

On Wednesday I sat down and was starting to work on this week's service. My intention was to finish up 2 Peter. We had spent the last couple of week's reading through that scripture and I was planning on wrapping it up. But a couple of things happened early in the week that brought my attention back to the story of Jesus walking on water.

This scripture has been on my mind a lot over the past couple of months. I don't know if it is actually more prevalent or if I'm just looking for it. But, this week alone it has come up 5 different times. And I am not the one to start the discussion.

The last time was what made me decide to change the scripture lesson to today's reading. I was getting Wednesday ready for daycare and she went up to my bible and pulled out the bookmark. She does this frequently and places it somewhere else in my bible. So, I turn to where she put it and read one of the scriptures on those two pages.

This time she put it in the book of Matthew. As I was reading through the scripture I instantly went to Jesus walking on water. God is clearly putting this scripture out there for me. So, I took the hint and changed the service.

The first time that I was talking about this scripture this summer was with a friend of mine that is a church leader. He told me that this scripture has bothered him since before he started confirmation. The two of us are roughly the same age, so I wondered what could have influenced him that much for him to hold on to it over thirty-five years.

He told me that his pastor at the time told him that Jesus didn't really walk on water. His pastor had told him that Jesus knew where rocks were so that he could walk across the sea to the boat. Or they might have been next to a sandbar and he knew it was there to support him. And that had been bothering him all of his life.

I asked him why it bothered him so much. Was there something else in his sermon that really upset him? And he didn't know. He couldn't remember anything else about it, other than the minister talking about Jesus' miracle.

So I asked him which bothered him more, that the miracle happened, or how the miracle happened? He looked at me like a number of you are right now. After a minute he asked me why would it bother him that the miracle happened? And I followed with, "Why are you bothered by how the miracle happened?"

He had spent so much time being upset that someone told him that Jesus didn't walk on water, that he missed the rest of the sermon. All of this time later and he still couldn't talk about the message behind the story. He could only talk about Jesus walking on water and not on rocks or a sandbar.

So, let's talk about the rest of what is happening during and before this scripture reading. The story about Jesus walking on water is only in three of the four gospels. And in each gospel the story is told differently and happens at a different time.

In the book of John, this scripture happens after Jesus leaves Jerusalem following a Passover festival. He had just commanded a crippled man to pick up his bedding and leave the Hellenistic temple after the man asked Jesus to carry him into the water. People follow Jesus and his disciples heckling him and then listening to his message. The disciples realize that they are in a barren place far away from any resources and try to figure out how they can feed all of these people.

Mark, on the other hand, tells us that Jesus had just set out his disciples two by two to preach his word and to perform miracles. The disciples had all returned and were sharing what

had happened to them on the road, when a number of people started gathering around and listening to what they were saying. Like in John, they were in the middle of nowhere with nothing and had to decide how they were going to feed all of these people.

And now we have reached today's scripture reading. Matthew tells us that Jesus had just learned that John the Baptist had been murdered. Herod had him beheaded and John's followers gathered his body and buried him. Word had just reached Jesus and his disciples, so they went off to be alone and pray. But when their boat reached the shore, people were there asking Jesus questions. And while he spoke to them, the disciples again had to find food and a way to feed all of these people.

So we have three separate build ups to the event. Each event happens at a different time in Jesus' ministry and what happens in the story isn't even the same between the three scriptures. For example, Peter is only mentioned in Matthew's version of the miracle.

But what is the same is that in each version, it happens immediately after Jesus feeds the five thousand people listening to his message. The miracle of Jesus blessing the five loaves and two fish is the only miracle that is listed in all four gospels.

If we are supposed to be focused on the miracle about Jesus walking on water, why isn't it in all four gospels, and why is each story different? Maybe we are supposed to be focused more on the story.

