

# Wandering Heart: Rescue me from danger

Jesus and Peter walk on the Sea

Matthew 14:22-33  
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

Rev. Todd B. Freeman  
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First, a note of gratitude to the Rev. Gordon Edwards for preaching and helping lead worship in my absence last Sunday. He introduced the theme that we will be following throughout this season of Lent, guided by the resource material from A Sanctified Art. Entitled, "**Wandering Heart: Figuring out faith with Peter**", we will be focusing on "the life and faith of one of Jesus' most famous disciples.

In Peter, we see a person who is both steadfast and unsteady, a dear friend and a betrayer, a follower and a wanderer. Here's our point of connection. "**In Peter, we often see ourselves.** By following Peter's journey, we watch the story of Jesus unfold through the eyes of a very normal human trying to figure it all out—just like us. In this series, we want to affirm that **faith is a constant journey of steadfast pursuit, one that ebbs and flows...**" And for what is true for many of us, "We want to affirm that **wandering is exploration, not necessarily distance from God.** In fact, it's heartening to learn that Peter "keeps searching and yearning and loving, even after missteps or mistakes. Ultimately, **in Peter's story, we are reminded that God loves imperfect people—in fact, time and again, that's precisely who God claims and calls.**"

Therefore, during this season of Lent, we will look for ourselves Peter's story. "We will reflect on the stages of our own faith journeys as well as who and what has shaped us along the way...."

"Like many of us, Peter has a wandering heart. **His journey is not polished, or linear, or perfect, but he is always tethered to the love of God.**" And, not surprisingly, we find Jesus at each step along the way. Perhaps that is the main point of this story. The Sacred Presence of the Divine that is beyond, among, and within you is closer than every breath at each step along your way.

On this Sunday, we're taking a look at the fairly familiar story of Jesus walking on the storm-tossed sea to meet his disciples. It is important to note that it is Jesus himself who "made" them get in the boat and cross the sea. The primary focus in this sermon, however, among so many other important theological points being made by the gospel writer, is on Peter's encounter and experience. The resource material connects with the theme this way.

As a new disciple, perhaps Peter wants to prove himself. Boldly, in the middle of a storm, Peter steps out of the boat to join Jesus who is walking on top of the waves. He, too, walks on water until the wind shakes his trust and he begins to sink. **Many of us know what it feels like to be thrown off balance, to feel as if we're sinking.** Maybe this looks like doubt, unexpected change, too-busy seasons of life, devastating grief, or distance from God. In this story, **we empathize with the desperation Peter**

feels as he cries out [“Lord, save me”], and we pray for God to save us when we sink.

**Have you ever prayed that prayer?** We are being encouraged to consider the following.

**This is the reality of life and faith: we will inevitably face many emotional, relational, professional, physical, and global dangers.** The [point] for this week names the desperation we feel when these dangers are imminent. It also acknowledges all who may be offering this prayer as a desperate plea—all who are in need of rescue.

Instead of the typical focus on Peter as a person with doubting faith, “we recognize the bold courage required to take a leap of faith—or to willingly step into a storm. **We see doubt as a normal and important element in fostering a healthy spiritual life. We also see Jesus extending his hand, reminding us that God is with us in every storm.**”

While Peter’s danger was primarily physical in nature, sinking into raging waters, it is often experienced in our lives in additional ways. **Sometimes, fear and danger present themselves in the form of despair, or a feeling of hopelessness because of circumstances in life. Sometimes we need to be saved from ourselves, such as circumstances of our own making. And many of us need rescuing from psychological medical conditions, involving issues of mental health, or with the struggle of addiction.**

At times like these, I can think of no better prayer than, “**God, rescue me.**” That, by itself, is a statement of faith and an acknowledgment of our need for help. And notice, **Jesus responds with rescue, not shame or guilt.** In our darkest hours, we need to hear the words spoken by Jesus, who represents God in this story, “**Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid.**” Hope, courage, and perseverance are needed, yet are sometimes hard to come by. But I think that is what Peter and the disciples needed to hear, and I think it’s what we need to hear, as well.

The gospel writer Matthew wants his readers to know that even when disciples falter, and that includes each one of us, God continues to be present. **Jesus rescues Peter, and us as well, but not from experiencing the storms of life themselves, but by reminding us that God is always present with us in the midst of those storms.**

In the Bible, the sea, metaphorically, represented chaos, as in Genesis 1, to which God brings order. Therefore, take note that **it is Jesus (God) who approaches us in our chaos.** In our own journey of faith **we, like Peter, are people caught between faith and doubt, between courage and anxiety, between peace and fear.** Yet Peter, rather than representing some kind of failure, took the risk of getting out of the relative safety of the boat so that he could get closer to Jesus. **Is it not true that oftentimes it is in the storms of life that we draw closer to God?**

**We too, then, are called to take risks, even when the outcome isn’t certain. That is why we are called to step out of the boat, out of the relative safety of this sanctuary and into the stormy chaos of the world outside – where God awaits.** We do that every time we face and respond to the ignorance and prejudice and hatefulness that we encounter on an almost daily basis. We do that whenever we confront and respond to the very real issues – such as **bullying** – faced by those in our schools, this neighborhood, and beyond. I’m sure you can reflect upon other risks that you have taken in your life in stepping out in faith.

This biblical story is misinterpreted, however, with the common platitude, “If you just keep your eyes focused on Jesus, then the storms in life will disappear.” The message to us is NOT, “If we just had *enough* faith, we could overcome all our problems in spectacular, if not miraculous, ways.”

Faith is not being able to walk on water – only God can do that, and we’re not God – but daring to believe, in the face of all the evidence to the contrary, that God is with us in the midst of chaos. And since a boat, metaphorically, stood as a representation of the early Church, God’s Presence is made real in our community of faith as we make our way through any storm – in the board called College Hill.

To remind us of that take notice of the shape of our sanctuary ceiling. It actually has an architectural name – an inverted arc, the shape of the bottom of a boat.

So take heart. Let us not be afraid. And let us have the courage to step out of the boat. And **may we never be too proud or arrogant to recognize our need to be rescued from time to time.** Therefore, I’ll close by reading a poem entitled “Rescue Me” from resource contributor, the **Rev. Sarah Speed**, who also wrote most of the liturgy used in the bulletin today and throughout Lent.

### Rescue Me

*I'd rather not need rescue.  
I'd prefer a five-step plan  
and a quick-fix solution.  
I'd prefer stubborn insistence  
over honest vulnerability,  
because rescue requires  
asking for help.  
Rescue names  
the rising water.  
Rescue sees  
the tired, treading feet.  
Rescue feels  
the swell of the wind  
and the rain at a slant.  
But when the floor falls out  
and the world is on fire  
and my small hands  
cannot fix the hurt welling in me,  
the prayer that slips out  
is rescue  
rescue  
rescue me.*

Amen.

Resources:

A Sanctified Art, *Wandering Heart: Figuring out faith with Peter*, Lent 2024.  
*Feasting on the Gospels*