

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Stepping out in faith. I believe I've talked about that a time or two or thirty. When we read and think about the gospel you heard me read a moment or two ago, stepping out in faith is often the first thing that comes to mind. The second thing might be if we just have faith enough, we can do anything, conquer anything, bear anything, and so on. The third thing might be "keep your focus on Jesus" otherwise you're going to doubt, then sink like a stone. Or maybe sink like a rock is more appropriate since "Peter" means "rock."

So you may hear from some folks, just step out in faith, eyes on Jesus, with enough faith, you will walk through the storms of life and succeed. And of course the converse to that, that your faith must not be very strong if this happens, or that happens. Step out, take a risk. Out of curiosity, I did a Google search on the words "step out in faith", I got approximately 45 million responses in much less than a second. Get out of the box, get out of the boat, take a chance, take a risk, step out in faith, it's almost like the world has appropriated those phrases and through overuse and misuse make them nothing more than trite expressions.

Of course we as Lutheran Christians, as believers, as disciples are to take risks for the sake of the gospel, keeping our eyes and ears focused on Jesus, on his mission, on our mission as he has given it to us. Of course Jesus wants us to have faith, he's the author of our faith, our faith is a gift by the grace of God. If you remember what we've talked about the past few weeks, you remember that he told some guys to leave their nets and follow him, you remember he told you take up your cross and lose your life for his sake and in so doing find your life. You remember he is the one who is not in the tomb on that first Easter. You remember he's the one who calls you, you personally, you as a congregation, to leave your comfort zone, to follow him, learn from him, to believe in him, to love and worship him, to be together in community.

Community! That's something our gospel author, Matthew, seems to emphasize throughout his gospel. Community become congregation become church, the body of Christ, fellowship of believers who share all things together. Now I may or may not have shared with you that when it comes to the Apostle Peter, I really relate to him. No, I'm not an apostle, but like Peter, try to do the right thing, try to say the right thing, and end up with foot in mouth. Impetuous Peter, in my eyes a hero of the faith, who swung his legs over the boat following Jesus' command "Come" and started to walk on water to Jesus. I think of Peter's courage in just getting out of that boat, I think of his faith, after all here's Jesus walking on water, he's just fed 5,000 men in addition to women and children, to say nothing of the miracles that Peter has already witnessed Jesus doing. I think of Peter's faith, but I also think of his doubt, being distracted by the storm, faltering, then I relate even to Peter even more.

But then I also think of the rest of the disciples, rowing, trying to hold their own with the storm, a group doing their best under trying, terrible circumstances. Peter got

out of the boat, I understand that, I understand the urge to want to do something like that, to maybe prove something to yourself if for not other reason. But I find myself wondering why he got out of the boat.

The boat has been a symbol of the Christian church since the early days of the faith. In fact, the space you're in right now, is called the "nave", it is the Latin word for ship, it's where you assemble for worship. Now think of a large boat, a ship. It takes a lot of people working together to work, to run a ship, in Jesus' day and ever since, whether manning the oars, hoisting and lowering sails, steering the thing one way or another, running with the wind or running against the wind. All kinds of people, including some along for the ride, all kinds of personalities and agendas and who knows what else. Then there are problems, perhaps with the boat or ship, more likely perhaps with the crew, those who are working; some want to things their way, maybe go out alone, maybe there are some who want to run things and throw overboard those who don't go along with their ideas. There might be some who simply give up and go over the side, maybe they think they can walk to wherever they are heading.

But this ship, this boat we call the church, has one ultimate head, his name is Jesus. We are on his ship in this place, we are his ship in this place, a beautiful seaworthy ship, heading to a safe harbor. But along the way we face storms, winds, waves, the danger of running aground.

Our gospel this morning starts like this: "Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side." And there is a storm. Now you may not know that the Sea of Galilee is roughly 700 feet below sea level, the lowest freshwater lake on the planet, it's surrounded by hills and valleys and when the winds come, the storms are fierce, the winds pick up speed before they hit the lake.

Not making much headway, maybe half way across, between 3 and 6 in the morning, and Jesus comes walking toward them. It reminds me of these lines from Psalm 77:

"When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid; the very deep trembled. The clouds poured out water; the skies thundered; your arrows flashed on every side. The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind; your lightnings lit up the world; the earth trembled and shook. Your way was through the sea, your path, through the mighty waters; yet your footprints were unseen."

The disciples were alone, but not alone, Jesus came to them saying in response to their fear:

"Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." "It is I", intimations of deity, in the Greek, a God statement, "I am I am", do not be afraid.

Jesus and Peter get into the boat and the storm ends. The disciples worship Jesus saying "Truly you are the Son of God". Peter had doubts when distracted by the storm, the disciples will have doubts as well, they have faith and they have doubts. At the end of the book of Matthew we're told they see the resurrected Jesus, they worship him, but some doubted.

But the story doesn't end there. In their faith, in their doubt, Jesus sends them to make disciples, baptizing and teaching, and reminds them that he is with them to the end of the age. You and I on this boat, this ship, this church, here in this holy place, here in this nave, have experienced the storms of life, and we will again as long there is life within us. But we are not alone. And yes, we are called to step out in faith, but not to leave the boat, we are called to be in fellowship, in community, and together, captained and commanded by Jesus, we follow him, and he reminds us no matter the extent of the storm, that he is with us, it is him, do not be afraid.

AMEN