

Postures: Doubt

Matthew 14:22-33

Good Morning Church Family,

It's so good to see you all this morning and be together. Something the speaker at last weekend's ADS meetings, Preston Peautaux, reminded me of is how God is already here and working in our lives, in the life of our church and in the life of our neighbours. What we're doing this morning is merely joining in with Jesus and what he's up to.

This morning, we'll also be continuing our Lenten journey together and talking about postures.

Today's text focusing on a wild, beautiful encounter between Jesus and Peter.

Has there ever been a time in your faith journey, or really any area of your life, where you felt like you were stepping into the unknown? Where you felt like yes, this is what I'm supposed to do, but doing that thing scared you? Starting your own business? A new relationship? I remember that feeling keenly when we made the decision to move to Saskatchewan from Manitoba. We'd been looking for jobs in SK, sensing that it was time for something new. Junia was 16 months old. When I was offered the job at Great Plains College, and we decided that in less than a month we were going to move sight unseen to a bedroom community called Warman, I said to Taylor, "I'm probably going to cry every single day for six months, but I do think moving is the right thing." But anxiety and doubt were intertwined with confidence with every single box I packed, every rip of the packing tape sealing up our lives. If you've ever experienced something similar, I'd invite you to revisit those emotions and hold on to those as we talk through our story.

In the passage that Char read for us this morning, Jesus and his disciples have been with a crowd. Jesus needs some downtime, so he tells his disciples to go ahead to the other side of

the lake while he sends the crowds home and then goes up to pray. The disciples, Peter included, head out on the water. By the time Jesus finishes, and heads back down the mountain, a violent storm has come up and it is just thrashing the boat on the water. The passage said that it was evening when Jesus was finally alone and morning when he came down the mountain. We can assume the disciples have been battling this storm for quite a while; they're bleary eyed, sleep deprived and frightened. And then, through this gale, in the angry red light of dawn, they see someone in the water, not IN the water. ON the water. Surely they're seeing things. Soon they all see the figure-panic tracing their faces as they realize they are all seeing this person. "A ghost!" someone shouts. The text doesn't say this, but I imagine it's Peter who shouts this out. I love stories in the gospels about Peter. He's impetuous, honest, and the sort of person who is all 'Yes Lord!' or "No way Jesus!" There's just no middle ground. Peter is not a man of calm rationality.

Jesus calls back to them "Take heart! It's me! Don't be afraid!" Again, Peter, wild, impetuous Peter, "If it's really you Jesus, tell me to come to you!" Peter is already running across the boat, maybe already swinging a leg over the side. He's going to get to Jesus. "Come!" Jesus tells him.

At the risk of losing the dramatic tension here, we're going to pivot from the story of Peter stepping out to Jesus to the story of when Jesus stepped toward Peter.

In Luke chapter 5, we read the story of how Jesus called some of his disciples into ministry with him, including Peter. This was a story that I've read many times and heard told many times, but at ADS this past weekend, the guest speaker, Preston Peatux, told this story which brought it to life for me again in a new way. Interpretive credit goes to him.

Peter is in his boat, fishing. This was his livelihood, how he provided for himself and any family

that he had. He knows fishing. It's been a rough day, out on the water, he's coming back to shore and he's got almost nothing to show for his efforts. Then he sees a crowd forming on the beach, great. Just what he needed when he's trying to clean his nets, people milling around. They people are animated, hollering, and he sees that teacher, Jesus, in his midst. Great. The passage says the crowds were pressing on Jesus, so he climbs into one of the boats, Peter's to start preaching. Who does Jesus think he is? First he clogs up the beach with these crowds, now he's using my boat as a pulpit? I'm working here! Jesus wraps up preaching and then turns to address Peter. He sees his meager catch, his empty nets. "Go out into the deep water, and cast your nets out again for fish." Jesus is essentially backseat driving. Peter knows how to fish. He's annoyed, "I don't tell you how to be a Rabbi, but you have the audacity to tell me how to do my job?" Peter, with a sarcastic edge in his voice replies back to Jesus, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." They go out into the deep water, Jesus riding along, and throw the nets back in. When they pull the nets up, they're loaded, overflowing with the fish. The nets begin to tear. They call for help from other boats. Soon the boats are sinking. A miracle of abundance. Jesus showed up in Peter's life, climbed right into his boat and changed his whole life. Wild, impetuous Peter throws himself at the feet of Jesus. Jesus says, "Come and follow me. I'll teach you how to fish for people."

Between these two stories- Jesus showing up in Peter's life, climbing aboard his boat, and Peter saying yes to Jesus and the story of Peter asking Jesus if he can walk out on the water to him, we see a side by side connection. First, Jesus met Peter where he is, and now, Peter wants to meet Jesus where he is. It's this growing and evolving relationship between Peter and Jesus, and it is the same for us. Jesus meets us where we are, calls us to come and follow us where we are. For me, Jesus showed up in my home with parents who wanted me to know him and in a church that cared about me. For others, Jesus shows up in a friendship, in a co-worker, at a 12 step meeting. Jesus shows up where we are , and as we walk in discipleship along with him,

growing in relationship with him, we want to show up where Jesus is. And sometimes the places where Jesus is scary, feel risky, dangerous and unknown.

