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*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. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking towards them on the lake. But when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified, saying, ‘It is a ghost!’ And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, ‘Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.’*

*Peter answered him, ‘Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.’ He said, ‘Come.’ So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came towards Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, ‘You of little faith, why did you doubt?’ When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God.’*

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This year is the twentieth anniversary of the great comedy starring Will Ferrell, “Anchorman: the Legend of Ron Burgundy.” The tongue-in-cheek film features the self-obsessed, egotistical, sexist, obnoxious titular character, Ron Burgundy, in his quest to sabotage the introduction of a female co-host in his beloved male-dominated profession. However, the he falls in love with his arch-enemy and ends up, after a hilariously bizarre set of circumstances, in a zoo with his beloved trapped in the bear exhibit. This is the perfect chance for his male fragility to be soothed by rescuing his damsel in distress. He bravely hops the fence into the bears’ den and then says the following:

*“*I *immediately* regret this decision!”

Such, I imagine, was probably what was going through Peter’s mind when he exited the boat in that raging storm. No one compelled him to do it. Not his fellow disciples. Not even Jesus. It was *Peter’s* idea. Was it that he thought his chances out on the water were better than staying in the boat? Was it that he felt like showing off? Having just witnessed the feeding of the five thousand, did Peter simply know that the same Jesus who multiplied that meager meal to a feast for the multitudes could give him the power to traverse the watery chasm? Who knows! We don’t know Peter’s motivations but the beauty of that passage is that it allows us to insert our own.

**Sometimes we’re motivated to step out of the boat because it feels like we have nothing else to lose.** The marriage has fallen apart. The job has been lost. The diagnosis is grim. The pain is just too much and we just need something to *give*.

**Sometimes we’re motivated to step out of the boat because we’ve done a lot of work on ourselves and we trust that it’s time.** That dream that has captivated us for so long begins to call. The research has been done. The hours of therapy have done their thing. Money has been saved. Mistakes have been made, and learned from. And now…it’s time.

**Sometimes we’re motivated to step out of the boat because change forces our hand.** The church goes through a period of conflict. A pandemic happens! The family goes through a divorce. The business has to adapt to a changing landscape or collapse. The team loses their star player to an injury and has to rethink their strategy.

**Sometimes we’re motivated to step out of the boat because we have something to prove.** To others or to ourselves; it doesn’t really matter. We know that others are watching - waiting in the wind, so to speak - and all eyes are on us. It’s time to gird our loins. It’s time to leave it all on the field and come home with the W.

No matter the motivation, at some point in your life, I’m willing to bet you know what it’s like to step out of the boat. It’s a scary moment, leaving behind the relative security of a vessel that has delivered you safe thus far. And sometimes, even when things seem to be going relatively well, panic can set in when the distractions tempt our focus. At our midweek service earlier last week, Corliss McGinty shared with us that she once had the opportunity to walk on hot coals when she was visiting another country. She told us that she was instructed by those experienced in such practice to focus on her destination and *not* the searing hot embers beneath her feet. Corliss said she did just fine; just fine, that is, until she turned her head to the side to see her family watching and then she learned why her guide instructed her to keep her “eyes on the prize.” Whether beneath your feet are burning hot coals or a dark watery abyss, there’s wisdom to be found in the spiritual discipline of focus, especially in a world where our attention spans seem to shorten by the day.

When we lose our heart, when our head turns, when the waves, water, and wind weather our resolve, it’s natural to give in to panic.

As I was meditating on this passage while in the pool at the gym this week, I was reminded of my training as a lifeguard back in college and seminary. Part of the training is, obviously, learning to rescue someone in distress. We would take turns with our fellow trainees, with one of us pretending to drown and the other saving us. For those of us who were pretending to drown, we were instructed by our teachers to do everything in our power to pull our rescuers under the water by clinging to them with every fiber of our being. This is, of course, because that’s the natural reaction when someone is drowning. It takes no small measure of courage to approach someone flailing about wildly in the water to save them. Even though the best course of action for them is to stay still and allow the lifeguard to bring them to safety, the brain doesn’t exactly think rationally in a moment like that.

Rescuing is messy business. Dangerous, even. God rescuing us - either from a watery grave such as that Peter feared or, as Nadia Bolz Weber puts it, metaphorical graves that we dig for ourselves - is not done without risk. Jesus *chose* to cross those raging waters to help his friends. He *chose* to risk bodily harm in order to rescue us. Such is the unfathomable love of God; a love that took on fragile human flesh to be with us, through calm waters *and* stormy gales.

In a moment, we will sing “On Christ, the Solid Rock, I Stand,” that beloved hymn of assurance in God’s “support in the whelming flood.” The third verse sings as such:

*When darkness seems to hide his face, I rest on his unchanging grace;*

*in every high and stormy gale, my anchor holds within the veil.*

*On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;*

*all other ground is sinking sand; all other ground is sinking sand.*

I love the pairing of this text with this specific tune because the tune is so very singable. The rhythm isn’t complex. Neither is the melody or intervals. Its vocal range is relatively narrow. And, most of all, the chord progression is very predictable and repetitive. If you were, for example, to sing this text to another tune, one with wide interval jumps, a two-octave range, and complex meter, it just wouldn’t convey the “solid rock” that we need in the stormy gale. Instead, the simplicity of the tune it is sung to - aptly named SOLID ROCK - musically embodies that “anchor” of which it sings.

And in this week of our Lenten journey, I invite you to give gratitude for the anchors God is giving you to weather the storms of this messy thing we call life. Sing this hymn as you go about your week and ask yourself the following question before you lay your head down to sleep: “what *rescued* me today?” “What anchor has God placed in my life?” Or even, “what anchors could God be giving me that I might not even be aware of?”

For friends, on Christ the solid rock, we stand. All other ground is sinking sand; all other ground is sinking sand.

[*congregation sings “On Christ, the Solid Rock, I Stand”*]

In the name of the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, may all of us God’s children say: Amen.