

Lectionary A August 10, 2014, 9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Grace and Peace Lutheran Church, Evansville, IN  
Roberta Meyer

1 Kings 19:9-18  
Psalm 85:8-13  
Romans 10:5-15  
Matthew 14:22-33

### Sinking Feet

Our Gospel story for today picks up where the story last week leaves off. Jesus had just fed 5000 men and probably twice that many women and children with two fish and five buns. After that miraculous meal, we join Jesus today as he “immediately” made the disciples get back in the boat and sail to the other side of the lake while he sent the well fed crowd on their way. This was not a suggestion, he compelled or forced the disciples to get on that boat and leave him alone with the crowd. Why?

If we go back to the beginning of last week’s story Matthew 14:13, we see that before the whole thing with feeding all those people, Jesus went to a deserted place to be by himself. He had just heard about the brutal death of his cousin, John the Baptist. He needed to be by himself. So he sent the disciples away on the boat and sent the crowd home with their illnesses healed and the tummies full.

Now, Jesus is in that deserted place alone. He now takes care of himself. The text says, “...*he went up the mountain by himself to pray.*”<sup>1</sup>

By evening, the boat was far from the shore. It was being tossed around by some high winds. Jesus kept praying. He took all the time he needed and then early in the morning he set out to teach the disciples who he is. He walked out on top of the tumultuous water to meet the boat.

I read in a commentary that in this action of walking on the water Jesus was revealing his identity to the disciples. According to Job 9:8, God “*alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the Sea.*”<sup>2</sup> In Psalm 89:9, the psalmist exalts the Lord, “*You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, you still them.*”<sup>3</sup> In this stormy sea, on top of the battering waves, Jesus does what only God can do. This commentary calls this story a “theophany”. According to my dictionary “*a theophany is a manifestation of God in the Bible that is tangible to the human senses.*”<sup>4</sup> In other words, a theophany is when God shows up in ways we can understand.

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<sup>1</sup> NRSV Bible

<sup>2</sup> same

<sup>3</sup> same

<sup>4</sup> Dictionary reference.com

The disciples' human senses were triggered all right. Seeing Jesus walk on top of that tossing sea scared their sandals off! They thought they were seeing a ghost. You see they hadn't got the "theophany" message yet. So Jesus had some more teaching to do. *"..immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."*

A more literal translation of this verse from the Greek is, *"Take heart, I AM, do not be afraid."*<sup>5</sup> "I AM." Remember when Moses asked what God's name was at the burning bush? God said, "I AM WHO I AM." "Tell them [the Egyptians] I AM sent you." The disciples and Jewish people who read this text from Matthew would recognize that Jesus was telling them exactly what is the source of his power. He is God.

Then there is Peter. "So, Lord, if that is really you, then I want to walk on top of that water, too. Tell me to come out there with you on the water."

Sweet Peter, I wonder why he asked this? Was he curious? Did he want to see what it felt like to defy gravity? Was he testing Jesus? I don't know. But I think Peter was being his impulsive self. He just wanted to do what Jesus was doing. At the point that he jumped out of the boat, his faith was pure. It didn't have time to get, can I say 'dampened' by the laws of nature. He must have really believed that was Jesus out there on top of the water, or he wouldn't have gotten out of the boat in the first place.

Being in the midst of the storm with Jesus is scary. Being on top of the unfriendly waves, being strong and doing what Jesus does, is more than our human senses can take. Peter's logic kicked into gear and the strong wind frightened him. His feet were sinking! *"Lord, save me!" Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"*

Have you ever been in the water when there were lots of waves? Even on a float, those waves can splash over you. You can get drenched. They can take your breath away. If they are strong enough you may feel like you are sinking.

Is this why Jesus said, *"You of little faith, why did you doubt?"* Or was it because Peter yelled, *"Lord, save me!"* Was Peter's "little faith" that his faith wasn't enough to keep him afloat?

Or did the doubt happen when he felt he had to yell to Jesus to save him. Did he doubt for this moment that this Lord Jesus, who he knew was God, not let him drown in the storm? He should have known Jesus would save him. Did he really have to ask?

That's when Jesus quickly reached out his hand and pulled him to safety. What does this say to us? Following Jesus is frightening. Jesus didn't make walking on water easy for Peter. He

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<sup>5</sup> Carla Works, Working Preacher.com

didn't calm the waves when Peter wanted to get out of the boat. No, in order to see fully who Jesus is, Peter needed to experience the storm.

It's easy to walk on water with Jesus when things are calm. When everything in life is going smoothly, jumping out of the boat is no big deal. I've had some times in my life when my sinking feet made me doubt if Jesus was going to save me. I bet we all have—those times when the waves come up over our faces and we can't breathe. Some of those times in my life were so scary that they are still very painful to talk about. There was the death of my mother, an abusive relationship, a divorce, a bankruptcy... That just tips the iceberg. These were times when I knew God is God. I knew Jesus was my Lord, but in those moments when the terrifying waves in my life were slapping me in the face, I have to admit my sinking feet caused doubt. "Are you there, Lord? Don't forget about me. Don't let me drown. Lord, save me!"

And what happened? Jesus reached out his hand and pulled me up. I felt Jesus' hand in the hug from a friend, in a smile, a word of support. Jesus' hand reached out for me through the people around me. One time this happened right after the divorce. I found myself, a single parent, with two children. Christmas was coming and I saw no way to make Christmas happen for my children. I felt Jesus' hand when I opened a Christmas card from a friend. A check fell out of the card with a note saying to use it to have a Merry Christmas with my children. At that second, I realized that God is in control. I reacted the same way the disciples did on that boat. "*When [Jesus and Peter] got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."*"<sup>6</sup>

Let's offer in prayer today, those times when life's storms cause us to sink, maybe it fear of war, financial burdens, health concerns, troubled family member... Write them on your prayer card and bring them to the altar when you come to the Lord's table. Through Jesus' body and blood shed for us on the cross, we can know Jesus' hand is reaching out to save us

Jesus knows we will start sinking at times. This Gospel tells us Jesus is God and Jesus will reach out and save us. Jesus understands our doubting sinking feet.

How do we know this? Let's go back to the beginning of this story. Remember, Jesus was in need. Jesus needed time alone. He was in a sinking feet moment, himself. He went up the mountain to pray. He sought God's hand to reach out for him.

And there is something else this story from Matthew tells us. We learn who Jesus really is midst of those chaotic storms in our lives. Think about it. If Jesus had not forced the disciples to get out in that boat on the stormy water, they would have missed the opportunity to see God revealed in their midst. That's when they got the theophany part. That is when they proclaimed, "*Truly you are the Son of God.*" Amen.

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<sup>6</sup> NRSV Bible