

**FAITH IN TIMES OF TURMOIL  
TURN YOUR EYES UPON JESUS  
MATTHEW 14:22-33; ACTS 3:1-10  
JANUARY 22, 2023**

A few years ago a group of us went on a trip to Rockport to go bay fishing.

There were four boats and enough guys to fill them all.

But we ended up with high winds and rough waves.

It was intimidating.

Usually we'll go all over the bay, including to the far side.

But not this time.

We stayed closer in,

fishing behind the shelter of islands as much as possible.

Even then it was challenging to stand in a boat.

I got quite a workout.

One of the guys in one of the boats was thrown into the air,

landed off balance, and ended up getting hurt.

This was not what we had planned on.

Fishing is supposed to be a noncontact sport.

But those rough waters were dangerous!

And exhausting.

Jesus and his disciples encountered rough waters,

in more ways than one.

Jesus' friends were hungry,

and so picked some grain to eat,

but the religious leaders were upset they'd "worked" on the Sabbath. (Mt.12:1-2)

Then they put Jesus under a microscope about him healing on the Sabbath. (Mt.12:10f)

When he cast out a demon,

the religious leaders accused him of being demon possessed. (Mt.12:22-24)

He'd worked miracles to heal the sick and broken.

He'd faithfully taught the truth of God.

But some people could not see or hear the truth about Jesus,

hung up on the fact that they knew his human side so well,

even the names of his mother and brothers and sisters.

They were offended by him. (Mt.13:55-57)

Then they got word that John the Baptist had been beheaded. (Mt.14:1-12)

That would be a threat to Jesus and his followers,

since they'd been associated with John's ministry.

At that point, Matthew reports,

"When Jesus heard what had happened,

he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place." (Mt.14:13)

But there was no rest for the weary.

Crowds came to him,

he healed their sick,

and then fed them by a miraculous multiplication of a few loaves and fishes. (Mt.14:14-21)

Once again, he tried to get away for a little rest for body and soul.

"Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side,

while he dismissed the crowd.

After he had dismissed them,

he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray." (Mt.14:22-23)

He had been through plenty of rough waters.

He's hoping for just a little rest,

a little time alone with the Father.

**MATTHEW 14:24-26**

They knew Jesus was someone special,

healing and casting out demons and such,  
and had wonderful insights about the kingdom of God.  
Maybe he's even messiah.

But walking on water?

That was not part of the package.

They were terrified, and rightfully so!

**MATTHEW 14:27-29**

Don't be afraid.

That most frequent of commands in the Bible.

Do not be afraid.

Peter wants reassurance it's really Jesus.

If it's really you, invite me to come water-walking with you.

Wow. I'm not sure that's what I would have asked for.

How about:

If it's really you, calm this storm.

When I'm experiencing rough waters in life,  
that's my natural go-to request.

Calm the waters, Lord!

Send the money we need.

Stop the opposition.

Solve this or that problem.

Fix the situation.

Eliminate the turmoil.

Peter went a different direction.

Not "calm the waters."

Let me walk with you ON the water, in the midst of the waves.

And so Jesus did just that.

He invited Peter with a word, "Come."

And Peter did it.

Crazy!

Imagine sitting in a boat, getting that invitation,  
swinging your leg over the side of the boat,  
and finding yourself walking on the water!

He's out of the boat, walking on the water, headed toward Jesus.

But....

**MATTHEW 14:30-33**

Did you see what happened?

Look again at verse 30.

"When he saw the wind, he was afraid..."

Saw the wind.

Just before that he was headed toward Jesus.

Then he turned his eyes on the wind and waves.

Fear set in.

He began to sink.

But when he turned his attention back to Jesus,

the story turned around.

"He cried out, 'Save me.'"

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him."

Isn't that just like Jesus?

He didn't force himself onto Peter.

He waited for an invitation.

He never intrudes where he's not needed or wanted,

but is always responsive to in invitation.

He's never early, never late, always right on time.

Peter and Jesus stepped back into the boat,

the wind stopped,

and all the fishermen “worshiped him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God.’”

Notice that.

They worshiped him.

Every good Jew knew... and knows... that

worshiping something or someone other than the one true God  
is the worst sort of blasphemy.

It was punishable by death.

But they did it.

And Jesus accepted their worship.

Don't let anyone tell you the idea that Jesus was God in the flesh

was an idea developed only later by the church.

That idea was firmly in place in that boat.

And if someone wants to suggest the story was invented by Matthew,  
well, Matthew wrote in the first century.

So the idea that Jesus was God in the flesh was already present then.

It wasn't a later invention of the church.

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Whenever I read this story,

I'm reminded of John Ortberg's book title:

*If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat.*

Ortberg's main point is the importance of taking risks for the sake of the gospel.

And Peter took a risk!

If any of his friends giggled and whispered about him sinking,  
all he had to say was,

“I didn't see you get out of the boat at all.”

