

Will you get out of the boat?  
Matthew 14:22-33

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One of the first things I was told when I first got on a sailboat was to stay on the boat. That is the No. 1 rule. Being a good swimmer, I asked if someone else fell off should I jump in and get them. No - was the reply. Stay on the boat. If someone else goes overboard you sound the alarm and throw them the life preserver kept on deck. The disciple, Peter, in this morning's gospel did not get this memo to stay on the boat. Perhaps they had different rules back then. In our gospel this morning, Peter gets out of the boat. What I found myself paying attention to is that Peter gets out of the boat in the middle of a bad storm. This past Tuesday, Tropical Storm Isaias passed through our area leaving many without power. After watching boats being tossed about on the Raritan Bay by the tropical storm winds and at least a couple breaking free and being thrown up on shore, I am amazed that Peter got out of the boat.

This was not a mild storm. The gospels says the boat was being battered by the waves. I took a look at some of the images of Jesus walking on water and many of them have the sea looking sort of calm, but that's not what we hear in our gospel. There is rocking and the boat is being thrown up and down. There are most likely white caps on the waves. In the midst of this, Jesus appears and the storm doesn't stop. When Peter figures out that it is Jesus, he asks to come to him and Jesus says come. Peter gets out of a boat that is being thrown around by the sea. He starts walking on the water until he notices how strong the wind is and starts to sink. Immediately – hear that – immediately Jesus reaches out and catches him. They get in the boat. It is only then that the storm subsides.

Why does Peter get out of the boat? Does he want to try out walking on water as Jesus is doing? Does he want to be close to Jesus in the middle of the storm? Does he think he will be safer with Jesus? We don't know and maybe we don't need to know. What we know is that Peter getting out of the boat has something to do with Jesus.

I began to think about the boats we find ourselves in as we weather the various storms of life. One boat could be our homes in the midst of this coronavirus pandemic. As we are tossed about, our homes do provide some safety. In the worst of the pandemic, we only left home for food and emergencies. However, some people left their homes to serve at our food pantry. It was a risk and we had two scares when people in the pantry had possibly been exposed to coronavirus. We worried after those scares that the volunteers would not come back, but they did. Why did they get out of their boat? Did it have something to do with Jesus?

After the killing of George Floyd, thousands upon thousands took to the streets to protest this injustice. Why did they leave the safety of their homes? Why did they come even though the protests drew others who wanted to start violence? Did it have something to do with their relationship with Jesus and Jesus' call to stand up for justice and respect the dignity of every human being? I suspect for many it did.

That's what happens when you are in relationship with Jesus. You find yourself stepping out of whatever boat you are in which provides some safety in the winds of this world. You step out to be with him and to do his work. And yes, often when you step out and start walking and then realize what you done, you start to sink. But Jesus is right there, reaching for you and picking you up. I remember being in seminary after having left my job and thinking what have I done? I heard others say the same. Listen carefully to stories of people who have left their jobs to start a non-profit to help people, or those who moved their families to be missionaries in a foreign country or who started an organization to help the homeless and you'll hear those moments of – I'm sinking. What have I done! But you will also hear the stories of how Jesus was there.

We step out of the boat for Jesus in big ways and small ways. Sometimes we leave our jobs or pack up our family and move. Sometimes we speak up for those who have no voice. Sometimes we go to a place that scares us. We go because Jesus is there. We go to do his work. We go because Jesus is tugging at our hearts. And when we start to sink know that Jesus is there. Immediately! Know that Jesus understands that our faith waivers and is there anyway.

In the announcements today, you will see there is a paragraph describing the discussion the vestry has been having about how we can address racism as a community. At the end, the vestry suggests that the congregation to read an article written by Senator John Lewis before he died. It is a NY Times op ed piece published on July 30 called "Together, you can redeem the soul of this nation."

John Lewis wrote "Though I may not be here with you, I urge you to answer the highest calling of your heart and stand up for what you truly believe. In my life I have done all I can to demonstrate that the way of peace, the way of love and nonviolence is the more excellent way. Now it is your turn to let freedom ring."<sup>1</sup> While Senator Lewis doesn't mention Jesus, it sure does sound like how Jesus might invite us to get out of our boats.

Listen to see how you are being invited to get out of your boat. Pray for the strength to step out of the boat even as the storm rages. And know that Jesus is with us in the storm every step of the way.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/30/opinion/john-lewis-civil-rights-america.html>