

Rebecca Mattern
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Matthew 14:22-33
Be En-Couraged

This is our last week in our Re-Shaped worship series. The first two weeks we focused on inner change and transformation, first with Jeremiah and the idea that we are moldable and shapeable like clay, with God as our Potter, and then through the story of Jesus' baptism and inner transformation that happens through the work of the triune God and how it can lead us to be peacemakers. Last week we expanded our Re-shaping to focus on the church, and the ways that what may look like failure or death, is actually bringing us to new life, like the chaff of wheat, and Jesus death and resurrection. Being re-shaped, transformed, and letting go of old ways takes vulnerability and hard work. This morning's passage encourages us along the way.

Before we get to reading the passage - let's set the stage. The confirmation class talked about this yesterday, how it is important to know the setting of scripture.

This text comes after John the Baptist has been killed by Herod (you may remember him from when Jesus was born) and Jesus went to be alone. I imagine you might be able to relate. Instead, the crowds follow Jesus and despite the disciples trying to make the people go away, he has compassion on them and heals them - then feeds the 5,000 men, plus women and children with two loaves and 2 fish.

As I mentioned to the children just a few minutes ago, I invite you to embody this text. I will give instructions as we read. I encourage you to imagine where you might be in the story. Are you like the disciple who stays in the boat, or are you like Peter?

I'll give prompts for response as we go along.

Enter now, with your body, your imagination, and Holy Spirit, the words from Matthew 14:22-33

²²⁻²³ As soon as the meal was finished, [Jesus] insisted that the disciples get in the boat and go on ahead to the other side while he dismissed the people.

- Pretend you are the disciples in the boat - you may bob around or row and watch the skies.

With the crowd dispersed, [Jesus] climbed the mountain so he could be by himself and pray. He stayed there alone, late into the night.

²⁴⁻²⁶ Meanwhile, the boat was far out to sea when the wind came up against them and they were battered by the waves.

- Rock back and forth and imagine the wind building and the waves beating against the boat. You may need to hold onto the sides of the boat. There may be water sloshing in from the sides

At about four o'clock in the morning, Jesus came toward them walking on the water. They were scared to death. "A ghost!" they said, crying out in terror.

- Point toward the cross and the table, symbols of Christ in our sanctuary, and imagine Jesus coming toward you

²⁷ But Jesus was quick to comfort them. "Courage, it's me. Don't be afraid."

- Take a deep breath

²⁸ Peter, suddenly bold, said, "Master, if it's really you, call me to come to you on the water."

- If you wonder what Peter was thinking, you are invited to stand

²⁹⁻³⁰ He said, "Come ahead."

Jumping out of the boat, Peter walked on the water to Jesus. But when he looked down at the waves churning beneath his feet, he lost his nerve and started to sink. He cried, "Master, save me!"

³¹ Jesus didn't hesitate. He reached down and grabbed his hand. Then he said, "Faint-heart, what got into you?"

³²⁻³³ The two of them climbed into the boat,

- Peter, you may sit down

and the wind died down.

- You can stop rocking and sit quiet and still

The disciples in the boat, having watched the whole thing, worshiped Jesus, saying, "This is it! You are God's Son for sure!"

This is the Word of God for the People of God.
Thanks be to God.

I wonder, as you embodied this passage, if you got a sense of what the disciples and Peter might have been feeling. Jesus insisted they get in the boat and go to the other side while he hangs back to be alone. Do they wonder how he's going to meet up with them? Maybe they are glad to be away from him because he didn't listen to them and send those crowds packing. Maybe that feeling is mixed with wonder at the miracle of how all those people got fed. Maybe they want to be with Jesus, to comfort him - or to comfort themselves. They've hardly had time to process that John the Baptist is dead. Maybe they are just plain exhausted.

And then the wind comes and the sea gets rough. This would make me nervous as one who doesn't make a living on the water, but it was likely standard fare for the disciples who were fishermen and they would have known how to cope with it. What scares the disciples is what they think is a ghost - coming across choppy waters toward them.

And what does Jesus do? He comforts them and reassures them - with words he has used before - and will again, "don't be afraid".

And Peter, who we may think of as both enthusiastic and impulsive, does not ask for the storm to be calmed or wait for Jesus to make his way to the boat. Instead he says, "call me" - or command me - "to come to you on the water." Maybe he needs to be sure it is Jesus. Maybe he is saying, "Jesus, I trust you, I know you, I've seen you do miracles, I cannot wait for you to get here - I want to to come to you - and I will, if you command me."

Whatever Peter is thinking, Jesus tells Peter to come. Peter responds with his body - stepping out of the boat - confident that he is moving to Jesus, and actually does walk on the water - the choppy, wind whipped water.

It is when Peter looks down and sees the churning water, that he is frightened and starts to sink. He has stopped looking toward Jesus and started looking down. But he got that first step in! With faith, and trust in Jesus he stepped into something new.

Often when we examine this passage we focus on Peter's failure - he just couldn't keep up his confidence and trust - so that we can rush to the part where Jesus saves him. We tend to overlook the courage it took for him to step out in the first place. A courage that Jesus embraced and en-couraged.

Peter asked Jesus to command him to come, and he followed, just as we try to do. We know that God is molding us, transforming us, reshaping us - always to be in better relationship with God. Embracing the changes, as individuals and as a congregation, can be really scary. We might not get it quite right - and what Peter and Jesus teach us is that it is OK! It is ok to step out in trust and then falter. Jesus has got us. But still we have to take that first step and trust that God is re-shaping us for good - reshaping us for relationship with Potter God, Teaching Jesus, and Adventurous Spirit.

Week after week we come to worship and ask God to guide our lives, and week after week, we come to confession because we too, take our eyes off of Jesus and attend instead to the waves battering us. Week after week, Jesus extends his arm of saving grace, pulls us out of the churning waters and back into the boat with him. All so we can step out again - ready to be reshaped - even in unknown and choppy waters around us.

Let us pray: