

Good morning or good whatever time you are you are reading this. This is a Reader's Digest version of last Sunday's sermon.

What is something in your life personally or something that you see around you that is so important that you would literally try to work on water for it? For some of you this may be something that you are facing right now. For others it may be something that you have faced in the past. And for others it may be something you have been contemplating for a period.

This message will come to you in three parts.

The first part is to put into place some basic concepts so that the message itself can be better received.

The second part will be to share some stories that I received from people in response to that question: what is something so important that you would literally try to walk on water to achieve?

And the last part will be another story that hopefully is something that we can rally around and be united in our faith journey.

Before we get started, I want to point out that there is a whole lot of research that I did that is not going to make it onto this page. If you would like to have a more in-depth conversation about this, I would be very happy to do that. We will look at things at a rapid clip here.

Many of you will not have heard of Bill Plotkin. He is an echo therapist and spiritualist from the Colorado area and had a major awakening during his career that caused him to change directions in the way he merged his counseling practice and his faith.

In answering this question, we are asking today in his own way, he says that beyond the everyday skills that we will need to embark on a journey that transforms our lives – there is something deeper, more foundational that we need. He writes:

Even more important are the spiritual and psychological skills. You will need to know what to do when you lose heart, when you feel more deeply than you thought possible, when you want to run, when you need to let go of what is dear to you but holds you back, when you get stuck, when you suddenly break through. You might need to know how to pray and to whom or what to pray, how

to obtain help from spiritual allies, and how to access strength and courage during times of danger or difficulty or the absence of faith.

So that is the first bit. But let's go deeper.

From our bible comes this revelation from **Victoria Loorz**, Pastor, and Eco-Spiritual Director. She gives us this insight into the use of the word LOGOs. It is a word that is about 2500 years old, one that first appeared about six hundred years before it was attributed to Jesus of Nazareth. The insight is this – that all things are one – that the **uni-verse** – is where all things find a way to work in harmony.

The logos – the search for it is not about searching for a truth that lies above all others so much as for the truth that is found through observing and being part of the harmonious working together of all things.

So, for us today – the lesson is found here: In emulating the relationship between Jesus and his disciples, in following his teachings, in trusting the peace that Jesus passes to us which compels us to trust in the movement of the Spirit, the storms of life are calmed.

It is at this moment for that I will also add that in a commentary from Lutheran seminary in the United States, we are offered the following the following teaching: *It is only in getting to the depths of a crisis, either our own or one that we are witnessing, that we can truly experience the divine.*

Please note that I am not saying that you must be in crisis personally to experience the divine. I am saying however that ignoring crisis around us, even if we are not personally in crisis, will prevent us from achieving our full God-given potential.

I put today's question out to my people on Facebook. And there are three stories that I would like to share with you that will help us I hope to get to a place where we understand the power of the presence of Jesus in our life. Like everything with parables, the stories will mean different things to different people. You may find that they speak to you differently depending on when you read them even. And so, before we get into them, I would like to add one final commentary about our passage today.

Another part today's passage is that Jesus is so committed to his message and his relationship to his disciples that he put his own life at risk to help them. You can almost imagine in everyday terms that if Peter and Jesus did

meet somewhere in the stormy waters, Jesus would have whispered to him in his ear to breathe and to relax to not be overcome by the waves. Think for a second about how much we know about how dangerous it is to try and save someone from drowning and not be pulled under ourselves. With this image in mind, we can appreciate the faith and solidarity that Jesus demonstrated in his commitment to his ministry and to his followers.

Here is the first story from my friend the reverend James Murray who comes from a long line of United Church ministers. He writes that back in the mid 1990s, when the United Church was facing massive budget cuts, ministers from across the country and dedicated lay people were called around a common table to delve into the crisis. And they were offered the very same passage that we read today for reflection and invited to hear Jesus call them by name each and every one of them to get out of the boat and faced the stormy waters. James writes that not one person around that table was able to fully go there. It is a cautionary tale about bypassing the depth of a crisis because of fear and doubt.

Here is the second story from a longtime friend of mine who shared a story that I knew quite well. This person had made every effort to achieve their goals. Years of struggle and thousands of dollars invested. This person fell short of their goal. This story is a cautionary tale about the perils of attaching our own desires to answering a call. And the cautionary tale about how hard we can be on ourselves when we fail as if it would only take just a little more effort, just a little more money, just a little more faith. No, we are not called to be “successful.” We are called to be faithful and to support each other as we expend energy and effort following the path.

