

“Stand in the Storm By Me”

Pentecost 10; Matthew 14:22-33

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Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO

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Jesus Walks on the Water

²² Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³ And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴ but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land,^[a] for the wind was against them. ²⁵ And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. ²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out in fear. ²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”

²⁸ Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” ²⁹ He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he noticed the strong wind,^[b] he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” ³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” ³² When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³ And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

I. AH THE STORMS!

My, what a storm! What a sudden micro-burst crashed down upon them! Poor Jesus and the Guys. They’d *finally* gotten a little time off—a small bestowal of “weekend R&R,” and Jesus can’t wait to send them on ahead and grab a power Nap ‘n Pray by himself up the hillside.

But no sooner had everything finally fallen *into* place, when it all fell *out* of place again. Winds and waves, fears and fatigue—all threatened to overpower them—body and soul. Their spirits were quaking as much as their bodies were shaking!

As I write this, a storm has come up from *nowhere*. Again! I know, this happens several times a day of late. No big surprise.

But, doesn’t that just add to the craziness of these times? Doesn’t it make you wonder if you’ll *ever* get your bearings, or just live in “weather whiplash” all the time? Tossed about in this never-ending Covid Confusion?

Wavering between cautious and cavalier—or at least careful and *care-full*, and trying not to forget your mask whenever you go somewhere? Or, trying *not* to play “mask police” every time you see someone not wearing one for whatever reason!

Or worse—a “nose-slipdown nazi?!” I’ve encountered a few of those lately, and am trying *not* to be one, but it’s probably needed!

II. ON THE SEA WITH JESUS

So, here we are, right along with the disciples, in the middle of the storm. *Hopefully* in the middle of the Covid storm, and *not* still stuck on the shore—back at the beginning. Still stuck in Phase 1!

In the middle of the storm, when we are not *sure* if it is Jesus coming toward us or not. When we *want* to leave the boat and go to him, but then we notice the strong wind, and we start to sink in the mire of so much upheaval, it is *then* we must not forget the **end of the story!**

For, what happened then? In that moment, in the middle of the storm, as they were starting to sink? There was a calming moment. A grand pause. A deep breath. Yes, the external elements *did* calm down. The wind *did* cease to blow so very hard. *But*, that's not all that happened. There's a "Rest Of the Story" to this end of the story.

There was a **change** on the *inside* of them too. "Open the eyes of my heart, Lord!"

They saw Jesus with a whole new set of eyes. The eyes of the heart! They saw him for who he truly was (not a ghost!), *and* they saw God working in and *through* him. This one who was their friend and teacher—yet a little ungraspable—beyond their complete understanding.

They saw Jesus calling them to *be* and *do* more than they ever had before--**even when** the storm was

raging around and things seemed overwhelmingly frightening, suspicious and scary!

III. STEPPING OUT ON THE SEA

Now, here is the *pivotal* moment and question for us, as we consider this scripture story for us, today: Did Jesus *only* call out to Peter to step out of the boat and walk toward him?

Or, was that invitation to trust, to take courage, to go beyond where you've gone before, given to ALL the disciples? Peter *was* the first one to speak up—spout out a challenge to the Lord—"IF this is really you—then *prove* it!"

Peter *was* known for being impetuous—at least characterized that way by the Gospel writers! But, maybe he's the only one who made it into the *written* story, but not the only one who was invited to plunge in. To step out in faith. To trust the calling of the Lord.

We will never know! But, we can imagine....

Better yet, we can imagine ourselves right in the midst of that story. Would *we* have spoken up? Jumped out of the boat, after tossing out a challenge—"if the Divine *really* is trustworthy, then let's *see* some *proof!*" Would we put everything on the line, not just a toe in the water?

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got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ But *when he noticed the strong wind*,^[b] he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!”

There’s something else about Peter that I just caught this week for the first time. Maybe you saw it years ago!

Peter hops out and starts walking on the water toward Jesus, but then what happens? He “*notices the strong wind!*”

Hello?! Six verses earlier, we already heard that the wind was blowing like crazy. “²⁴ but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land,^[a] for the wind was against them.”

Maybe Peter is not just impetuous, but a little clueless to boot!

But, maybe that’s the whole point of this story—for us, in the middle of this crazy COVID storm:
It was already blowing!

It didn’t *just* get rough after Peter stepped out in faith! It was already rough, and *still* he answered the call. And then, the 2nd lesson for us from Peter comes as he starts to sink. What does he do?

“He cried out, “Lord, save me!”” ³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him.

Peter looks up. Stands up. Cries out to the one who saves.