Throughout the Gospels Peter is

the most impetuous, the most outspoken, the least hesitant.

And so he is in this episode.

This is very much in character for him.

But Peter's natural boldness is not the main point of the story.

Because even bold Peter slid into fear.

No, the point of the story, at least Peter's place in the story is

where you keep your eyes focused.

What are *you* looking at?

Everybody experiences the wind and waves at points in their lives.

For some, those points may seem like the largest part of life.

For people of modest incomes, today's economy is a serious storm.

Inflation is eating away the purchasing power of limited dollars,  
to the point that some people are having a hard time making ends meet.

A sagging stock market is impacting the investments many people made  
for their retirement.

And they're wondering what that retirement is going to look like.

Parents are concerned for their children and grandparents for their grandchildren,  
worrying about school shootings,

will they regain the academic ground they lost during the COVID lockdowns,  
and wondering what they are being taught about race and gender,  
especially when they are young and impressionable.

For people deeply invested in the life of the church,

there is great concern about turmoil within the United Methodist Church,  
wondering where Northwest Hills will end up,  
and what the church will be like after I retire.

And, of course, there are the winds and waves that are not big social issues,  
but are experienced in *every individual* life.

Financial struggles, relationship issues, job challenges,  
health issues, family stuff, and more.

*Everybody* experiences the wind and waves.

*In the midst* of the turmoil, what are you *looking* at?

If you're reading the newspaper or watching the news on television,  
you are seeing what *they choose* for you to see.

And what do they choose?

Those things that will get the most attention,  
which tends to be conflict, blood, and outrage.

And those things that fit their ideological bent,  
whether it's left or right.

When was the last time you saw a news report about  
a church like Northwest Hills supporting a ministry like  
Abundant Life Center or Under the Bridge  
with money or volunteers?

Or someone adopts a dog from a shelter.

How many babies were born whole and healthy?

How many people did NOT get COVID?

How many people slept well last night, not burglarized or assaulted?

It doesn't get reported.

At best it is a very brief "human interest" story  
just before the news program ends.

What we get fed is an unbalanced view of the world.

Oh, it's not that bad things don't happen.

They certainly do happen.

But that's not all that happens.

It's not even MOST of what happens.

It's just all that gets reported.

In the midst of turmoil, where are you looking?

Today more than ever, people are on social media.

Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, Instagram, news sites  
that fit our preconceived ideas, and all the rest.

And what gets the most attention on social media?

The loudest voices, the most extreme views,  
the greatest hysteria, the most outrageous things.

That gets the views, likes, comments, retweets and shares.

And you and I feed that social media monster,  
because we are the ones viewing, liking, retweeting and sharing.  
And the algorithms will send us more of what we interact with.

We can get addicted to bad news, hysteria and outrage,  
just like someone can get addicted to pornography.

There are things built into news media and social media to which we can get hooked,  
because of what it does to our brains.

And like any other addiction,  
we start feeling the need for more.

And so it gets worse over time.

So what can we do?

I used to be hooked on talk radio.

It was almost automatic that when I got in the car I turned on talk radio.

And I found that, the more I listened, the most cynical I became.

I didn't like the way I was feeling and thinking.

I had to go to periodic fasting from talk radio!

It helped to find something else to listen to in the car,  
something that truly interested me.

Christian music, worship music, audio books!

And one day I realized I'd been set free,  
and was better off for it.

What can you do?

First, you've got to figure out

what is feeding your anxiety, fear, anger, or simply unsettledness in this time of turmoil.

Be honest with yourself about it,  
 even if it's your favorite news show that feeds your bias,  
 like Fox News, MSNBC, or whatever.

Ask God to make it clear to you.

Second, identify those times and places  
 where you are most likely to turn your attention to that unhelpful thing.

Third, figure out what you can replace it with.

Something positive.

Something to build your faith.

Something that can give you greater peace.

Perhaps reading through the four Gospels.

Or spending time with your kids.

Pay attention to what you're looking at.

I want to read one more episode from the Bible that makes this point.

### **ACTS 3:1-10**

Did you notice what Peter said?

He said to him, "Look at us."

Where are your eyes?

What are you looking at?

Are you focused on your disability?

You've been disabled from birth.

And you've had to live off handouts all your life because of it.

So it's understandable.

But... look at US.

And, in the name of Jesus, he was healed.

With his eyes on followers of Jesus,  
 he was healed.

With Peter's eyes on Jesus,  
 he walked on water.

And with your eyes on Jesus,  
 you can walk through these times of turmoil... in peace.

Open your hymnal to #349.

Let's sing it together as a prayer:

"Turn your eyes upon Jesus

Look full in his wonderful face

And the things of earth will grow strangely dim

In the light of his glory and grace."

As you turn your eyes upon Jesus,  
 the things of earth will grow strangely dim.

The wind and the waves are no longer the only thing.

He comes to us in the midst of the turmoil.

He reaches out his hand to you.

And he will enable you to walk on water.