

Dan Ince August 9, 2026

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost Proper 14 Matthew 14:22-33

In the name of One God, Father, Son & Holy Spirit, Amen.

As I was reading, praying and working on the sermon for this week, I realized that the work wasn't going very well. It usually helps me to get back into focus when I'm also listening to music. So, as is my habit, I connected to an internet Hawaiian music station on my computer while I worked. When I'm struggling with what I want to say, one song that seems to come up regularly is the song "Ke Akua Mana E" which is Hawaiian for "How Great Thou Art". This particular song helps me to concentrate and to bring the Gospel reading, that is the basis for my sermon, back into focus.

This hymn also seems to go hand in hand with this Gospel lesson about Peter, "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."

I think that this is a wonderful story from Matthew that tells us of Jesus' miracle of walking on the water. But the message that it gives to us is so much more. I read that St. Augustine said that this story was an allegory for Jesus and the Church. He said that the Church was represented by the boat that the disciples were in. That's the reason that a part of the church is called the nave which also comes from the same root word as "navy" and "navigate". I've also seen on some travel programs that many Scandinavian church ceilings look like the hull of a boat that's been turned upside down.

St Augustine also said that the Church may get tossed around by the storms and high seas of life. He equated the devil with the power that

keeps the storms blowing but, with Jesus' help, the Church can weather any storm. I like that analogy, but I think that this story of Peter's interaction with Jesus also tells us something even more meaningful today.

I can identify with Peter because I think that, as a human, he's the perfect example for us of Christian discipleship. He shows us faith in action and, at the same time, he also shows his weakness. His impetuous personality continuously gets him into trouble which is followed by his failure of faith. And every time that Peter puts his foot into his mouth, Jesus takes him back with love and saves him from the world and from himself. What an example of God's love for us.

This morning's Gospel immediately follows last Sunday's story of Jesus feeding of the multitude. And, as you may remember, even before Jesus healed, fed and preached to the crowd that day, He was looking for a place to be alone to rest and to pray. So, after the crowds had been fed, Jesus sent the disciples ahead in the boat to go across the Sea of Galilee while He stayed behind to pray.

The Sea of Galilee is about 8 miles across at its widest point. That's a pretty easy sail if the winds are right. But that night, the sea and the wind were both working against the disciples. Matthew tells us that the disciples were "far from land" and, when it was "early in the morning, He came walking toward them on the sea". In John's version of this story, he wrote that they had only rowed about 3 or 4 miles. The disciples had already had a very long and tiring day by the time that they got into the boat. And now, they've spent most of the night trying to get across the sea and, at this point, they had only made it about halfway.

To put this story into context for a minute, two days earlier they had gotten news that John the Baptizer had been executed by Herod. Andrew and John had been disciples of John before they had met Jesus. They loved John, and so did John's cousin, Jesus. They had not been able to mourn his death because of the crowds that had kept pressing in on them. They tried to get away from the crowd by boat but Jesus told them to put back in to shore because He had such compassion for the people's needs. Then what followed was the incredible miracle of the feeding of the multitude. Now, they were emotionally spent and physically exhausted, when Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and to go on ahead to the other side. They found themselves stuck in the middle of the sea, in a crushing storm, too tired to fight the rest of the way across. And then they saw Him walking toward them 3 or 4 miles from the shore. They were terrified because, in their state, they thought it was a ghost. But, instead of cowering as the others did, their unofficial leader, Peter, stood up to get a better look. Jesus was still walking toward them on top of the waves and said, "Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid."

I've read that there are several different translations of this phrase in various Bibles. In some, it says that Jesus tells the disciples, "It is I" but, in other translations of that phrase, it says "I Am." I love the image of Jesus saying, "Take heart, I Am, do not be afraid." "I Am," was the name that God told Moses in Exodus when Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I am who I am."

When Peter heard Jesus's voice, he responded with, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." Having grown up a block from the beach in South Redondo and was an avid scuba diver for many

years, I've seen and experienced the power of the ocean. I'm not sure that my faith would be as strong as Peter's and I doubt that I would have said what he said to Jesus. The boat with the disciples was being beaten and battered to pieces by the storm however they had also seen Jesus quiet a storm before. If I had found myself in their situation, I think my response probably would have been, "Lord, if it is you, get us out of this mess!"

But not Peter. He was a true disciple and wanted to walk where Jesus walked, even on the water. So, Jesus calls Peter to him and Mr. Impetuous jumped out of the boat and started to walk in the Way of the Lord. But what happened to him next? Like his name, Petros (or rock), he started to sink when he realized where he was and then became frightened.

And I think that this was the ultimate example for us. I can easily identify with Peter in my day-to-day journey of faith. I want to try to be more like the disciples and to devote my life to trying to live more as Jesus lived. But, like Peter, I tend to get distracted by everyday life and to lose my concentration. When I lose that concentration, even for a moment, I'm more likely to be like Peter and sink.

Several weeks ago. I preached on the parable of the Sower. I would like to be more like the seeds that landed on the good soil and to yield 3 or 6 times than what they were in the beginning. But too often, like Peter, I'm more like the rocky soil. My faith might spring up in me quickly with enthusiasm, and then something distracts it and, because its roots are shallow, it dries up.

If you find yourself with these same tendencies, remember what Jesus said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." No matter how much our human weakness may influence our ability to be good disciples, Jesus

will never give up on us. Petros, the rock, sank that early morning in the Sea of Galilee but Jesus was there. His hand was out, ready to grab Peter and to pull him back into the boat. And this example of God's love is also true for us. "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." And remember the words of Ke Akua Mana E - How Great Thou Art.

We need to step out of the boat in faith, just as Peter did. And, even if we start to sink like a rock, we'll all end up back in the boat together because we can always count on the help of our Savior, and on the love and support of our church community.

And thanks be to the God of love for that and Amen.