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Bush Hill Presbyterian Church  
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Genesis 37:1-4,12-28  
Matthew 14:22-23

## **OUR BOAT IS FAITH; OUR LIVES ARE WAVES**

Can there be a more well-known story than the story of Jesus walking on the water and calling Peter to him? My question is do we really understand why the disciples are in the middle of the story? Is it because they have somehow misunderstood what Jesus wanted them to do? The image is very clear. They are there because they have been obedient. They have done not less than what was expected. They have done precisely what Christ asked them to do; what he had commanded them to do—to get on board the boat while he dismissed the crowd. Jesus put them in that very boat that he had used earlier to get away from the news of Herod's beheading of John the Baptist—to get away from the rejection he had experienced in Nazareth. He had tried to use that boat as a vessel to him to a place of consolation—a place where he could finally kneel before God and admit all his own fears.

So after going away, looking for some understanding, if you will, some consolation; then finding the need to be that consolation for others, now Jesus sends them away across the Sea of Galilee. If you have ever lived in a community one second too long and you have known that need to just be alone, to have a little space, you understand what's happened. "I'll send the disciples across the Sea of Gallilee and I'll send this crowd home full and healed, and finally I'll have some peace." That had to be what Jesus was saying to himself. And so when we read that the disciples are actually doing the perfect will of God, don't we wonder why they are struggling, why they are fighting against the wind, why they aren't able to make any headway in their journey? A journey of faith as surely as we are on a journey today.

Something has happened in your life, I believe, when you have had that same sense of not being able to make any headway. Maybe it was an experience in your life beyond the church, although no such life really exists. We often think it does. Maybe it was out there in your studies. Maybe it was in your secular relationships, or in your home or where you work. You just didn't seem to be able to make any headway. Maybe it was here or in a similar environment where you volunteered to help and you had expectations about how that would play out. In fact, what really happened was you were just taken for granted—a warm body placed in a slot. You weren't allowed to express who you really were or share the gift that you brought. Maybe it was when you agreed to teach and you became disillusioned, not only at your students' lack of preparation, but even their parents didn't seem to be concerned whether they were there or not. Maybe it was when you agreed to serve on a committee only to be told those seven deadly words: "We never do it that way." or "Here's how we always do it here."

Have you ever felt a call to serve? OK, no one raise their hand; but have you ever felt the call to serve as a deacon or elder only later to dread the very night that those people met, and when you finally rotated off you said, "I'm not doing that again for a long time."

If we want to follow Jesus, and we are convinced that we are doing exactly what Jesus called us to do, why is it that we are so surprised when we feel exhausted and frustrated by the wind and the waves that press against us? All we'd ever wanted to do had been fairly simple: Be the church of Jesus Christ. Be a place where others know the love that we have experienced. All we've ever wanted to do was grow just a little deeper for we know we have so far to go. To grow a little deeper in our relationship with Christ. It's as simple as crossing the Sea of Galilee for longtime watermen like Peter. It's simple, not complicated. But occasionally, occasionally in the midst of all the turmoil, we risk the impossible. We try what we have been told cannot happen. We love where we have been told others have given up. It's like walking on water, even though most of the time we just stay in the boat.

What is your current position in the boat? If you have ever been on a boat tossed by waves you know that being up front is not the place to be. I'll never forget a harrowing experience in the waves on a boat where I was trying to captain and everyone was terrified save one little redhead asleep in the V-berth through the whole thing.

Most of us aren't that peaceful—aren't that content in our church experience. And the more we get involved, the less content we become. Our boat of faith is this congregation in varying degrees. And we are at our best when we do exactly what they did in this scripture lesson. After every storm, after every trial, after every temptation, we are at our best when we gather here and kneel before Christ in worship, in communal praise.

Last Saturday, a week ago, Alexander Solzhenitsyn died. He said that only once during his long imprisonment in the Soviet Union in the labor camp there had he ever become so discouraged that he didn't care any more. He said he sat down in despair and actually considered whether to end his own life. As he sat there, he said, a stranger came and sat beside him—someone he had never seen before and never saw again. For no apparent reason, this stranger took a stick and drew a cross on the ground. Solzhenitsyn sat and stared at the cross for a long time. Remember, he had fallen so far into depression he was debating whether to live or die. He later wrote that while staring at that cross, he realized that in the cross lay true freedom. And in the midst of his storm, he received new courage. He said he never again visited that dark place of doubt about his own existence.

Which is it? What is your storm? Are the winds of loneliness buffeting you? Is your storm a wave of personal problems too painful to face for yourself—too painful to share with others? Most of us are constantly in storms of doubt about whether what we are doing and what we are giving has any real significance. The truth of God's word for us today is unmistakable. Wherever your storm is swirling around you, if you listen, if you take your eyes off the incoming wave for just a moment, you will hear the precise tone of Christ's voice. You will perceive his presence calling to you gently, "Come." And then you will have the opportunity to respond because he was there before you. He was on the waves early in the predawn hours aware of what you were facing. And he is the one who will place you back in your proper place within his congregation. And all the wind that had paralyzed you, all the turmoil, it will be as if it never existed.

So he will still us and he will still the surroundings around us. Jesus will speak and he will say, "Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid. I know that in time your storm will pass." And I know that in time whatever you perceive in this congregation will pass also. For Jesus is still here, as he's always been. Amen.