Let's return now to Peter, as he steps out on the water. He climbs over the edge and begins to, amazingly, miraculously walk atop the water to Jesus. His eyes are fixed on Jesus and he's going to him- it feels holy and divine. Then his five catch up to him. He hears the wind, and the voices of the disciples shouting Peter! Come back! Peter, it's not safe! He feels the spray on his face, the thunder rumbling overhead. Still there's Jesus, but his fear of "Can I really do this? Can I really meet Jesus where he is?" overtakes him and he begins to sink. "Lord, save me!" Jesus, the compassionate shepherd, reaches out his hand, grabs Peter back up to the surface. We can picture them, standing there, suspended on the top of the water. Peter, soaked and relieved. Jesus, tender, compassionate, still holding Peter's wrist. And Jesus says, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

I had long assumed that when Jesus said this, he was asking Peter why Peter didn't believe Jesus. Why did you doubt that I would take care of you? But, more and more, I think the question that Jesus is asking Peter is why he did doubt himself? Jesus told Peter to come to him and was ready to receive him, ready to welcome him to where he was and what he was doing, and Peter believed him, Peter stepped out in faith. This text is not about a man who had no faith in Jesus, and therefore climbed out a boat in a raging storm to walk across the water. It is about a man who came to Jesus, joined Jesus in the scary, hard things, but doubted that he could do it. Doubted that Jesus could really use him, had really called him.

Perhaps some of us can identify with Peter's story. Ready to step out and meet Jesus where and how he's working in our neighbourhoods, working in our lives, stepping out to meet Jesus when he calls us, but then it gets scary. The other voices get louder. What if this fails? What if I

sink into the water? How do we handle stepping out of the boat in our lives? This passage offers us some good news; some good truths to hold as we step out to meet Jesus.

First, we can remember that faith and doubt are not mutually exclusive; both can exist in our lives and in our journeys at the same time. Jesus knew what a step of faith Peter was taking and we can be assured that Jesus sees we do the same. Peter was scared, and yet he stepped out.

A couple of weeks ago, Junia and I were in the car together and we were discussing the topic of bravery. She was telling me about some new trick she'd been trying on the playground and she said, "I wasn't brave. I felt scared when I jumped." I told her that being brave doesn't mean you never feel scared; being brave means trying something even when you feel scared. You can feel scared and brave at the same time." Fear and bravery, faith and doubt are often companions; not enemies of one another.

Secondly, we can aim to fix our eyes, our minds, and our hearts on Jesus and his calling on our lives. We see Peter stepping out onto the water; he's heard Jesus' voice and he's walking towards him. But then Peter loses his focus; he feels the wind and the waves, hears the voices of the other disciples, his brain catches up to him and he thinks, "What am I doing!?" And it's at that moment that he begins to sink.

I realise the herculean strength it requires to tune out all the other voices and distractions to focus in on Jesus, but it's in those spaces of focus that we can find strength, comfort and security. Zephaniah 3:16-17 says, "On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:

"Fear not, O Zion;

let not your hands grow weak.

The Lord your God is in your midst,

a mighty one who will save;
he will rejoice over you with gladness;
he will quiet you by his love;
he will exult over you with loud singing.”

Thirdly, when the waves do feel too big, when we just can't see Jesus through the swelling surf, we can cry out, just as Peter did. We can reach out to Jesus for rescue, just as Peter did. And we can trust that Jesus will grab our hand, and bring us back up to the surface. A singer-songwriter from my hometown, Aaron Espe, wrote a song about this story and it's been playing in my head often this week. “When I read that story I heard thunder everywhere, I could hear that boat crashing on the waves, The bow is in the air, And I have respect for Peter who had faith enough to dare, Step out onto the water, While all the others stared, And when hell is on your back, Sometimes you think you got strength and you say, Hey Lord, save me, I'm drownin' out here! But I'm caught somewhere between Faith and Doubt, And I feel like I'm never going to find my way back outta here.” Let's not be afraid to cry out, to reach out to Jesus when it all feels like just too much.

In closing dear friends, Jesus meets us where we are and then invites us to meet him where he is. Sometimes he's in the calm, green pastures. Sometimes, he's in the middle of a storm. But, always, always, he bids us to come. To step out of the boat and meet him where he is. He invites us to believe in ourselves, because greater is he who is in us than he who is in the world. Let's aim to fix our eyes on Jesus, to allow and fear and bravery to exist side by side. And to remember that Jesus is ready to grab our hands and save us when we call on him. Because the one who calls us is faithful and he will do it.