



Westminster Presbyterian Church

Eugene, Oregon
"At Home" Worship

October 11, 2020

Gathering Around God's Word

If you are worshipping with another family member or with children, you are invited to have different voices share and read the various parts of the service. You can also call/FaceTime someone to worship together.

(If you have a prayer request you would like added to the At-Home Worship service, please email Brooke office@wpceugene.org)

CALL TO WORSHIP

Come, let us sing to the Lord:

LET US MAKE A JOYFUL NOISE TO THE ROCK OF OUR SALVATION.

Let us come before the Lord with singing.

AND ENTER GOD'S COURTS WITH PRAISE.

OPENING HYMN

Eternal Father, Strong to Save

#8

CALL TO CONFESSION

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Lord God, Your eyes are open day and night watching over Your children; Your ears are always ready to hear their prayer. We have come to worship You. We come as sinners, in need of Your forgiveness. We come tired from our work, in need of refreshment and renewal. We come with worries, in need of Your guidance. But first, please lift us out of our preoccupation with our own needs. Allow us to see You with the eyes of faith, and to hear with understanding what You say to us. Make us thankful for all the good we have received from You. Awaken in us a longing to do Your will. And make us aware of the great company, past, present and to come, with whom we join to worship You.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

If anyone is in Christ, he or she is a new creation!

THE PAST IS FINISHED, AND EVERYTHING HAS BECOME NEW!

In the name of Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

THANKS BE TO GOD. AMEN.

The Word

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Old Testament Reading: Psalm 148

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights! Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his host! Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars! Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens! Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created. He established them forever and ever; he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed. Praise the Lord from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command! Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars! Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds! Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth! Young men and women alike, old and young together! Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his glory is above earth and heaven. He has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his faithful, for the people of Israel who are close to him. Praise the Lord!

New Testament Reading: Matthew 14:24-33

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 toward them on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, 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 toward 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 worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

SERMON

"When the Wind is Against You"

Arlen Salthouse

Have you ever seen someone walk on water? Mind you, I'm not talking about water skiing, nor surfing - but actually walking over the surface of the water. It kind of boggles the mind, doesn't it?...to even imagine the possibility. Though personally, I find it no more mind boggling than water skiing. I can't help but wonder, how do they do that? How do they stay up there? Well, I suppose some of you have tried it, and many have seen it done. So we know it is possible. While at the same time, just as improbable as Jesus walking on the waters of Lake Galilee one night some 2000 years ago. Because that's precisely what the Gospels tell us happened, but I'm getting ahead of myself. So let the story speak for itself, and let its meaning shine through. For when you come right down to it, it's a story of life; and faith, in the midst of life's circumstances. It's about focused faith, and the power of focused faith, when the storms of life surround us, and threaten, and assail us. For that's the picture we have here. As we see Peter and his pals, the ones we call the 12 Disciples; out on the lake one evening in a little fishing boat they're using to cross Lake Galilee - sometimes called the Sea of Galilee or Capernaum - in northern Israel. Oh it started out normal enough. The sky was clear, water calm, and fishing going well. But then, suddenly it all changed! As fierce gale force winds, arising in the

mountains of Lebanon; not unlike some we've experienced in recent times, came gusting down upon that lake, stirring waves to enormous heights and whipping aside anything and everything in its tumultuous path; apparently a common occurrence in those parts even now. When I was there some years ago I observed signs in four languages warning boaters and bathers of sudden squalls. That's what seems to have occurred in the incident described by Matthew in his 14th chapter. The little boat was way out in the middle of that big lake, miles from any shore; when the situation becomes desperate. Matthew tells us they were "beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them". "...beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them". If ever there was a graphic illustration of life's adversities, as some of us have experienced them, at times at least; well, this is it, isn't it? "...beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them". It doesn't take much of a stretch to see a parallel with our own recent experience of threatening winds whipping up wild fires. Keep that metaphor in mind while we look further at our story - which, you recall, started at evening, that is, the first hours of the night, right after sunset. What we do not know is exactly what time the storm arose and began to pummel the boat - up and down, side to side, creaking and groaning, threatening to capsize, hour after hour. We do know it was daybreak when help came, for verse 25 tells us, "In the fourth watch of the night (Jesus) came to them..." See the fourth watch in the old Biblical reckoning began at sunrise. 'But Pastor,' you say, 'what difference does it make, what time Jesus appeared?' It may seem a minor detail, but one I find significant, especially in this day and age in which some of us at least want instant miracles, instant answers to prayer, and push button responses from the Almighty. Well friends, that's not how it happened in our story. And honestly now, it rarely happens at the snap of a finger in our experience either. However, to conclude therefore that it doesn't happen at all, is to seriously underestimate, both the love and power of God; not to mention our own God-given inner resources.