Maybe that is where the lesson lies, in the story and not Jesus walking on water. By this point we already know that Jesus can perform miracles. He just fed five thousand people with five loaves and two fish. We know that he can heal the sick, the lame, the blind. We know that he knows all that God knows. He has proven time and time again that he is the Messiah. Do we need another blatant reminder this soon after the other miracle?

Something happened to me this week that made me realize that I needed to read this scripture this week. I needed to be reminded about this story, especially Matthew's version, more than I needed to talk about 2 Peter.

This week an old friend reached out to me. And yes, I know, I have a lot of friends. But, most of you knew my grandpa, so it really shouldn't be a surprise that I know a lot of people. This friend reaches out to me every couple of years.

He tells me about how great his life is. He has quit drinking and drugs. He has a steady job. All of the things that are supposed to impress me. The more we talk, the more he tells me how great his life is. He doesn't ask about my life or my family. I don't think he even knows that I moved back to Iowa or that I'm a minister now. It doesn't really concern him.

A lot of people have friends like that or at least, had friends like that? They only want to talk to us when it is convenient for them or they need something from us. He usually calls when he needs money or wants to gloat about how great he is.

But, I believed him that this time was different. He is a changed man and he didn't want anything from me. Alyssa warned me that he hadn't changed. But, I really wanted to believe that he had. That this time things were going to be different.

But they weren't. He wanted to blame me for everything that had gone wrong in his life. He wanted me to admit that it was my fault everything had gone wrong in his life. He was better before he met me and wished that he had realized how awful I was.

I was praying for guidance, when I realized what this scripture was saying to me. It all made so much more sense to me. The answer was right there.

All this time, I was a disciple in the boat and my friend was the storm. No matter how hard I struggled to move on, he kept fighting me. I couldn't get past him. I was rowing and getting nowhere.

But this time, I was praying. I was like Peter and asked Jesus for help. I was tired of fighting the storm. I was tired of being afraid about what was going to happen next. I called out to God for guidance. I asked Jesus to take my hand and lead me through the storm.

And that was when a calming came across me. I wasn't worried about his feelings and losing my friend. I had already lost him and I just needed to accept it. When I did that, I changed from praying for guidance to praying for him to find peace.

When we ask Jesus for help, and we are ready to accept it, he will calm the storm in our troubled lives. We won't struggle against the wind, but we can reach the other shore. We will no longer be afraid, but we will see Jesus for who he truly is.

What is the storm that is holding you back? What keeps you rowing in place and gaining no ground? How can you take that leap of faith and ask Jesus to help you? What will make you give up your fear and listen to what he has to say?

**God, we come before You with confidence, bringing our prayers for the world You love. In Your mercy, hear and answer.**

**We pray for those who, like Jesus' disciples, find themselves surrounded by high winds and stormy seas; those who feel overwhelmed by events and circumstances the loss of a job, the death of a loved one, serious accident or illness, chronic pain, depression, or divorce and who don't know where to turn.**

**Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.**

**We pray for those who, like Joseph, find themselves deeply wounded by people they love, people they thought they knew and trusted and who are struggling to know how to respond.**

**Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.**

**We pray for those who, like Peter, are experiencing a crisis of faith; who long to whole-heartedly trust in God but are held back by questions and doubts.**

**Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.**

**We pray for those who, like the prophet Elijah, have fallen into despair; who have begun to doubt God's presence and power; or question God's call in their lives.**

**Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.**

**We pray for those who, like Joseph, have had their hopes and dreams crushed; those whose lives have suddenly taken a different turn, and who now wonder what lies ahead for them.**

**Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.**

**Loving God, it is not Your will that any should suffer. We offer our prayers for all those who hunger and thirst, those who live in the midst of violence or poverty, and those who feel abandoned or ignored by the world around them.**

**Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.**

**Through the life-giving power of Your Holy Spirit, make Your sustaining presence known to all who are in pain or need, so that they, too, may know Your love and live.**

**In the name Jesus Christ, our Savior, who lives to intercede for us, Amen.**