so low that we find ourselves in situations like the empty well in which Joseph was lowered. His brothers sank so low. The evils of hatred, anger and jealousy take hold over us. They are like an addiction. We can tell how destructive these can be. We can tell that we are sinking. We can tell we no longer have control over our own lives. Unlike Peter, we are unable to shout, *Lord save me.*

The winds of life scare us into unbelief and so we wonder, we wonder, if we can be saved or if the Savior can yet save us or if the Savior is even interested in saving us. We look around us and all we see is raging water. We are so far from the boat in which we safely sat with our friends.

The Savior, who has always been our God and friend is not far off, but because of the strong winds whipping our faces, it feels like he is absent. But if we can see through the mist and like Peter, cry out, *Lord Save me*.

Indeed, our faith may be as strong or we may not have any faith at all. But it may not matter, for the God who walks on water doesn't distinguish between Greeks and Jews, nor does this God distinguish between those who have faith or have no faith at all.

Remember, this God, causes his rain to fall on believers and unbelievers alike. This God invites any and all who dare to believe, to walk on water, to face the winds of life, to confront the storms of life and never lose faith because the winds and storms of life have never proven to be enough to dampen our faith in the God who saves.

I once read a poem with these lines:

People die every day,
Some physically,
Some mentally,
And some emotionally

The question really is, can you call upon God in that moment of trial, when the winds of life scare you into unbelief-when you are dying physically, mentally or emotionally? I have learned that it is not enough to walk on water. It is not enough to respond to the invitation to walk on water-in fact God doesn't promise those who respond to the invitation to walk on water, that there wouldn't be any strong winds, rather, can we acknowledge God's power to save? Can we see beyond the winds that scare us into unbelief?

I believe in God's power to save. I also believe in your power to save. The fact that Reuben saved Joseph's life point to us that you don't have to be divine to save another person who is battling the winds of life. You can be that person who having been transformed by the power of the good news, dares to bring that same good news to those who the winds of life has scared into unbelief-to assure them of God's abiding presence. How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news. May your feet be always beautiful with the good news of God's saving grace. Amen.