So it turns out that, after hours of floundering about in the storm, and no doubt being terrified - suddenly Peter and the gang saw something that really scared the wit's out of them! None other than Jesus, walking on the sea! Imagine how they felt! Imagine how you'd feel! Getting back to the question, 'Have you ever seen someone walking on the water?' I'm sure every one of us would have to answer, "no way!" That's simply not something in our experience. Of course we'd be frightened to see such a sight, as were those Disciples. And yet, you know friends, there's another sense in which I venture to say every one of us has seen someone walking on water. And I'm certainly not talking about water skiing or surfing. But I'll come to that in a moment. Meanwhile, the picture before us shows the Disciples in the middle, being buffeted about - an ugly turbulent storm on one side, and on the other, a calm confident Jesus. A Christ very much in control of the circumstances, isn't He? Despite the winds, despite the waves. Mind you, this account says nothing about Christ calming the waves. That's not just an oversight on Matthew's part. That's another story for another day; a different metaphor if you will. Because that's exactly how I see this; as I said earlier, a metaphor of life. A parable of life, and faith in the midst of life's troubles. Focused faith, centered faith, personified in Jesus, Who's able to keep His head and stay calm, cool and collected, even in the midst of the storm. Able to rise above the storm, which I believe stands for the adversities of living, the turbulence of living.

See He too was battered by the waves. He too felt the wind biting against Him. He too felt the sting of that wind. Yet He kept going, didn't He? Able to keep going, with courage, and intentionality, because He had a purpose, didn't He? In this immediate case, to come to the aid of the Disciples. In a larger sense, to come to the aid of the world; and people He loved and

came to save. Jesus had a sense of God's will for Him. Oh, not always with even steadiness; for like us, He too had some ups and downs, as is obvious from His prayer in Gethsemane. But isn't that the very nature of spiritual growth? And the important thing is, He kept in touch, kept open the lines of communication. Whenever His gaze started to stray, He re-focused on the spiritual centre.

Which is exactly what He calls Peter to do. It's what Peter longs to do. For He says, Lord, "if it's you, bid me come to You..." And Jesus responds, "Come". Come!, He says. As other times He said, "Come follow me". and "Come to Me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest". As He called Peter and the Disciples of old, so He bids us, "Come!" Come to Him, and thus focus our eyes upon Him; centre our lives in the Lord.

Yes, even in the midst of the storms. Especially in the midst of life's storms. Even when the waves beat upon our boat. Even when the wind is against us. You see, when we do focus our faith on the Lord - we too walk on water! And that's what I meant when I said earlier that every one of us has seen someone walking on water, figuratively speaking; able to keep above the water. Able to rise above the storm; able to keep on going, even when all about is turbulent, rough seas. We've seen those faith-centered individuals who kept calm, cool and collected, even when those fierce waves were churning, and wind thrashing. Even though terrified, afraid and anxious, because that doesn't always go away completely, does it? Sometimes you just have to press on in spite of the fear! And yes, I said YOU! Because you may be that one, or perhaps once were, and still can be the one who walks on water. Like old Peter? Maybe. I'm not sure how to understand the 19th verse, though my inclination tells me Peter started out bravely enough; but didn't get very far, because he panicked; taking his eyes off the Lord, and focusing upon his fear of the storm instead of faith in Christ. Just as you and I start to sink, when we let fears dominate and control us; to the extent that we focus on the storm, instead of on Christ. And so, we come right back to that picture we saw earlier. Remember? The Disciples in the middle, with the raging storm on one side, and a steady Christ on the other. And like those Disciples of old, the choice must be made - which will you focus on: the storms in fear; or in faith, upon the Christ Who bids you 'Come!' Who even when you falter, reaches out His hand to you, when the waves beat upon your little boat, and the wind is against you. He holds out His hand, and takes the hand of all who reach out to Him! Let us pray. Lord, when the storms of life assail us; help us to see You, calm and steady, above the turbulence, and focus our faith on the living Christ in Whose name we pray, and to Whom, with You Father and the Holy Spirit we give the glory. Amen.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from hence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

Responding to God's Word

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE AND THE LORD'S PRAYER

Heavenly Father, Whose name and nature is Love, we thank and bless You for all Your mercies, especially for coming among us in Jesus Christ and showing the fullness of Your love for us on the Cross, and for the new life in Christ to which we are called.

True and living God, guide Your Church on earth into the way of truth. Give us a vision of our unity as sons and daughters of God, and of our unity with all humanity and all creation.

Grant peace in our world, peace in our nation and community, peace in our homes, and peace in our hearts, and bless the efforts of all who work for peace in the name of the Prince of Peace.

Help us to stand up against bigotry, hatred and to treat all your children with dignity and justice.

Bless the labours of all who do honest work, and a sense of self worth for those whose formal labours are ended. Increase our opportunities for mutual service and acts of selfless love, and make us aware of those opportunities. Give us a sense of meaning in what we do, and encourage all whose toil is difficult dangerous or monotonous.

Draw near in comfort and support to all families, parents and children; to all in special need, the sick and sorrowing, confused and despairing, and those who face difficult decisions. Especially those affected by recent disasters.

Into Your hands, Father, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy, through Your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, in Whose name and words we pray.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

Sending of God's Word

CLOSING HYMN

Give to the Winds thy Fears

#815

BENEDICTION

Go forth in peace and serve the Lord.

WE WILL SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT.

The blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you, this day and always.

AMEN.