

## SERMON FOR AUGUST 13, 2017

Peter is the one for me. I feel a real kinship with the disciple who is the rock of the church and yet sinks like a stone in the waters of Galilee. I identify with the disciple who sees clearly that Jesus is the anointed one, the messiah, and yet loses that clarity of vision and ends up denying and betraying the one who saves him. Peter is the one for me. I relate to the moments when he sees deeply Jesus' dream of a just and compassionate world and I relate to the times when the dream fades and the reality of oppression and fear overwhelm him.

Peter is the one for me. I relate to his struggle, to his journey in spirit. And that is why I pay attention to the stories where he is working out his spirit life and his faith. He always shows me the way.

Peter is doing that very thing today in the great narrative of his walk with Jesus on stormy Galilee. Or should I say today we share Peter's desire to walk on water and his fearful sinking in the sea.

It begins with fear, the terror of the disciples as Galilee rages and they are tossed by wind and waves that they cannot control. My guess is that because some of the disciples are fishers, they knew exactly the power they were facing and their terror was based on experience. Simply put, the disciples were afraid.

In the grasp of awful fear, they see Jesus approaching them. It looks like he is walking on water. Who knows if this message of walking on water is fact or a wild imagining. Lots of commentators have posited various explanations. Jesus was actually on a sand bar. Or he was in a small boat that was invisible

because of the wave action. This wondering seems like such a waste of energy to me. Who cares about the physics of the moment? What matters is that love and comfort and peace showed up in a time of panic. What matters is Jesus' message, "Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid." We hold onto that message.

As did Peter. In his own predictable style, Peter lost his courage to the storm, and then, seeing Jesus and hearing the "do not be afraid" message, he wanted out of the little safety that the boat offered and onto the stormy water with his friend. In a split second, Peter went from fear to boldness, from feeling weak to feeling brave, from anticipating the worst to trusting the best. "Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid."

I think I understand how Peter went from "afraid" to "brave." It had to do with the presence of Jesus in real time. It had to do with the building of trust between the two men. It had to do with on-the-spot presence and the tangible care and strength that Jesus offered. "Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid."

While we share Peter's human combination of strength and vulnerability, we don't share his face-to-face access to Jesus. We do not meet Jesus in real time. We meet him across the centuries in our own storms of life, with our own fear and our own courage. How do we find for ourselves what Peter found in the person of Jesus?

Let me tell you a story of comfort in one of the storms of my life. It was June 19, 1981. The phone rang at 6:30 in the morning. It was my mother with the news that my dad had died the night before. I had a lunch date with three of

the women from my Paisley congregation. I thought that I would have to cancel but they insisted we carry on. They took me for who I was that day, alternately stuck in the reality of grief and then incredulous at the idea that my dad was gone. They made me laugh. They supplied me with Kleenex. They let me ramble around in the world of memory. They let the conversation go where I needed it to go. With all they did that day, they said "Take heart. It is we. Do not be afraid." That was 36 years ago. I remember it as if it were last week.

How do we find for ourselves what Peter found in Jesus? We find it in one another.

When my son, Aaron was 12 years old, he ran away from home. Actually, Aaron decided to bike to early morning swim practice at McMaster University. It was a 5 minute ride, if that.

Imagine my pleasure. I got to stay home and have my morning coffee out in my garden, and, read the paper before making breakfast. He always came home starving. Before long, though, the phone rang. It was Aaron's coach saying that he hadn't shown up at the pool. Panic. Fear. Paralyzing terror. I felt them all. I called Aaron's dad who raced over. Compared to Brian, I seemed dead calm. We drove around to see if we could find him. No luck. We called the police who came and told us to be patient. Aaron would be back. Apparently, they gave kids 4 hours to get hungry and return home. Not too comforting

By this time, I knew that I wouldn't be into work in Oakville, so I called my work partner, Lyn. About 45 minutes later, the front door opened and in she walked. She closed the office at the church and came to the place where she was most needed. She was comfort to me. She was my storm-stayer. She calmed the waves of fear and stilled the winds of panic. Her presence said to me "Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid."

I am not sure how we passed the time. But when the clock chimed 9:00 and Aaron rode his bike up the driveway, I was somewhat serene and in control. Apparently, the Hamilton Police were right. They come home when they are hungry. How do we find for ourselves what Peter found in Jesus? We find it in one another.

We are just as human as Peter was, sometimes strong and sometimes weak with fear. We know times when we are brave and we know times when we are afraid. We need to hear words of comfort every bit as much as he did: "Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid." I think we understand both sides of being human.

Just as we need others to be our courage and peace, we are exactly that for them. Our acts of kindness speak for us and they say to others the very words we need to hear ourselves, "Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid."

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