

New Hope Lutheran Church

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August 9, 2020

10th Sunday after Pentecost

**ALL EVENTS FOR THE COMING
WEEK HAVE BEEN CANCELLED**

Please remember to send in your offering.

*We now have a **donate button** on our web site nhlc.ca*

*Previous Sunday sermons and bible studies can be found
on the website.*

*The office is closed, but phone messages, email and mail
are being checked regularly.*

IN OUR PRAYERS

Fred, Pentti, Esme, Martha, Derek, Maria and Kai.

Prayer of the Day

O God our defender, storms rage around and within us and
cause us to be afraid. Rescue your people from despair,
deliver your sons and daughters from fear, and preserve us in
the faith of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

First Reading 1 Kings 19:9 – 18

9 There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the LORD came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?"
10 He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."
11 The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake.
12 After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.
13 When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"
14 He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."
15 The LORD said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram.
16 Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet.
17 Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu.
18 Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him."

Psalms 85:8 – 13

8 I will listen to what God the LORD says; he promises peace to his people, his faithful servants— but let them not turn to folly.
9 Surely his salvation is near those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land.
10 Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other.
11 Faithfulness springs forth from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven.
12 The LORD will indeed give what is good, and our land will yield its harvest.
13 Righteousness goes before him and prepares the way for his steps.

Second Reading Romans 10:5 – 15

5 Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: "The person who does these things will live by them."
6 But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down)
7 "or 'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).
8 But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim:
9 If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.
10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.
11 As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame."
12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him,
13 for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."
14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?
15 And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

Gospel Matthew 14:22 – 33

22 Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd.
23 After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone,
24 and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.
25 Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake.
26 When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.
27 But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."
28 "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."
29 "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.
30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"
31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"
32 And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down.
33 Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

August 9, 2020 – 10th Sunday after Pentecost
From the Summer Sermon Series 2020
by Bishop Greg Mohr

Stay in the Boat, Peter!

Does it take more faith to stay in the boat or to walk on water? Maybe that's an unfair question, but I think it is something we need to ponder today. At first glance, it would appear to be an incredible accomplishment of faith to step out of a boat with the expectation that you could walk atop the water. But as some commentators have pointed out, from the very beginning the writer of the gospel of Matthew offers subtle clues that perhaps Peter was motivated by something other than tremendous faith. Maybe getting out of the boat was the action of "little faith."

It's been a long day for Jesus. Feeding 20,000 people will do that to you! Jesus sends the disciples out; it's a common phrase in the gospels; Jesus sending, directing. Rather than get into the boat with the disciples, Jesus goes up the mountain to pray, by himself. I see in that brief mention in the gospel a reminder of how important our self-care is, how important our prayer life with God is: to spend time in prayer, away from the rigours of the day; to sit in the presence of God, to be refreshed and renewed.

This is a timely reminder at this time of year; rest and renewal is built into the very framework of creation. Some would argue that the crown of creation is humans. But others say "no." The crown of creation is sabbath rest — not human beings. God, with humanity and the whole of creation, enters into God's rest on the seventh day. ... "And Jesus goes off by himself to pray."

"When evening came ..." The disciples are in the boat and a storm bears down upon them. They are far from land. They have been rowing all night. They are not getting anywhere. The wind is against them. They are exhausted. Many of these disciples are trained fisherfolk. They know how to handle a boat. But not this boat. Not this time.

Early in the morning, in that ethereal, mystical time, a time before sunrise, when they are tired, not really awake but not asleep either, when they are in between the shadows of night and the rays of hope of the morning. And it is there, at

this liminal moment in time, that Jesus comes, walking to them on the water.

The disciples see Jesus, although they do not know it is Jesus. And they are terrified. They cry out in fear. And then the words — the holy, gracious words: "Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid." What those words do to us! In the midst of fear, a voice that says "I am with you." In the midst of the struggles of life and challenges we face, we hear a voice that says, "I am. I am with you always to the end of the age."

Peter calls out, "If it is you." And Jesus says "Come." That's it. One word. That is all that Peter needs. One word. Not like the three words of denial that he speaks a short time later in the gospel. No. Just one word. And Peter steps out of the boat and he walks toward Jesus

Now . . . we don't know how Jesus said the word "Come." Does Jesus say it in a calm, reassuring voice, "You can do it. It's okay." Or is it said with a rolling of eyes and note of exasperation in his voice? "Just once, Peter, couldn't you be less impetuous and just stay in the boat?" We're not sure how Jesus said it.

Peter looks down. And Peter feels the storm buffeting him. And he starts to sink. But Jesus reaches out, reaches out just like he is always reaching out: a hand, a gesture, a word, grace, care, love.

