

Getting out of the boat
Matthew 14:22-33

Anne-Marie Jeffery
August 13, 2017

My first time on a sail boat, the first thing the skipper told me was that my main job was to stay on the boat. The second thing he told me that I needed to know was to stay on the boat and the third thing ... stay on the boat. Boats are meant to be stayed on as long as they aren't sinking. At times, it is not as easy as you might think. If there is a good wind, and the deck is wet and the boat is keeled over to the side, you'd better hang on to anything you can find. Sometimes you hang on to the boat even when the part of the boat you are hanging on to is underwater.

Now Peter has been a fisherman for all his life. Surely, he must have known the "stay on the boat rule" and yet in our gospel story, Peter gets off the boat. He doesn't fall off the boat. He asks Jesus if he can go out to him. He chooses to leave the relative safety of the boat. And it is not calm water that Peter is going into. They are in the middle of a storm with strong winds and waves.

Why does Peter get off the boat? Well he wanted to get to Jesus. Jesus had been away from the disciples that night. He had finally been to take a break. He had recently learned of the death of his cousin John the Baptist and had tried to take a break before but the crowds keep following him and finding him. But this time, he throws the disciples into a boat and goes off by himself to pray and hopefully to rest.

There is no rest for the disciples, because they encounter a storm that is so bad that they are not able to cross the lake which at the most 7 miles wide. They are battered by the storm for many hours. And then in the early morning, Jesus comes to them walking across the troubled sea in the midst of the storm. The disciples are terrified and think it is a ghost, but then Jesus speaks and says – Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid.

The disciples must have been exhausted and terrified by the storm and to see Jesus, their beloved teacher coming to them in this amazing way, must have been a great comfort. And Peter wants to be with Jesus.

- Perhaps he just wants to be near him after such a night.
- Perhaps, he knows he will be safest with Jesus.
- Perhaps he wants to stand with Jesus without the protection of the boat.

So, Peter asks if he can come to Jesus and Jesus says – Come. As I think about how Peter leaves the boat to be with Jesus in the midst if the storm, I wonder about how each of us is called to leave our boats and stand with Jesus in the midst of the storm.

In many ways, we all have our boats that protect us from the storms of life. I think the place we live is one of those boats. Our houses protect us from the elements. They keep us safe and a place to live our lives. In many ways, our jobs are a boat that protect us. Maybe even a certain group of friends could be considered a kind of boat

that we are in. This church building is a kind of boat that provides us a place to worship, but also protects us.

And yet when we see Jesus in the midst of the storm and the high waves, we realize that we need to be with him and leave the protection of whatever boat we are on to stand with him.

Think about Jesus standing with those who are hungry or those who are in prison or those who are afraid of being deported. Think about Jesus standing with the person in hospital undergoing treatment or waiting for surgery. Think about where else Jesus might be as he stands in the various kinds of storms.

How are we being called to leave the safety of our respective boats to stand with Jesus? Leaving our boats requires great trust in Jesus and a longing to be with Jesus who we know is with all those in great need and in trouble. As followers of Jesus, we go out into the storms because Jesus is in the storms and Jesus has work for us in a storm.

We've got lots of storms going on right here in this country including what has been going on this weekend in Charlottesville, VA with the white supremacist protest at the University of Virginia and those who responded. People have died. Will we stay in our boat in New Jersey far away from the horror or will we find something to do – something to make a difference, something to push back against hate, bigotry and violence?

Now it is not easy. It is not easy to get out of the boat. And getting out of the boat is not smooth sailing. Peter got those first few steps in, but then he starts to notice the strong wind and he starts to flail, but Jesus comes and grabs his hand and pulls him up. As you get out of the boat, remember that Jesus will pick you up when things get rough. Those steps out of the boat are difficult.

I tried paddle boarding this summer - it is when you stand on a surf board and paddle—the closest I may come to walking on water. I remember seeing some friends doing on Facebook and thinking how wonderful and peaceful that looks. And so I tried it. When I stood up on that board, I did well for a couple of seconds and then I started shaking. My instructor told me to calm down and I tried but I couldn't. Finally I said I would just go into the water because there I knew I would be safe. And so I did, and after I brief rest, I got back up and tried again and it was much better. It is not easy to get out of the boat and walk on water. It may involve sinking or shaking or falling off. But when Jesus is there ready to pick us up so we can go forward.

What kind of boat is Jesus calling you to get out of? Is it the leaving the boat of being home on Monday evening to serve at the St. Peter's food pantry? Is it leaving the boat of having Sunday afternoon to yourself, to go on a youth group outing? Is it leaving the boat of only coming to St. Peter's when you are in Perth Amboy to walk around the neighborhood or participate in community activities?

Following Jesus is not safe. Following Jesus means getting out of the boat knowing that you may get tossed about. Pray about how you are being called out of whatever boat you are in and know that Jesus will be there as you step out and join Jesus in his work.