



## Main Street Congregational Church

145 Main Street, Amesbury MA 01913

### February 16, 2025 - Jesus Culture

(Matthew 14:22-34)

“She cheated”, the careful congregant might say. That part of our sacred story we just heard - it is from Matthew and we are working our way through Luke. Yup, I did. With deliberation and intention I veered from the prescribed reading for this week. Circumstances made that seem like the really right thing to do. Circumstances of a national climate that is unlike anything most of us have ever experienced. There is a tension and energy that is making day to day life turbulent. It is around us and active regardless of our pleasure or disappointment in the presidential election results and initial executive actions. Tension and energy that makes day to day life turbulent, and right now hyper turbulent. So this week I choose a part of our sacred story that speaks directly about turbulence.

It wasn't hard to find a passage like that. It was harder to narrow it down. Our sacred story is full of unsettled situations and challenging conditions. It seems that unsettled and challenging is normative of being alive. What our sacred story does, offers, emphasizes is the available and active presence of the Holy in the midst of whatever is and the conviction that God's presence can shape the way we react and respond to the knots in our stomachs and tears in our hearts. Our sacred story tells us about our God who has agency, agency that is fueled by love and compassion. Our sacred story gives us the life, way, wonder of Jesus who walks with us and models for us how we humans can be fueled by love and compassion and let that shape our lives.

Jesus' story is inundated with declarations of “don't be afraid”. It begins with the “fear not's” of Luke's birth story - “fear not, for behold I bring you glad tidings of great joy” and they carry through his life, death and resurrection. Don't be afraid. Yup, the world is going to come at you and your feet will get knocked out from under you, the best laid plans and dreams of our hearts will crumble. We don't know or control what is to come. In that very vulnerable situation, don't be afraid. Don't be afraid because God is present and pouring out love and love wins. God is doing the holy, sacred part and is with us in it all but it is left to us to decide if we will let that matter. We can opt to pay attention, recognize and respond or not. Regardless of our response God continues being a God of life and love. Jesus lived in an oppressive, violent empire and in those hostile conditions he chose to trust, practice and share God's way of love and life. That's what Jesus did. That's what those who worshipped in the catacombs did. They were threatened by the powers and found ways to gather around Jesus' way and be love in the broken world. That's what Jesus invites his followers to do. To recognize him in our midst and let that presence give us courage to love and have hope and be active in sharing the gospel.

Recognize him. Remember that he is present. So basic and yet complicated. The disciples had a hard time and they had been living and working with him. They knew the twinkle in his eye and the furrow in his brow. They knew his gait and the ways his hair got tussled about in the wind. It should have been easy to recognize him right out there on the water but they

thought it was a ghost and that scared them. To their fear Jesus responds - Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid". Peter's attention is sparked. It could be Jesus or it might not be - so he engages in conversation - if it's you, command me to come to you. It is Jesus and Jesus says come. And he does and it's amazing, he is moving closer to the love, the hope that is right there and accessible to him. He is going to latch on to that and embrace "don't be afraid". Except then the wind kicks up and that knot in his stomach becomes pronounced and he seems to forget the option of clinging to Jesus and his way and it all seems to be falling apart and he starts sinking into the water. Then he remembers who is with him and he cries out for Jesus and Jesus reaches out his hand and catches him.

It seems this story might have something to say to us today. The seas are stormy and in the midst of that turbulence Jesus is seeking to be with us - and us? What will we do?

Jesus: o Joan - wait, o Peter....?

Peter: (no response)

Jesus: Peter?

Peter: (no response)

Jesus: Is it as bad as that?

Peter: Mm-hm.

Jesus: But you have changed your clothes - you are dry now

Peter: It wasn't getting wet that bothered me - it was making such a fool of myself. Why did you let me do it? Surely you knew what would happen?

Jesus: What have the others said?

Peter: They have been quite good actually - apart from Andrew who keeps making snide comments about webbed feet.

Jesus: Well, your shoulders are broad enough

Peter: It's not my feet or my shoulders Jesus, it's my head. Whatever made me try it?

Jesus: Well, you tell me... Why did you try it?

Peter: Oh, you know what I am like. I have these what I think are incredible ideas. And I have a fear of missing out so I always try to be in on the action. And you made it look so easy. We all thought it was a ghost at first. You know, stomping grapes and making wine - well, that's one thing but walking on the water? That's out of the question. It had to be a ghost coming over to us. Then we realized it wasn't a ghost. It was you. You! Jesus, you were walking on the sea

Jesus: And you wanted to do the same

Peter: Yup. I did.

Jesus: Why Peter?

Peter: A bit of me wanted to see if I could do it.

Jesus: And a bit of you wanted to show off..was that it?

Peter: Yup. That's right. But I was doing at the beginning. I started out ok, didn't I?

Jesus: Yes, you did. For about 5 yards. And then?

Peter: After that I don't remember a thing until I woke up in the boat with James pulling seaweed out of my mouth. What happened anyway?

Jesus: I'll tell you what happened. You stopped looking at me and started looking at the waves.

Peter: What else could I do. Hardly anything. There were big swells and scary waves.

Jesus: Remember Lot's wife Peter?

Peter: Did she try walking on water?

Jesus: No - but like you, instead of looking ahead, she began to fascinated by the danger all around her - and she ended up being destroyed

Peter: I am not sure what you are saying - whats your point?

Jesus: Peter, I have asked you to follow me. And you can only follow me if you watch what I am doing and see where I am going.

Wherever I am, there will be trouble and opposition. There will be waves - of your making and others made by those who react against you. There will be threats all around you and there will be distractions inside you...doubt...uncertainty...and all the old temptations you thought you had left behind. If you keep looking at those things you will go under. If you keep your eye on me, you'll stay afloat.

Peter: Is it as easy as that?

Jesus: No Peter, it's not as easy as that. It's not easy at all.

Peter: Do you ever feel like giving up? Like its too much? Like there is no hope?

Jesus: No

Peter: (after a moment) anything else?

Jesus: You are not on your own. Ever. Don't be afraid, my love is stronger than your fear.

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Note: Script adapted from Jesus and Peter by John Bell and Graham Maulle.

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