

May we hear the words of Christ, know the mind of Christ, enter the heart of Christ. Amen.

I was kayaking the other day, and the water was lovely and calm. I paddled all the way up the creek to a favorite branch where there is forest on both sides of the stream. When I re-emerged I checked the time – 12:25. "I'll be home in 30 minutes, plenty of time to make Mom lunch," I thought. And out of nowhere a wind blew up. A strong wind. Coming right at me. I headed out, but that wind did not let up. It whipped up the water, so that it became quite turbulent, nothing like the nice still surface I'd traveled up on. I kept going, and thankfully made it home without incident, but it was scary.

Squalls on Cuckold Creek are nothing compared to those for which the Sea of Galilee is known. And even though Jesus' followers were experienced fishermen, used to that sea, this storm had them scared as they battled in the dark against the wind. But it was not as scary as the sight of someone walking toward them on top of the water! Is it a ghost? They're terrified.

These guys had been on an emotional roller-coaster. First, they heard about King Herod's capricious beheading of John the Baptist, Then they set off with Jesus on a retreat that was interrupted by a vast throng of people clamoring for Jesus' teaching and healing. That turned into a miraculous picnic in which thousands are fed with five loaves and two fish that never seem to run out... there are even leftovers. Then Jesus leaves them alone to go off by himself to pray – they don't know how he's going to get across the lake in time to meet them.

They're still trying to sort out just what happened back there with the loaves and the 5,000, when they have this strong wind to contend with. And then – when I don't think they could have taken one more mind-bending thing, here comes Jesus walking to them on the water like it's asphalt. Okay – so he could heal people instantly from incurable conditions, including death.... and yes, he had a way of multiplying food and turning water into wine... and he had commanded even wind and waves to be calm and they were – But how could he control the molecules of water, to make them solid?

For some reason, Peter reacts to the scene and the fear by wanting to test Jesus. “If it’s you, Lord, call me out there with you.” And Jesus says simply, “Come.” Peter just climbs over the side and feels the water under his feet.

He keeps his eyes right on Jesus and takes a step toward him. And then another.

And another. He is almost at his side – and then some thought intrudes.

It’s always our thoughts that get us. “Hey – this is impossible. What am I doing?”

Then he notices how bad the wind is, and look how choppy that water is,

and he takes his eyes off Jesus, because the next thing you know,

he is sinking. Sinking fast in a storm-tossed sea. You ever felt that way?

Three gospels tell of this incident, but only Matthew tells us the whole story.

Not just the part about Peter getting out of the boat, that exercise of amazing faith, but of the doubt that came right after the faith, and the sinking effect it had.

Because our doubts – real and natural as they are – do have a sinking effect.

We can’t will ourselves not to have them, and this story reminds us that they’re inevitable. But we don’t have to give our doubts the last word.

We can call out, “Jesus! Save me!” And he’ll be there. That’s a promise.

Peter did. And right away, Jesus was there, grabbing his hand and pulling him up.

And he just said, very gently, “You of little faith – why did you doubt?”

“You were finally doing it, what I’ve been trying to teach you!

You just believed me and acted on it. You just did it.

You got out of the boat. You walked on water! Why did you stop?”

He stopped because he stopped focusing on Jesus. That’ll get us every time.

Walking on water means putting your trust in something that looks insubstantial...

Pretty good metaphor for living by faith... to the world this story of ours, with this

living but invisible Risen Lord Jesus seems ludicrous, as insubstantial as you can get.

But when we get our feet wet, we find it’s the most solid substance there is.

These are times for getting our feet wet, friends, and keeping our focus on Jesus.

We can stay in the boat, in our beloved church on Sundays, and love God.

But Jesus has much, much more in store for us as we get out of the boat.

God has much, much need of us, as we get out of the boat.

The Spirit has gifts in abundance to equip us, as we get out of the boat.

Where do you think God might be inviting you to get out of the boat?

Where do you see Jesus on the water, beckoning us to join him?

What risks are we being called to as churches in these time of division and hardship?

I'll tell you one I see – the risk to open ourselves up in conversation and then relationship with people who are not part of this church. I'm reading a great book about reimaging food pantries and the ones that are thriving these days have a mission far beyond handing out food once a week. They put a priority on interacting with clients, on talking with them, finding out how they can be set up for success. They help connect clients with resources, and lend a listening ear, and build relationships that can lead to community. Most of the pantries in the area do just what we do – but I think we're called to model this wider mission of wholeness. That might mean more of us get involved. Or we host more Community Conversations about the hard issues that face us – and we make ourselves available, really meeting and talking with folks, not hiding behind food tables and our comfortable busy-ness.

Faith is believing when you can't see – once you've seen, it's knowledge. We are called to be people of faith – that's what the world needs from us. We really start following Jesus when we let our faith in what we cannot see be stronger than our doubt in what we can. Our faith in what we cannot see – the power of God all around us and in us – needs to be stronger than our doubt in what we can. Living our faith means constantly asserting the power of God in the face of the world's definitions of reality.

I am not planning to try to part the waters of the Potomac, or step off my dock to see if I can walk on water – but I know in faith and in prayer I can float on it. We are looking this August at how different landscapes can speak to our spirits and strengthen our faith, how they have different gifts to give us. How is the landscape of Sea different than that of Mountain? What does being on the sea do for us spiritually? When I was in Italy I went swimming in the Mediterranean Sea – It had been awhile since I'd been in ocean. But I feel so free in that water. And one thing I love to do is float, face to the sky, my whole body resting on that coolness. That's what it means to rest in God – to put all our weight on God's power and love to tackle the things that are impossible for us. So I'd like us to call on our experiences on the sea now, in prayer, to remember that feeling and know we can call it up anytime...

Guided meditation.

This sea is available to us in our imagination anytime.
Jesus says, "Come." *Amen.*

Matthew 14:22-33

Jesus 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."