

“A Matter of Faith”

Matthew 14:22-33

Richard C. Allen

South Glastonbury

November 10, 2019

Connecticut

As we read the stories of Jesus interacting with his disciples, we see that he was about the task of nurturing faith. To nurture faith is to encourage a trusting in a power greater than our own. As Jesus moved from town to town with his disciples, he looked for opportunities to nurture their faith; that is, their willingness to place their trust in God.

Many of the disciples were fishermen who had left their nets to follow Jesus. As fishermen, they were very aware of the power of wind. They knew when to hoist the sails and when to furl the sails. Wind was an example of a power greater than themselves. They understood the power of wind. It just so happens that the Hebrew word for wind is also the word for Spirit. So when Jesus started talking with Peter and Andrew and several of the others about trusting the Spirit, they understood exactly what he was talking about.

One strategy for nurturing faith is to invite someone out of their comfort zone where reliance upon God’s strength is required. In the story for today, Peter is a little bit like a beginning Confirmation student. He is ready to grow in faith and he is anxious to step out of his comfort zone. We can sort of picture Jesus walking on the water, nearing the boat, hearing Peter’s request to invite him out upon the water, out of his comfort zone; but Jesus is also thinking to himself, “I’d better be ready to rescue him because his faith is still young and in need of lots more nurture.” After just a few steps upon the water, Peter realizes that this faith business requires more than he imagined.

And, bless his heart, after a few steps upon the water, he begins to sink!

That's the way it is with growing one's faith. It's a matter of a few steps at a time. It's a journey; some would say, a life-long journey.

I sort of picture Peter crawling back up onto the boat, drying off with a towel, and thinking to himself, 'this faith thing is exciting; I can't wait to trust God a little bit more each day.'

Many of us are familiar with the exercise known as a trust fall. Here, let me demonstrate! (I'll have Dave Blake and another ready to catch me!)

Faith and trust are kissing cousins. When I sit in the barber's chair with a sheet wrapped around me, I have enormous trust that my barber will know exactly how to adjust the razor. I am literally in his hands. Or HER hands, depending on the day. The trust level is very high. I go back to the same chair every time! You could say I have faith in my barber; though my barber would dispute the notion that he's a higher power!

Our Christian Faith is centered on this notion of trusting God with our lives, with our life having a purpose, knowing that whether we live or die our lives belong to God. One of my favorite, all-time, faith stories arises from a small town in the mid-west. There had been a season of drought. The crops were failing. The future looked bleak. So, the local preacher invited everyone in the town to come to church for a prayer meeting that night. They all came. They prayed for a drizzle, a steady downpour, a cloud burst! They kept this up for an hour when they started to hear the blessed sound of the pitter patter of rain on the church roof. They all rushed outside to celebrate!

And they all went home soaking wet except for the one little old lady who stayed perfectly dry because she had come to church with her umbrella!

She had come to the prayer meeting with her faith! I think if I were to have the privilege of starting a new church somewhere in the world, I'd be tempted to name it The Church of the Blessed Umbrella! For that midwestern community, the umbrella became the symbol of faith, the representation of what it means to trust in a higher power.

The notion of stepping outside of one's comfort zone doesn't appeal to everyone. We're not all enthusiastic about taking a risk now and then. Yet, the great theologian, Soren Kierkegaard, urged the Christian world to go ahead and take 'a leap of faith.' "Yes," he said, "Take a leap of faith, but only after reflection." In other words, a leap of faith needs to be hemmed with prayer.

In a way, getting out of bed in the morning is a leap of faith. Sometimes it's wise to do a little reflecting before our feet hit the floor for the start of a new day.

I am intrigued by this notion of a 'leap of faith.' I'm not too keen on trying to walk on water. But I do think of Peter's attempt to walk on water as a metaphor. We each have to discern what our leap of faith might be. For me, a leap of faith might be wading out into the waters of a new language. How could God use me as an instrument of peace in the Hartford area if I were to learn to speak Spanish fluently? Where would that take me? What doors for ministry would that open? What would be the risk? I already know how to say 'mucho freo.' What would come next?

What would be a 'leap of faith' for South Church? I have this wild idea. What if once a week, maybe at noon time on Mondays, we came to church with our umbrellas, gathered in a sacred space, and prayed for the Spirit to rain upon us; prayed for the healing of the divisions in our nation; prayed for the healing of our friends and neighbors; prayed for the kind of peace that allows a wolf and a lamb to lie down together? We'd be called the Umbrella Gang or the Parasol Prayer Group. We'd place our confidence in a higher power. We'd invoke the authority of God.

As Peter climbs back into the boat soaking wet, I imagine him looking at his colleagues in that boat and asking, 'So, what will your 'leap of faith' look like?' This is a great question for all Christians and for all churches. It's the kind of question that keep me living in the greatest of hope! Amen.