

“Doing The Impossible”

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Romans 10:5-15

Matthew 14:22-23

*And Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water.”*

*[Jesus] said, “Come.”*

*So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus...*

Let us pray...O God,

Help us to understand these stories in ways that can be practically applied  
in our lives as individuals and as a community.

Amen

So..

*A Catholic priest and a rabbi welcomed the new pastor in town by inviting him  
to go fishing with them as they did once a month when schedules permitted.*

*At the dock, they loaded up the boat and rowed out to the middle of the lake.*

*“Wait a minute,” said the rabbi. “Where’s the bait?”*

*The priest said,*

*“Oh. I left it on the dock!”*

*So, the priest gets out of the boat and walks on the water, back to shore,*

*where he retrieves the bucket of bait, and walks on the water back to the boat!*

*Climbing in, the priest says,*

*“My but I’m thirsty. Where’s the beer?”*

*And the rabbi answers,*

*“It’s back on the dock, of course! I’ll go this time.”*

*Before either one can say anything more, the new pastor says,*

*“Wait! I’ll get it!”*

*So, he jumps out of the boat – and sinks in over his head,  
underwater.*

*As the pastor comes sputtering to the surface, the rabbi says to the priest,*

*“Oy, we should have told him where the rocks are?”*

Walking on the water... Doing the impossible...

What does this miracle mean? What is its significance?

It has a context as a continuation of last week’s Gospel lesson from Matthew 14,  
when Jesus learned of the death of John the Baptist by King Herod,  
and sailed away in a boat for a desolate place across the sea.

He meant to go there to pray – but a huge crowd of people followed after him and  
they were waiting for him on the beach.

He had compassion for them and performed miracles of healing the sick and  
feeding them all with a basket of food.

Then he sent the disciples back home ahead of him in a boat –  
and caught up with them later by another miracle – walking on the sea...

Willard, p.2

So where are the rocks for us to walk on, to understand today's Gospel lesson?

How can we navigate it and find something that can be relevant  
for us as individuals and as a community?

This is another example of a story about Jesus that we have to consider  
whether the lesson for us is to be taken literally or symbolically.

Either way, the most important question is not so much, 'What happened?'  
as it is to ask 'Why is it in the Bible?'

Apparently Jesus was deeply troubled by the news of John's assassination  
and it is a turning point for him that will lead to  
a series of spectacular demonstrations.

These were intended for his disciples back then, and for us now,  
just as they have been for all the generations since and yet to come,  
to show how closely Jesus was identified with God...

Feeding a multitude of 5,000 people is a God-like act  
and when you think of all the millions of Christians through the centuries  
who have partaken of Holy Communion, God is still feeding us;

Jesus walking on water is like the opening lines of Genesis –  
He is identifying with the Spirit of God that hovered over the face of the waters  
at Creation, to bring order out of the chaos.

At the same time, these events appear to be related to the Temptation story –  
as if Jesus was mocking each of the three temptations.

Instead of turning stone into bread, Jesus turns bread into more bread;  
Instead of leaping off a tall building, Jesus walks across a stormy sea;  
Instead of bowing down to worldly powers, Jesus' disciples bow down to him.

Jesus was preparing to do the impossible:

To show us that it is possible to save the world by forgiving the world.

Finally, Jesus would take his three most trusted disciples – Peter, James, and John  
and go up a mountain where they would witness his transformation  
into the HUMAN form of God, his true identity,  
like the visions described by the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel.

Yet in Philippians 2:6-7, the Apostle Paul reminds us that

*...though [Jesus] was in the form of God,  
[he] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,  
but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant,  
being born in the likeness of [human-kind].*

Willard, p.3

So, Jesus was like God – the likeness of God in human form,  
scaled down as an example for us to follow –  
but are we expected to do the impossible, too?

There's more to today's lesson  
as we recall that Peter also walked on water...

