

AN INVITATION TO STEP OUT

8/9/20 ~ St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Encinitas, CA (*Livestreamed*)

Proper 14 (A): ~~Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28~~; Psalm 105:1-6, 16-22, 45b; Romans 10:5-15; Matthew 14:22-33

I have a feeling I've already told you about the dream I had where I learned to walk on water. But it's always the first thing that comes to mind when I read this morning's gospel passage, so, hopefully, it bears repeating. In my dream, there had been a flood in my hometown, and my mom's bar is left with a foot, or so, of water covering the floors. While we're bailing out the water, this Rastafarian man walks in, and, before I know it, he's teaching me to walk on water.

I've turned that dream over and over in my mind for the past couple of decades. I think God was communicating several important things to me in that imagery. Some, of which, I've figured out; others I'm still discovering. As I considered the dream in relation to today's gospel, I was struck by the similarities.

The first similarity is the presence of water and the symbolism it represents. We often think of water as nurturing, life-giving and something that sustains us. But water can also be destructive, as in a flood. In the ancient Hebrew texts, the imagery of water was often used in opposition to God's creativity.

It is only God who can calm the waters and part the seas. So, in this passage from Matthew, part of what's going on is that Jesus is claiming his divinity by asserting his power over water. He further establishes his divinity with the verbal proclamation of "It is I."

The disciples call out, "It's a ghost!", but Jesus responds, "It is I," which is more closely translated as "I am". Remember those words from Hebrew Scriptures? The people ask what God's name is, and God responds, "I am that I am." God is the great "I am".

Another similarity between my dream and this biblical story is that a trusting relationship is the basis for the call to action. In my dream, the Rastafarian man was willing to work alongside me, bailing water with us, as he learns more about me and my life, so that when he offers to teach me to walk on water, I implicitly trust him. And he was such a patient and re-assuring guide. He instructed me to be very intentional; to stay in the moment, and simply put one foot in front of the other.

We know enough about Peter that we can assume he was not going to attempt walking on water of his own volition, but because he wants to be as close to Jesus as possible, and because he trusts Jesus, Peter is willing to give it a try. We are much more likely to succeed if we know someone we trust thinks we can do it.

A third similarity is that failing is part of the learning. Each time I sunk down through the water in my dream, my guide added further clarification. He instructed me, that if I looked too far out on the horizon, I would sink. If I looked down too close to my feet, I would sink. He encouraged me to try out these subtle differences, because in sinking...in failing...I was being prepared for how not to sink.

In the Gospel passage, Peter isn't successful either. But he's willing to try; so when Peter starts to sink and cries out, "Lord, save me!", Jesus reaches out his hand

and catches him. I imagine Jesus saying the next line with a loving grin: “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”, and then grabbing Peter and hugging him closely.

The fourth similarity—and the one that stands out most to me today—is the invitation itself. In my dream, my guide asks me, “Do you want to learn to walk on water?” He doesn’t show up and say, “you’re going to walk on water today.” He establishes a relationship, builds trust, assures me my mistakes are part of my preparation, and in the process, invites me into this thing I’d never even contemplated trying before.

The reason this has my attention is because Peter, who thinks of himself as lesser than Jesus—in terms of Jesus is the teacher and Peter the student—Peter says, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you.” But Jesus doesn’t command him by saying “Just do it!” Instead Jesus turns Peter’s request for a command into an invitation. As Jesus so often does, he gently invites each one of us into new life by saying, “Come. Come be with me.”

After I had much of this sermon written, I came across an essay by Bishop Mariann Budde. She’s the Episcopal Bishop in the DC area who spoke out against an Episcopal church being used for a photo op instead of a place to come for prayer. In her writing, she talked about how she didn’t really feel brave that day, she simply felt it was necessary to speak on behalf of all those who were being brave—out there peacefully protesting that Black Lives Matter. She explains that in looking back, she sees that she had gone through a long period of preparation to get to that moment.

Bishop Budde concluded her essay with this:

Wherever we are in the continuum of change, there are ways to be faithful to that vision, to be part of the coalition of the faithful. Whether this is the turning point or yet another season of preparation, whether we are successful today or whether we fail, we can do what God asks of us, which is our part—faithfully, imperfectly, in an ever-changing world in which we, too, are being changed.

Journeying on this path of discipleship, means our faith will continuously require us to step out of our comfort zone and try to do what looks impossible. That can be an intimidating prospect, until we realize each time is an invitation to be closer to Christ. In that one word: “Come,” we are reassured that Christ will be our companion, and that our failing will be part of our preparation.

-AMEN

Collect of the Day

Grant to us, Lord, we pray, the spirit to think and do always those things that are right, that we, who cannot exist without you, may by you be enabled to live according to your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28

Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived as an alien, the land of Canaan. This is the story of the family of Jacob.

Joseph, being seventeen years old, was shepherding the flock with his brothers; he was a helper to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him.

Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." He answered, "Here I am." So he said to him, "Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock; and bring word back to me." So he sent him from the valley of Hebron.

He came to Shechem, and a man found him wandering in the fields; the man asked him, "What are you seeking?" "I am seeking my brothers," he said; "tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock." The man said, "They have gone away, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers, and found them at Dothan. They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to them, they conspired to kill him. They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams." But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but lay no hand on him" —that he might rescue him out of their hand and restore him to his father. So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves that he wore; and they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

Then they sat down to eat; and looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels carrying gum, balm, and resin, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers agreed. When some Midianite traders passed by, they drew Joseph up, lifting him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt.

Psalm 105, 1-6, 16-22, 45b

1 Give thanks to the LORD and call upon his Name; *
make known his deeds among the peoples.

- 2 Sing to him, sing praises to him, *
and speak of all his marvelous works.
- 3 Glory in his holy Name; *
let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.
- 4 Search for the LORD and his strength; *
continually seek his face.
- 5 Remember the marvels he has done, *
his wonders and the judgments of his mouth,
- 6 O offspring of Abraham his servant, *
O children of Jacob his chosen.
- 16 Then he called for a famine in the land *
and destroyed the supply of bread.
- 17 He sent a man before them, *
Joseph, who was sold as a slave.
- 18 They bruised his feet in fetters; *
his neck they put in an iron collar.
- 19 Until his prediction came to pass, *
the word of the LORD tested him.
- 20 The king sent and released him; *
the ruler of the peoples set him free.
- 21 He set him as a master over his household,
as a ruler over all his possessions,
- 22 To instruct his princes according to his will
and to teach his elders wisdom.
- 45 Hallelujah!

Romans 10:5-15

Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that “the person who does these things will live by them.” But the righteousness that comes from faith says, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) “or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? “The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is

justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. The scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

Matthew 14:22-33

Jesus made the disciples get into the 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.”