

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

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Introduction

Jesus' ability to walk on water speaks to the power of faith, and the benefit of self-care.

Text

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 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.'

Comment

Miracles in Matthew 14 include audience participation. Earlier in the chapter, the disciples and the crowds take part in the multiplication of loaves and fish. Now Peter is inspired to give gravitational defiance a try. He succeeds. Then he doesn't. Peter starts to sink when a fear of drowning, which Jesus briefly dispelled, returns. Matthew may well be arguing that, with enough faith, fears subside and miracles are possible. Lose faith, and our fears become reality.

But there is another point being made. Jesus benefits from time alone. So can we. It

was after he withdrew away by himself that Jesus fed the five thousand. A similar pattern appears here. Once Jesus puts the disciples on a boat and sends the satisfied crowds away, he heads up a mountain to pray. It's after he's had this second round of quiet prayerful practice that Jesus approaches the disciples' boat walking on water. Perhaps the answer to Jesus' question, 'why did you doubt?' isn't so much that Peter lacked faith but that he – unlike Jesus – hasn't had a sufficient amount of time alone to strengthen that faith.

What sets Jesus apart in this chapter, along with being able to walk on water and stretch out a few rations to feed thousands, is the priority he gives to prayer and private introspection. While none of us may possess the ability to stride across the waves, we can all make time for quiet and stillness.

Response

Many of us will be returning to a more structured schedule in the coming weeks and months. We will likely be mindful of increased anxieties at play in the world, but more aware – having experienced lockdown – that a less hurried pace is possible. Conflicts are coming. Now may be the right time to prioritise introspection and self-care: setting the boundaries we need; developing regulating habits that calm the mind, spirit and temper.

This is, of course, a practice easier for some to take on than others. It may feel like a luxury many can't afford. It is also an exhortation weakened by the author's own hypocrisy. But it could be the decision that prevents us from sinking. It may even offer the confidence to defy gravity for a spell.

Prayer

God who withdraws into quiet,
God who returns with reassurance:
after you took time for yourself
you approached the disciples
with a calming power.
May we, even as we fail
to match your miraculous ways,
find peace like yours
in the care we offer ourselves.
And then may we,
in the midst of new storms,
quiet the fears that unsettle our hearts.
Amen.

Further Reading

