



Christ United Methodist Church
Creating committed Christ-followers for the transformation of the world.

Romans 10: 5-15
Matthew 14: 22-33

Rev. Elizabeth Macaulay
August 13, 2017

“That Sinking Feeling”

We who are creatures must give voice.

Whether human or furred or feathered, there is a power within us that must break into voice.

That bringing to voice is necessary during times of intensity - intensity of joy and intensity of sorrow, both.

Those who passed the stories of our faith down through the generations knew this. Miriam and Moses and Hannah and David and Mary all knew the way of throwing back their heads and giving voice to their hearts. Their songs live with us yet.

The apostle Paul knew the need to voice anguish and joy.

So too did Jesus.

We are a part of the chorus of life that has sounded through the ages.

In these days, when the voice of fear is being given so much air time and body time it is particularly vital that we sing of grace and of communion and of the power of our baptism into the way of Jesus.

Surely, the white supremacists taking to the streets in Charlottesville and those engaging in verbal jousting involving nuclear weapons and surely you and I are needful of this morning’s reminder that the words spoken at our baptism: “You are my child, the beloved, with you I am well pleased” are spoken over the heart and body and soul of all of creation and oh, that song.

That song must be given embodied voice. Especially now.

“The word that saves is right here, as near as the tongue in your mouth, as close as the heart in your chest”.

Paul quotes those words of Moses as a way of reminding us that living our baptism; living the wash of grace that cascades over us at our baptism and on every day we live, is not something we receive as some kind of earned gift.

It is freely given. Without price.

Living our baptism means remembering moment by moment that the heart power of Jesus the Christ is right here. With you. As near as the tongue in your mouth and as close as the heart in your chest.

And, Paul tells us, all we have to do is to call out to God for help - no matter our religious background - and God is there to help us.

Today's reading from the book of Matthew finds the disciples terrified.

They have just fed the thousands with five loaves and two fishes and it is understandable that they might want to circle around and savor the wonder of that feat but no.

He needs to pray. Alone.

Jesus insists that they set out on the sea without him.

And the wind whips up. The disciples are out in a rough sea - sort of how headlines have had me feeling over this past week.

It is four in the morning - a gruesome time for high sea terror - and as they are adrift and terrified of being swamped by the elemental forces around them they see something that scared them further.

Jesus, walking out toward them.

Jesus, walking on the water.

Peter calls out to Jesus - if it is really you walking on that water and not some kind of apparition, call me out of my terror and into your company.

And Jesus does so. Peter begins to walk on that water.

He was doing it!

But then his head and fear engaged and here is what happened then:

(Read Matthew 14: 22 - 33)

I ran across a gut-punch powerful article yesterday. It was written by Amber Sparks and is entitled: The Useful Danger of Fairy Tales.

She had this to say:

“Someday, my daughter will ask me why there are so few mothers in fairy tales. Or rather, why there are so few living mothers. Mothers are nowhere and everywhere in these tales: made dead or spirit, found in inner voices or fairy godmothers, transformed into wild or wise beasts. Women told many of these stories themselves, to share with their own daughters. Why write so many stories where you only get to play the ghost?

It’s a complicated question that deserves a complicated answer, but the gist is this: I suspect that the mothers were preparing their daughters for a life without them.

Long, long ago, when the first fairy tales were being dreamed up, mothers were always on the verge of disappearing. To be an adult woman was to live a precarious existence at best. Too soon you could be sure of violence, of rape or beating or even murder. Too soon you could be sure of illness or death in childbirth. Too soon you could be gone...In those days, you had to create something you could leave behind to light the path, to keep throwing those bread crumbs, to clear the thorns from the thicket. A tree or a ghost or a bear or a good fairy—but something, something to outlast you.

A mother had to bequeath a gift, a story. And a daughter had to be ready.”

Throughout his teaching and loving, Jesus was preparing his disciples for a life without him.

Of course, he could have allowed his disciples to stay with him and savor the fabulous miracle of all those people fed.

But he knew that they had lessons yet to learn about what it means to be followers of the light and bearers of healing hope.

So, he sends them off on their own, knowing that they would encounter terror in the night.

He did not leave them. He came to them in their terror. And he shared with them the truth that getting out of the tenuous and known safety of their boat was theirs to do.