I don't think this means we should expect ourselves to literally walk on water, too.  
*I would have to know where the 'rocks' are.*

But there's an old expression that goes something like this:

*"Consider the difficult to be done already.  
The impossible may take us a little longer."*

There is something to be said about having a 'Can do' attitude –  
the conviction that – if you had to, you could move a mountain or walk on water,  
even if it was just in a figurative way, to help you deal with life's challenges.

I find it so sad sometimes that the discourse of the national media  
as well as in our own neighborhoods and communities,  
is often lacking a 'can do' attitude.

There are some formidable challenges out there to be sure; For example –  
Here's a list a friend of mine put together in a recent e-mail...

*Putin and the Ukraine,  
Guatemalan, Honduran, Salvadorian,  
and Mexican kids at our borders in droves,  
An Israel and [Hamas] master disaster, Libya gone wild,  
Syria still being Syria, Iran and Saudi Arabia still playing Chess,  
China stealing everything they can, Ebola breaking out in Africa,  
... natural[ disasters]... and that's just the international scene.*

It certainly seems to be impossible to control the world;  
But then again, it would be just as impossible to conquer the world...  
Caesar, Napoleon, Hitler, Stalin, the British Empire, radical Islamists,  
and even Wall Street may try dominate the world, but they won't succeed.  
However, *Jesus* dares us to believe that  
it is possible to save the world, now...

In John 14:12-13, Jesus said,

*"Truly, truly, I say to you, [the one] who believes in me  
will also do the works that I do;  
and greater works than these will [they] do,  
because I go to the Father[ God].  
Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it,  
that the Father[God] may be glorified in the Son..."*

Willard, p.4

Just like Peter called out to Jesus to save him,

we have got to remember that God is a living being who is always there for us  
no matter what we face in this life to forgive us, to love us, to be a refuge.

We just have to call on God by name, whether that is Father/Mother,

Jesus, Spirit – or by whatever name you are comfortable with in calling God,  
in order to accomplish what is worthy of that name.

When we decide to start working together, putting our best thoughts forward

and believing we can find the resources that are needed, we can do great things.

Let me tell you about some of those things already in the works through our church  
to help save the world:

First of all we are 5 for 5 in our mission giving to the United Church of Christ

with Our Church's Wider Mission, Neighbors in Need,

One Great Hour of Sharing, Christmas Fund, and Strengthen The Church.

Our own local giving has included the Wildwood Food Pantry and Thrift Shop,

Sozo Kids, Church World Service kits, CROP Walk, Prayer Shawl ministry,

Back Bay Mission, soda can tab and ink cartridge collections,  
recycling, and the Pastor's Discretionary Fund.

We have some events coming up in the next few months, old and new...

Admin and Missions are working to create a community garden

that will incorporate University of Florida principles;

Justice & Peace will start up their film series again soon

with documentaries that urge us to take another look at what's going on;

Education will hold a special study on the book, Hotdogs & Hamburgers

about illiteracy in our society, to be led by Anne Berg in September;

Fund Raising will be doing a Yard Sale in October and Savannah trip in January

to help pay down the mortgage for this building we need as a church;

Missions has invited the Farm-workers Self-Help, Inc. of Dade City

to come here at the end of October to be part of our service

which will be bi-lingual that day, with a panel discussion to follow  
so we can get to know them –

because when you know somebody, it makes a difference;

We are doing a special outreach to The Villages community

with a Veterans' Day service at Freedom Pointe.

Education is sponsoring a panel discussion on LGBT issues and the Church,

featuring Rev. Dr. Dawson Taylor of Naples UCC,

Pastor Carol Chambers of Open Circle MCC,

JoAnn Waterfield, Attorney at Law, and medical ethicist Betsy Johnson;

It is our turn this year to host the Community Thanksgiving

for the interfaith community.

Diaconate is working with me for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Advent as "Peace Sunday"

which will once again with Mr. Sheldon Skurow of Temple Shalom

and Imam Abdurrahman Sykes –

and what if other churches throughout the world started doing this, too?

