

“If it is You...”

1st Pres San Brdno

Matt 14:22-33, Ps 105:1-6
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The feeding with the fishes and the loaves is over, and Jesus has told the disciples to get into the boat and go across to the other side while he dismisses the crowds. And they do exactly that.

And they find themselves **far from land, battered by the waves. They find the wind is against them.**

Just because we are doing what Jesus has told us to do does not mean that the wind will not be against us.

In fact, the act of *doing* the things he calls us to do- standing up for those who have no voice, say, or forgiving those who don't deserve it, or doing what is right rather than what is popular- may *guarantee* that the wind will be against us.

And that's where the disciples are. They have done what Jesus asked, and they are far from land, and it is dark, and it is late, and the wind is against them.

And somewhere between 3 and 6 in the morning, what the King James calls 'the 4th watch of the night', as lonely and as dark a time as there is, and Jesus comes walking toward them on the water.

The disciples take one look at him, and they are terrified! Matthew tells us they think they've seen a ghost! **Because sometimes, when the wind is against you, and Jesus shows up, at first you can't even see that it is Jesus.**

But he calls to them, in their terror, and says what he so often says: "don't be afraid". And he says to them, **"It is I"**- the I Am, the One Who Is- It is I. The connection with the "I Am who I Am" name of God would not have been lost on the first readers.

And Peter, in a characteristic glimpse of something far beyond him, suddenly says

If it's you-

If it IS you-

Then call me, and I will come.

If it's you, then tell me what to do, and I will do it.

And Jesus says, "Come".

And that's all Peter needs. And he steps out of that boat-
Though it is dark, and they are battered by waves, and he is far from shore,
That is all he needs to hear. And he steps out.

You know, I am so much more inclined to be intimidated by the waves. To be intimidated by people's anger, or by the stormy stuff of disagreements, or by the list of what is not yet done. I am so inclined, left to my own devices, to play it safe and to hug the railing on that boat, and to 'cry out in fear', as the other disciples did.

But Jesus says, "Come."

And Peter steps out of that boat.

Now I think **Peter has been given a bad rap as people have preached this passage-** it has often been interpreted to say that Peter didn't have enough faith.

If he'd had enough faith,
He would not have been battered by the waves,
the wind would not have been against him, he would not have begun to sink.

And that, I think, **tempts us to put terrible burdens on ourselves:**

If I had had enough *faith*, my grades wouldn't be disastrous, I would not have gotten sick, my marriage would not have failed, I would be able to do everything that needs to be done... I could walk on water!!!

That voice, my friends, is NOT the voice of the Holy One.

I think what happened is that **Peter took that step of faith**
in response to Christ's call

And it was harder than it looked. It was harder than it looked, and he wondered: Was that *really* Jesus I heard calling me?

Because it is dark, and the wind is against me, and I KNOW I can't do this by *myself*....I'm not strong enough, and I'm not smart enough, and I'm not cut out for this-

Maybe it wasn't him after all~

And that was when he realized he was sinking.

Was that really you, Jesus, who called us to stay here and try to be good news for this neighborhood?

Was it really you calling us to create a 2 hour Sunday and invite EVERYONE in the congregation to continue their Christian education?
Was it you who called us to expand the number of food bags we give out?
Because it's a lot of work....it's harder than it looked.

Was it really You who called me to stay in this city,
To work in this school district, To serve as a deacon, To go to college?
Because it's harder than it looked, and I am sinking.

But notice this about Peter:

He is frightened, and he falters, but he *does not fail!*¹

He has the faith to cry out, "Save me!"

If it is really you who called me out of the safety of the boat, save me!

If it is really you who called me out into this storm, save me!

I am afraid, and I am not certain anymore, and the storm is fierce- help me!

And instantly, Jesus reaches out his hand.

And Peter grabs on and does not, in fact, sink.

He does not fail to do what he set out to do.

And he climbs, a bit soggy and breathless but perfectly all right, back into that boat.

And they worship Him.

And Peter knows something he did not know before the story began:

That faith is NOT foolish

That Christ is the One who comes to us in the dark when we are far from land and the wind is against us.

Christ is the One who can call to us over the storm

Christ is the One who reaches out to us when we call 'Save me!'

who gets us safely back into the boat,

and brings us safely home.

Jesus says, "Come." And that's all Peter needs to attempt what he knows he cannot do alone.

Peter did not, in that moment, know everything about the One he was trusting. He had not seen the crucifixion and certainly not the resurrection.

He, like the rest of US, **was still finding his way toward understanding**

Who this was who was calling him, and what it would mean to respond to that call.

Sometimes, if we are doing what Christ has called us to do, it will *guarantee* that the wind of power and of privilege and of public opinion will be against us.

It will, at times, be harder than it looked.

We will wonder if we made a mistake,

“Lord, If you are still there, call us again because we don’t know what to believe, and we are sinking.”²

Call us when we are afraid, and when we falter and are in danger of failing.

Call us when we think it may have been our imagination,
when we are not sure we’ve ever really heard you.

Call us when the wind is against us and the storm is strong
and we don’t want to go on.

Lord, if you are still there, call us again.

And give us the courage to step out of the boat

And come to you.

And learn what Peter learned.

Amen.

¹ I am indebted to Jan Richardson and her online PaintedPrayerbook website for this observation.

²Anna Carter Florence uses this sentence in her “Preaching the Lesson” article in *Lectionary Homiletics* vol XIX no.5 p.23. I think it is concise, poignant, and brilliant.