It was possible.

It is possible to walk on water; to summon the courage to step out into chaos without being swallowed by it.

It is possible to reach for the presence of Jesus and be saved from terror.

Two things about that:

First, I name for me what may be true for you on this day.

I am heart broken and I am afraid of the Pandora's box of hatred and violence that has been opened and is scarring the soul of this nation. I am challenged as a pastor to speak a word into this hatred and violence that can transcend any kind of partisan posture.

What I want to say is what our honest hearts know. We have a problem with racism in our country. This nation's wealth was built on the stolen lives of people bartered and sold as property and the naming of that injustice and the resulting generational inequity is a spiritual illness that must be owned and addressed.

I share with you an essay written in the most recent edition of the Christian Century written by Peter W. Marty: (Christian Century August 16, 2017 See attached)

We are living the communal challenge of seeking to live shared abundance and inclusion in a world that seems sore bent on stoking fear and violence.

These body and soul times of terror are so very real. The waves of violence feel like they have the power to sink us.

But especially in such times we hold to the promises of our faith:

Do not be afraid, says our God.

I am with you. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.

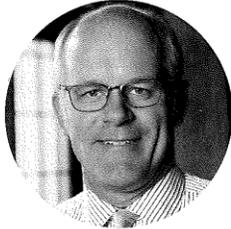
I have called you by name, and you are mine. (Isaiah 43)

Get out of the boat - whatever it is that you think protects you from chaos - and walk toward the grace God extends.

Jesus calls you. To live and to love and to walk across any territory, however fluid, to allow him to companion you through the painful times of chaos.

Especially when terror is real in Charlottesville, in North Korea, in Guam and Rochester, in hospital rooms and in the boat of our hearts. Especially during such times, may we step out and reach for the grace offered and may we live and may we be the Word that saves.

Amen



From the publisher

Peter W. Marty

On being white

I know that I will never be on the receiving end of blatant discrimination, at least not due to my skin color. It simply won't happen. There is no way that the stars of my birth circumstance will align in such a way that would allow me to suffer regular discrimination. The contours of privilege from what I know and enjoy as a white person mean that I never need fear being pulled over in my car or paying hundreds of dollars in questionable fines simply because of the color of my skin.

It hurts to write this truth, yet putting it on the table is critical. Those of us with white skin tend to take our whiteness off the table in discussions of race. We don't see our whiteness as a *race*; it's just "normal humanity"—the template from which other people are judged to be different or abnormal. Those with different skin color have race; we whites don't. Ever notice how schools celebrate Black History month? The other months are just plain history. We know black poets, preachers, and mayors. Nobody has ever referred to me as a white preacher or a white columnist.

As for white privilege, I like to think of it less as a charge of racism and more as a descriptor of the way things are for us who receive daily societal power and benefit simply by virtue of our skin color. Such an understanding of white privilege was made clear to the teenagers in my congregation during a recent work trip in Appalachia. "We knew we were in for an experience when we started seeing Confederate flags popping up in Kentucky," recounted one of the

trip leaders. "The black kids in my van immediately tensed up. They started to speak of being scared."

At a gas station stop in Virginia, four boys climbed out of one van for an ice cream run. Inside the convenience store was a local customer who gave Tremiere, the one black kid in the bunch, a fearsome glare. Once he finished looking over Tremiere, the man pointed at him and said, "You better get the hell out of here right now!" The boys took off running.

A worship experience at an all-white megachurch didn't help calm group anxiety. Two of our teenage girls, one black and the other white, turned around to exchange Christ's peace. The church member standing before them greeted the white girl warmly. She took one look at the black girl, rolled her eyes in disgust, and turned away. That gesture of ungrace became valuable conversation material for a mostly white group of kids unaccustomed to noticing racism.

I used to think racism was something one could surgically remove, like a precision airstrike taking out a terrorist haven, or a surgeon manipulating a sharp scalpel. But it's more difficult than that, of course, especially in an imbalanced world that tilts toward white privilege and perspective. It makes no moral sense that people should suffer simply for being wrapped in a skin color other than the majority. Yet it happens all the time.

Our U.S. Constitution enshrined the idea that African slaves were only three-fifths of a person for the purposes of legislative representation. It's clear we have a ways to go before that fraction becomes a whole number in everyday life.