When we notice the wind and waves and are afraid. We start to sink, what must we do? Look to the horizon! Keep our eyes up, looking to Jesus. Not looking down; at our feet, at the minutia in front of us.

IV. GOOD TROUBLE, a la John Lewis

A modern day Peter—a man not afraid to step out of the boat and into the storm, has been on our minds and hearts and in the news of late.

John Lewis. A true American hero and statesman died last month after 80 years of life and service to his country and humanity. He was not just a leader for the black community or the Civil Rights movement or for Congress, but a leader and prophet and example of courageous stepping out and standing up for us all.

Yes, that was 80 years of service and leadership, even though he was 80 years old when he died! John started early. He was preaching by age 11, and that even included chickens! This is funny, but profound.

He says of his early preaching days in the barnyard: "I say now, when I look back on it, some of these chickens would bow their heads. Some of these chickens would shake their heads. They never quite said 'Amen,' but they tended to listen to me much better than some of my colleagues listen to me today

in the Congress, and some of those chickens were a little more productive. At least they produced eggs."

Lewis knew what it was to live in the storms. To step out of the boat, walk on choppy seas while standing up and alongside others—whether the boats and the storms were the same or different.

Lewis called that stepping out of the boat and onto the choppy seas, "Stirring up GOOD TROUBLE." He might have been just a *little* like Peter—impetuous, always up for a challenge, ready to plunge in and follow—whatever it takes.

And, He kept his eye on the horizon, on the Holy One calling him forward, knowing he was heading in the right direction and on the right side of history. He kept his eye on the prize—on the end of the story—when the peace *would* come—someday! When the winds would calm down, and the waves would abate—if even a little.

He kept walking through the storms, even when diagnosed with advanced pancreatic cancer. He pledged to fight that rough storm the same way he met the other great challenges of his life: by refusing to back down.

"I have been in some kind of fight—for freedom, equality, basic human rights—for nearly my entire life. I have never faced a fight quite like the one I have now, but I have decided to do what I know to do and do what I have always done: I am going to fight it and keep

fighting for the Beloved Community. We still have many bridges to cross."

Two days before he died, John seemed to sense that the end of his earthly life was near. He penned these words to his fellow-disciples—all of us.

"Though I may not be here with you, I urge you to answer the highest calling of your heart and **stand up** for what you truly believe.... So I say to you, walk *with the wind*, brothers and sisters, and let the spirit of **peace** and the power of everlasting love be your guide."

V. GOOD TROUBLE by US

Fighting for the Beloved Community. Is that not what we are *all* called to? Fighting by stirring up "good trouble."

What does Good Trouble look like for us? For Peter it looked like jumping in with both feet—even when those feet started to sink and his courage wavered!

Likewise, for John Lewis, it meant not hanging back in the boat, letting fear of the storm take over. It meant *not* accepting being told to "Just be patient. Don't stir things up. Peace and justice, equality and human rights *will* come, in their good time."

John Lewis didn't stand for that. If he did, we all might still be waiting! Good trouble for us, like John and Peter, might mean "**Good Impatience!**"

Good Trouble, when stirred up by Jesus' disciples, instead asks the question:

“If not us, then who? If not now, then when?”

We stir up Good Trouble best by stepping out of the boat. Standing up and alongside one another in the storm. We answer Jesus' call—in the midst of the storms of life—by *not* being afraid. Or, better yet, stepping out in spite of being afraid.

To take a stand when our brother and sister—our fellow disciples—are in trouble. To refuse to remain silent, or sleeping in the boat, pretending the trouble is not there or is not ours. That it's “someone else's storm.”

We cry out to the Lord: “Is that really you, Lord?” And Jesus calls back to us: “Is it really you, Peter? “Is it really you, John, Jane, Betty, Bob, Ron, Kathy, Jacy, Matthew, Thomas?!”

Is it *you* who will step out of the boat, even while the winds are still raging, the waves are still tossing—and walk right through that storm toward the One who is calling?

Stand by me, Lord, as I stand by my brothers and sisters; neighbors and strangers. Together in the storm. Causing Good Trouble. Faithful to the end. Amen.

Gospel song from earlier:
Stand by Me

When the storms of life are raging,
Lord, stand by me.
When the current pulls me under,
Lord, stand by me.
When the rising waters toss me
Like a ship upon the sea,
You who rule the wind and water,
Lord, stand by me.
Stand by me,
Stand by me.
Lift me up from the restless sea.
When I am lost,
When love can't be found,
When no one cares,
Lord, stand by me.