The third story comes to me from a high school and college friend who now resides in the United States. He writes for a little-known publication called the TypeScript and is a lecturer of history at university. What makes him interesting is that during the days of Occupy Wall Street and the Bernie Sanders movement, he was on the front lines not as an organizer, but as a participant. He does this out of his sense of being a committed, practicing, progressive Jew. He writes that justice in all its forms is what he tries to walk on water for. And he mentions that above all his rabbi teaches loving kindness in the pursuit of justice. I asked him if I could quote him. He responded by saying “Um, but I'm kind of a nobody.” To which I responded, “Well that's kind of the point.”

Three stories and this is their trajectory: we ignore the depths of a crisis at our peril. We do great harm to ourselves if we blame ourselves for failing at working towards something that is important. We do not need to be so-called important people to make an important difference.

We have one final story to tell which is the third part of this sermon. The thought of the week says that the surest way to fail is to never try. Hopefully, you will find yourself anchored somewhere in this last story hearing the power of the commitment of Jesus to his people in his day and to us through the endurance of his ministry and teachings.

I never knew Enid Butler, but I met her in the Winnipeg Free Press on July the 29th as I read the testimony of her life.

Here are some selected passages from that article:

Enid Butler asked that there be no service after she died. Similarly, she might not have wanted the spotlight on her in a tribute story, but she'd be glad to see the organisations doing good in the community get some attention.

“Everything she got involved with she seemed to take to another level,” said her daughter, Jennifer Greek. “Eventually she was on the advisory group, the world council, she always seemed to have that drive in her... She always cared about what she was involved in. It became something that she needed to do. In our family home, being aware of what was happening in the world was critically important.”

Her other daughter Sue Wilton said, “my mom would always set this example: you keep going; If you come up against a challenge you just do what you can. She really was one of the most determined advocates who wouldn't win popularity contests. If she knew something was the right thing to say, she could get the point across. She was strong, determined, a force to be reckoned with period she was an advocate for what she believed. She would also listen. You can't achieve what my mom did without listening.” To which I would add... To God. You can't achieve what Enid achieved without listening to God... to God... to God.

My friends, no that in the depth of any crisis the spirit of Jesus desires to reach you, his teachings are there to help you, the Holy Spirit is there to encourage you. The surest way to fail is to never try.

Thanks be to God. **Amen**

Note for Matthew Passage for Sunday, August 13, 2023

There are two miracles that Jesus is said to have performed that remain so engrained in our culture that we still use them today in all kinds of situations:

- Turning water into wine – found only in the book of John.
- Walking on water – found in Mark, Matthew and John, but not in Luke.

It can be easy to lose sight of their core meaning when their use is so widespread. And it can be easy to ignore them for the very same reason.

Today, for our Gospel passage, we are reading the miracle of Jesus walking on the water.

And we are being invited to find meaning for ourselves in the struggle to make sense of this complex and riveting account of the relationship Jesus is said to have had with his disciples. Did it happen the way the bible says it did? Or is this the stuff of fantasy and conspiracy? Maybe it's some of both? Rev. Eric will say more about this in his message.

For now, we are being asked to consider the following points of interpretation as we listen to this well-known story.

- A primary focus of the story is how Jesus remains faithful to his disciples, especially during times of crisis.
- It is possible that the ancient Greek language describes a scene where Jesus stays above the stormy waters as he risked his life to reach his disciples who were clearly in distress. It would have seemed to them as if he walked on water – not a whole lot different than we might say that someone who is in a state of complete joy is “walking on air”.
- The term Son of God is used, perhaps, to refer to Jesus as being so in tune with the situation, including the raging sea, that one might say that his very being was of the same substance of creation itself – as in the divine LOGOS being in the person of Jesus, the word made flesh.

If this story is new to you, try to let it sink in and see what grabs hold of your heart and soul. If it is familiar to you, see if there is a detail of it that jumps out of you that, maybe, you never really paid attention to before. This kind of hearing is the beginning of being anchored in any storm.

Let's listen then to Matthew 14:22-33 from the New Revised Standard Version of the bible – updated edition:

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into a boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So, Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and, beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" 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. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church...

Thanks be to God. AMEN.