Willard, p.5

Someday, there will be a “sea-change” in attitudes about “gay marriage” and other issues that the United Church of Christ is already about. So, we are laying the ground work for that time when we will no longer be one of the few “open and affirming” churches in The Villages area.

By then, we will be recognized for our unique voice in how we present the Good News of God through Christ of forgiveness, of love, of trustworthy presence, in ways we have already done and ‘can do’ in the future.

Outsiders will know us and be drawn to us by our social ethic of love and inspirational style that is in dialogue with the living God who is still speaking in our time, still forgiving, still loving, still there.

We just need to stay open and ready to recognize when Christ is at work in our midst, calling us to come out of the boat and dance on the water...

In Eastern Europe at a time no less troubled than our own – or so I imagine, an Orthodox bishop was told about a young man who lived on a remote island and who desired to enter the priesthood.

The bishop sent word to a local priest to investigate and see if this person would be a worthy candidate.

So, the priest went with one of his deacons who had a boat, and they motored out to this island which was in the middle of a lake, surrounded by deep forests.

The island itself was covered with trees and they couldn’t find a place to put in to shore,

When they had gone all the way around the island, and were going to try again, they saw a break in the trees where there was a young man waving his arms.

After they waved back to acknowledge they had seen him, he started to walk out to them - on top of the water!

And the deacon turned to the priest and said, “Father, he should do just fine!”

We need a renewed attitude of ‘can do’

We must believe that “...the difficult [is] done already [through Christ] [though] the impossible may take us a little longer.”

and if so, we will be able to do what it takes to make a difference in our own lives, our church, and even the world.

That’s a ‘can do’ with help from God through Christ.

Amen

*Our scripture lesson from Romans 10:5-15 speaks of the futility  
in trying to figure out who gets saved according to a system of righteousness.  
Instead, the Apostle Paul assures us that salvation is there for all who call upon God...*

[10:5] Moses writes about the righteousness that comes from the Law:

*The person who does these things will live by them.*

[6] But the righteousness that comes from faith talks like this:

*Don't say in your heart, "Who will go up into heaven?"*

*(that is, to bring Christ down)*

[7] or *"Who will go down into the region below?"*

*(that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).*

[8] But what does it say?

*The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart*

*(that is, the message of faith that we preach).*

[9] Because if you confess with your mouth

*"Jesus is Lord" and in your heart you have faith that*

*God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

[10] Trusting with the heart leads to righteousness,  
and confessing with the mouth leads to salvation.

[11] The scripture says,

*All who have faith in him won't be put to shame.*

[12] There is no distinction between Jew and Greek,

*because the same Lord is Lord of all, who gives richly to all who call on him.*

[13] *All who call on the Lord's name will be saved.*

[14] So how can they call on someone they don't have faith in?

*And how can they have faith in someone they haven't heard of?*

*And how can they hear without a preacher?*

[15] *And how can they preach unless they are sent?*

As it is written,

*How beautiful are the feet of those who announce the good news.*

*Let us be guided and challenged by these words.*

Matthew 14:22-33

<sup>22</sup> Then he made the disciples get into the boat

and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds.

<sup>23</sup> And after he had dismissed the crowds,

he went up on the mountain by himself to pray.

When evening came, he was there alone,

<sup>24</sup> but the boat by this time was many furlongs distant from the land,

beaten by the waves; for the wind was against them.

<sup>25</sup> And in the fourth watch of the night

he came to them, walking on the sea.

<sup>26</sup> But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying,

“It is a ghost!” and they cried out for fear.

<sup>27</sup> But immediately he spoke to them, saying,

“Take heart, it is I; have no fear.”

<sup>28</sup> And Peter answered him,

“Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water.”

<sup>29</sup> He said,

“Come.”

So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus;

<sup>30</sup> but when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out,

“Lord, save me.”

<sup>31</sup> Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him,

“O man of little faith, why did you doubt?”

<sup>32</sup> And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

<sup>33</sup> And those in the boat worshiped him, saying,

“Truly you are the Son of God.”