This is an amazing story; it is otherworldly. And we, scientifically sophisticated that we are, ponder and wonder and have no answer for what this means from a physics point of view. And that is okay. Because this is not a physics lesson. The intent of the story is draw us in and to ask "Who is this?" We come to this story with the question "What does this mean for us?" And further, what did this story mean for the community in which the writer of Matthew lived — a community buffeted by the waves of persecution and hardship?

Matthew's community wonders where Jesus is. Why does it seem like he has forgotten about them when their situation is so desperate? Matthew's listeners could easily have identified with the disciples in the boat. Weary and afraid of death, like sailors who have fought a storm all night, Matthew's community may have begun to lose faith, may have started to become weary, and they want a sign, some reassurance that Jesus not only knows what is happening to them but that Jesus cares and will do something about it.

This is usually how we explore this story. We derive great comfort from it. Jesus comes to us in the storms of our lives, in our crises, in the death of a loved one, our struggles, times of feeling lost, at sea, lonely, afraid. He brings peace and calm. And it is good and true and we cling to that promise, that God is with us, in all things. We believe that; we proclaim that.

At the beginning of the gospel of Matthew we are told that another name for the baby Jesus is to be "Emmanuel." And we are even told very clearly what the word means: "God with us." At the very end of the gospel of Matthew we hear Jesus' promise, "Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." These passages act like bookends to the gospel of Matthew. At the beginning and at the end, we have before us this theme of "God with us."

But I wonder if there is another way to hear this story; perhaps there is another way God speaks to us in the chaos of our times in this COVID Era. What if we hear it this way:

When Jesus says to Peter, "You of little faith," maybe Jesus was asking: "Why, Peter, of all the people in the boat, were you the only one who doubted that it was me coming to aid you in the storm?" "Why didn't you have enough faith to stay seated in the boat with the others and let me come to you. Just wait in the boat and have some faith that I will be with you."

Maybe this is not a miracle story. Maybe this is Peter abandoning those in need. Maybe "O you of little faith" is not that Peter sank. Maybe those words were spoken because Peter wanted to get out of the boat. Maybe Jesus said, "O you of little faith," because Peter abandoned his friends; abandoned those in need. He was a professional fisherfolk, after all. He was skilled on navigating the lake. He would have experienced storms before. He was needed by the community, by those in the boat. And he left them behind. Note that Jesus only rebukes Peter for his lack of faith. To the others, seated in the boat, Jesus just comes, and gets in the boat with them. And there is a great calm as the storm ceases.

While Peter is often referred to in biblical commentaries as being a prototypical disciple, this is not what we want to have in a prototypical disciple. He left them for his own personal reasons. Was it his own ego? His impulsiveness? Whatever it

was, he abandoned his friends. He is forgetting those who are left behind.

And maybe this is what we need to ponder in these storms going on around us, with COVID-19, climate emergency, anti-racism rallies, Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls, affordable housing crisis, opioid crisis, stretched thin mental health services and support, and millions needing to access Food Banks, 1/3 of whom are children.

Are we forgetting who is left behind? Is that what we've done as a society? Do we value individual freedom and choice so much that we fail to discern who is in the boat with us? Have we stepped out of the boat?

Perhaps I am taking liberty with the text. But I think this text is speaking to us in this way, in this context, today. It is a poignant reminder of what it means to be disciples of Christ: Who have we left behind? Who have we left in the boat when we have gone off ahead?

Amen.

Prayers

Confident of your care and helped by the Holy Spirit, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

For your whole church throughout the world. Give courage in the midst of storms, so that we see and hear Jesus calling: "Take heart, it is I: do not be afraid." May we follow Christ wherever he leads.

For the well-being of your creation. Protect waterways, forests, lands, and wildlife from exploitation and abuse. Help the human family endeavor to sustain and be sustained by the resources of your hand.

For the nations and their leaders. In you, steadfast love and faithfulness meet, and righteousness and peace kiss. May nations in conflict know the peace that is the fruit of justice, and the justice that is the path to peace.

For those in need. Everyone who calls upon your name will be saved. Accompany all who are lonely, hear the voices of those who cry out in anguish, and support those who are frustrated in their search for an affordable place to live. We pray for those suffering this day.

For your congregation. You have gathered us here today as your people and we thank you for this gift. We pray for those who are new to this community, for students and teachers

preparing for a new school year, and for those struggling with unexpected hardship. Supply us generously with your grace for our life together.

We give you thanks, O God, for the saints of the whole church from all times and places, and for the saints in our lives and in our community whom you have gathered to yourself.

In the certain hope that nothing can separate us from your love, we offer these prayers to you, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**