



# SAINT LUKE'S

## "STORMY SEAS"

THE 10TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST  
YEAR A

1 KINGS 19:9-18  
PSALM 85: 8-13  
ROMANS 10:5-15  
MATTHEW 14:22-33

A SERMON BY THE REV. CAROLINE STACEY

AUGUST 13, 2017

It is when Peter is sinking that I connect heart, mind and soul with this gospel story. Most of us know what it is like to be in deep water, one way or another: in over our heads; losing heart or faith or health or sense of direction; facing disaster. Mark's gospel recounts a similar story of Jesus calming the storm.<sup>1</sup> But only Matthew tells us about Peter stepping out of the boat and walking on water too... For about 5 seconds.

What on earth prompts Peter to say to Jesus: *Lord, if it is you, command me come to you on the water?* It is definitely a Peter-ish thing to say. It sounds like Peter wants to know if he can walk on water too, with Jesus' help. Jesus simply says: *Come*. Peter ventures forth. Then something happens. Interpretations vary. We are told that Peter noticed the strong wind. His eyes are off Jesus and on the high seas. His fears overwhelm him and he starts to sink. He calls out to Jesus and Jesus immediately reaches out his hand.

When Jesus and Peter get back to the boat there is a debrief. Jesus' words to Peter sound condemning: *You of little faith, why did you doubt?* As though if Peter had enough faith and had not spooked himself with the waves, he could have made the whole walk. It would have been a very different story – of success and victory. And maybe Peter could have made it. But he didn't. And that is what makes this a story about us. We know that our faith gets deluged in doubts and fears and high seas often, if we are honest. That is our human condition and Jesus knows it. This is why we need Jesus, to reach out when we are drowning. And Jesus does. Jesus does not scorn Peter's efforts or give

<sup>1</sup> Mark 6:45-52

him a failing grade, he simply says: Yes, this really is about faith. Keep following, keep stepping out, keep risking. I will always be beside you no matter how rough the seas are.

Here is the other part of this powerful little story. The boat is an analogue for the church. We have enough faith to be in the boat with the disciples. We want to follow Jesus – that is why we are here. We are less inclined to step out of the boat. Peter is the only disciple who wants to boldly go where no other disciple has gone before. Not one of the other disciples raises their hand and says: Me too. It is tempting to stay in the boat. It is so much safer. But for all his imperfections, Peter has the faithful impulse. Jesus affirms it. Jesus doesn't say: "Stay in the boat, Peter!". *Come*, Jesus says. And after almost drowning, Peter doesn't say: "Well, that was awful. No more discipleship for me." The willingness to go first and the courage to *keep on* taking faith-full risks is what Jesus sees in Peter when he names Peter as the Rock on which the church will be built.

Boats are built for a purpose. *A ship in port is safe, but that's not what ships are built for.* (John A Shedd, 1928). Our mission isn't only to be rescued by Jesus. It is to be rescuers. Pope Francis has said often that the church must step outside herself, to go to the margins of existence, to the poor, to wherever the need is, because Christ goes where people are drowning. Christ is counting on us to go there with him now. We are a life boat crew. We may be that saving hand.

And if we are tempted to think that our modest gifts and efforts may

not make much difference, I would like to share some news. This current year, 75% of your pledges are designated for outreach. Here's one way they are being used. In July, Summer GO on our block was a 5-week tutoring program for 60 at-risk children aged 6-8 years old. These are children who we fed breakfast as well as lunch because they may not get either at home. Some kids asked for more lunch to take with them because there might not be supper that night either. Their home may be a shelter. During our Summer GO program, many of these children increased their reading skills by 2 levels in 5 weeks. That is what a little time and individual attention can do. These 60 children are now more likely to stay in school, graduate and get jobs. Which means that as adults they and their families are less likely to live in poverty. This summer we served 60 children but next year it will be 90. This is what Ferguson MO Methodist pastor Willis Johnson calls "holding up our corner". It is one of our life boat missions at St. Luke's. It is a gift to be able to give. In giving we receive. As Flannery O'Connor beautifully puts it: the life you save may be your own. We learned on this summer mission that next year we need to do more to address food insecurity. This year we scrambled simply to hand out healthy snack bags for the kids to take home. Next year, we want to send each child home with a backpack of food for the weekends.

The headwinds facing our boat are powerful today. There is a storm raging for the soul of this nation. The storm is spiritual at its core. More compassionate or more callous - which direction will prevail? The thing about hatred and evil, about the racism that is playing out in

Charlottesville but infects this whole nation, is that it is not one-and-done. We have to keep at it. Charlottesville won't be the last act of domestic terrorism around white supremacy. Evil is persistent. Violence and pure selfishness is persistent. But love is more so. Resurrection people persist. Nevertheless, we persist. We need both the holy courage of Peter, and the perseverance and tenacity to keep stepping out. You may have heard the saying: "Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying: *I will try again tomorrow*". No-one cares more about rescuing people from going under than Jesus. And this is why I know that Jesus will bless this boatload of timid disciples with the faithful courage we need to head out onto these stormy seas day after day. We are asked in our baptismal covenant: *Will you persevere in resisting evil?* We will. Today. And for as many tomorrows as God gives us.

AMEN





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