

Proper 14 A
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Church of the Servant

Did Jesus really walk on the water? I don't know. How about Peter? Don't know about that either. Nor do I really care. That isn't what's important about today's gospel reading; although I'm sure there are some who would argue with me. So what do I think is really important?

The most obvious and important message in this lesson, is that when we need him, Jesus is always there with us. He was there for the disciples and he was there for Peter who only needed to stretch out his hand to be saved from drowning.

It was important for Matthew to convey this message to the infant church. He wanted people to understand that no matter how bad the persecutions might become, no matter what trials they might have to endure, even death itself, Jesus would come to help them. All they needed to do was call upon his name in order to be given the courage to endure and overcome.

That message holds true for us today. No matter what our individual struggles may be--problems which seem to have no solution or those which seem beyond our coping ability--Jesus will come to help us. All we have to do is ask.

The second message of importance is concerned with the struggle we all have between faith and reason-- what one clever person called "the suma wrestlers of the soul."

Peter in this story is sort of Everyman. We can all recognize ourselves in Peter. Like him we are very good at denying our humanness and are quite sure that we're in total control of our lives, completely self-reliant and more than ready to prove it, and so we plunge right in, trusting in ourselves and our ability to cope.

But think a moment about the story. We read that the boat is battling a strong headwind. Jesus walking toward the boat also faces the wind, but Peter, heading toward Jesus, has his back to the wind and is probably being moved along by it at a pretty fast pace. Whoops! When he feels out of control and focuses on the wind instead of on Jesus, he begins to sink.

His reason comes up against the Spirit's pushing him to a place he would never have thought to go except for the fact that Jesus had called him to come to him. As Mark Twain opined, "Faith is believing what you know ain't true." Reason struggles with faith and faith struggles with reason and we wonder where God is in the midst of the

two. But there is a time for reason and there is a time for faith and God is present in both.

So the message here is not that we must somehow walk on water to prove our faith. Instead we must be willing to step out into the unknown, trusting that Jesus is indeed with us. When we struggle between the pull of reason and the call of faith, it's better to fail trying to be faithful to God than to do nothing because reason tells us we might fail.

Yet another message has to do with the depth of our faith and how it's shown in our lives. It's pretty hard to determine a person's faith if it's never put to the test--if we're never pushed into some sort of visible action.

And unfortunately, most of us need to be pushed and not necessarily gently, in order for our faith to become visible. Few of us would ever agree that we were ready to walk on water. Yet faith which stays in the boat, so to speak, safe and secure, is a pretty lifeless faith.

But there are times when we are pushed, shoved, even catapulted by the events of life into a test of our faith. And we find ourselves doing something which we can't really explain in a logical way. We just know that we are called to do it.

And when we do step out in faith and when the inevitable crisis follows, it's then that we find ourselves closest to God as we stretch out our hand for help. No one who has ever held out a hand to Jesus has ever been refused. That is the promise which sustains us in times of unrest, confusion, danger or grief. That is the promise on which all Christian faith is based.

Lastly, there is the message about prayer which often gets overlooked because of the focus on the miracle. Jesus didn't go with his disciples in the boat. He sent them off. He sent the crowd off. And he went up the mountain to pray.

Time to be alone with God. Something we all need for the refreshment of our souls just as we need vacation time to refresh our lives. Jesus knew the importance of balance in life--time to be with others, time to seek solitude; time to serve God by serving others, time to serve God in prayer and contemplation.

Life is a balancing act and it's up to us to maintain a healthy balance in our lives so that together and individually, we may truly be the Body of Christ, faithful and unafraid. AMEN.