

²² Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³ And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴ but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. ²⁵ And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. ²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. ²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

²⁸ Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ²⁹ He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³² When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³ And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

The Word of God for the People of God.

Thanks be to God.

Well, it's not the first time they had gotten themselves into trouble in a boat. Here we are in Matthew 14, deep into Jesus' ministry and adventures with his disciples, and it was only 6 chapters earlier that the disciples had found themselves on a boat, deep in a storm, with Jesus asleep inside. They woke him up, screaming, "Lord, save us! We're going down!" and before calming the winds

and the waves, before even getting out of the bed, Jesus sleepily opened his eyes and said, "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?"

So it's no wonder...that this time, Jesus send them in the boat without him, and he takes the moment to be alone--he sends the crowd away and he heads up the mountain to be by himself. It's that moment, when no one else is in the house, or no one else is in the office...and you can hear yourself think, and you can hear God speak.

And so the disciples go on in the boat, and they spend the better part of the night trying to cross this sea, this giant lake, which, from east to west is never more than 7 miles wide--7 miles from one side to the other. By 4 o'clock in the morning, they were dog-tired, up all night fighting off the wind and the waves, trying to keep the boat upright, battling the storm yet again. Surely someone on that boat remembered the last time this happened, when Jesus was there, when he kept them safe and calmed the storm--surely someone on that boat, at some point, exclaimed, "Where is Jesus when we need him?!"

But he wasn't there.

And then, suddenly, he was. Off in the distance, a figure moving steadily, in spite of the waves and the wind surrounding him. A ghost. A figment of their imaginations. For the disciples, and for most people of this time, the storm--the wind, the waves, the natural elements so out of control were not just a metaphor for the spiritual life--they were actually the spiritual world at work. Evil spirits

caused the sea to swell and the wind to howl, and only God could calm them. So when Jesus is spotted over the tops of the waves, out in the midst of the sea, it is no wonder they feared him and thought he was a ghost.

"Take heart; it is I; do not be afraid." A better translation, and what Matthews Jewish Christian audience would have heard, is "Take heart; I am; do not be afraid." I am. The divine name--ego eimi, as God said to Moses when God called from the burning bush and said, "Tell them 'I am' sent you." Jesus is not just reassuring them that their old pal Jesus is here to help them out of this mess, he is staking a claim on his identity as the one true God, the one who *does* have authority over the wind and the waves, the one who *is* able to save them from perishing in the storm. Take heart; God is here; do not be afraid.

And then comes our favorite part. Peter, getting a little gutsy, asks Jesus to call him. "Lord, if it is you, tell me to come to you on the water. Call me to yourself." It's a glimmer--a moment when Peter forgets himself; he forgets the wind and the waves; he forgets, you know, gravity, and the physics of what happens when a solid steps out onto a liquid, he forgets, or tosses out every practical reason why this is not a good idea, and in this glimmer of hope, this glimmer of just a *little bit* of faith that this guy Jesus really might be who he says he is, he looks at Jesus, and he says, "Let's do this." Ok, that's my translation, but it's a good one, because that's what he's doing. For the first time in this ministry, this time of following Jesus around the countryside and seeing all that he has done and hearing all that he has taught, for the first time, Peter is ready to stop just watching Jesus do the miracle--he's ready to step out and join Jesus in the

miracle. It's no longer just Jesus does this, and I do this, I do my part--for Peter, in this moment, he is ready to partner up with Jesus. He may have long believed that Jesus could do something miraculous, something like walking on water. But now, for a moment, Peter is willing to believe that Jesus can and might do something miraculous *with him*. Together.

So here's what I wonder. I wonder if, when Peter was getting out of the boat, about to take those first steps onto the sea, I wonder if he thought it would feel steady, like walking on the ground. I wonder if he thought that Jesus' miracle was to make walking on water just as easy and comfortable as walking on dirt. And here's why I wonder that. Sometimes, I think that Jesus calls us out of the boat, and we get the idea that since Jesus called us, since this is the thing that Jesus called us to do, then it ought to be pretty easy--smooth sailing. We neglect the fact that what Jesus calls us into is a storm.

Jesus' response to Peter is simply, "Come." Come out into this mess--where the wind is howling and the waves are high, where your footing will never be sure, come out to where the miracle happens, where you feel like the ground has been pulled out from under you, where every step will make your knees buckle. Friends, just because Jesus is walking on the water doesn't mean that it's calm! Just because he calls you out of the boat doesn't mean that you are going to feel real confident out there on those waves. And just because you aren't feeling so confident out there, or just because it's not comfortable, doesn't mean that Jesus hasn't called you.

You know, we hear Jesus call out Peter's little faith, but friends, this is where a little faith will get you. It will get you out of the boat--out of your comfort zone, out of your comfortable little nest. It will get you questioning the rules and the way things always have been. It will get you into friendship with people of another race, because you believe that God can heal what is divided. It will get you into a classroom, where you are the teacher, even though you had meant to be an engineer. It will get you into a doctor's office trying to translate for your friend, who is a refugee. It will get you on the ground in a foreign country, teaching children to sing Jesus Loves Me. It will get you into City Hall as an advocate, because you believe that one day, Human Trafficking really will end.

Friends, this is where a little faith will get you. Out in the storm, out in the wind, out on the waves...and then, at times, under the waves...hanging on to Jesus.

We might entertain the thought that Peter failed that night on the sea. That the little-ness of his faith got him in a little trouble, and he needed Jesus to rescue him. But I don't know if that's true. Because, if you'll notice, when they get back into the boat, the focus is never on Peter. None of the guys say, "Hey, Peter, don't worry, you'll get it next time," or even, "Peter, dude, what were you thinking?" No, all they can talk about is Jesus. All they can do is worship Jesus--their reaction, according to *The Message*, is "This is it! You are God's son for sure!"

In the end, this story is not about Peter. The story is about Jesus; and so is our story. It's about a group of disciples, coming to believe that this man from Galilee

is God in the flesh, and that his coming, his breaking into the world, changes everything. He changes everything; with a little faith, he even changes ordinary lives into something miraculous.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

Summary: Jesus invites us to join him in the miraculous, but that will require us to get into the storm. God gives us faith—even a little faith—and God uses us to reveal the one in whom the storms are calmed and all things are made whole: Jesus.