

Sermon Notes: August 9, 2020. **Focus:** Peter walks on water & so can we [Lectionary Readings](#)

Early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So, Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him.

Last week, I said that miracles are anti-imperial acts that are meant to shake our faith in leaders who pretend to have our best interests at heart. Caesar pretended to be a loving God, unless you questioned the Roman System. Pharaoh thought of himself as a God deserving cheap Hebrew slaves. Some even want a tough talking leader, unless they find themselves on the sharp end of a whip, and then it is too late.

This week I want to say failure is necessary for miracles. Peter's courage of walking on water likely won't get classified as a miracle by most. But it is his courage to fail that is miraculous. We can never bring or experience miracles unless we get out of the boat. Getting out of the boat to walk on water is terrifying and guaranteed to fail at some point. Peter was ill equipped to walk on water. He did it anyway. I imagine he got back into the boat soaking and ashamed that he sunk. Don't be afraid to get your butt kicked trying to be a blessing because sshh...that's a guarantee.

One time I asked an African American woman what she thought about a sermon I was working on and I wanted her perspective. I ignorantly/arrogantly thought she might appreciate me asking her advice...she didn't. She was so impatient and unkind that we never made it to sermon feedback. I was embarrassed, feeling like I was probably racist to even ask. Racist or not, I remember that experience because, if I don't keep putting myself out there, calibrating, and trying again I will never grow. If we don't have thick enough skin to be rebuked once and while, maybe sink in the water, we will never get out of the boat.

When it comes to race and systemic racism, this stepping out has been hard for me in California. Houston was much easier. I had African American families at the school and many church members who were Liberian and Nigerian. When we were dropping off kids at each other's houses, conversations about race seemed causal and not nearly as high stakes as they are here.

So, I keep wondering, has the murder of George Floyd receded further into the background for you? I don't want it to, but life keep dragging me forward. Now that school is all online, I am freaking out about my own family. Systemic racism has receded in urgency a bit for me. My prayer has been lately, "God, do not let me lose sight of the horrible window into systemic racism. Don't let it disappear into this weird summer."

For those of you in the dominate culture, you can choose to be “woke” or not. For white people we can visit the little ice cream shop of horrors and choose which flavor of outrage we would like. I want to remind you that not so long ago we were extremely upset about the burning Amazon rainforest. I am learning a secret; don’t let everything break your heart but let a couple of things turn you inside out. What really breaks your heart? This is not a sarcastic, but an earnest question.

For me, *race and kids* flatten me. In Houston, I focused on literacy and resources for underserved youth. My childhood was overshadowed by a raging white supremacist father. Parkland, gut punch. Breonna Taylor, wind knocked out me. kids crying for their parents in detention while guards mock them, heaving every time I hear it. Threatening federal funding of education for COVID political gain, check mate.

What are two animating principles for you? If all you can come up with is compassion for the world, let me push you a little. Caring for the whole world will kill you. Jesus already took that job. What are two things that turn your crank? What tiny things can you bite off and chew. I focus on kids and race. Maybe you care about hunger and environment; or spirituality and prayer. Maybe your center is human sexuality and immigration. Ask God how you can go deeper into that. For me, race and kids effect how I process everything else. For example, gun violence sends me reeling when it is directly related to kids being shot at. Columbine, Parkland, and Sandy Hook. If we all dig deeper, maybe we can draw upon this deep well of compassion and actually have the reserves to do something about it.

Peter kept getting out of the boat of racism Peter was good guy subject to the casual racism of his day. In the acts of the apostles, he had to go through a long transformation where he could boldly call non-Jews his brothers and sisters and not hold them at arm’s length. He had some humiliating experiences to get to this expansive view. A snapshot of this experience comes in Acts 10 – 16.

We are not innocent Another obstacle to getting out of the boat is our desire to be blameless and above reproach. James Baldwin says, *“People who shut their eyes to reality simply invite their own destruction, and anyone who insists on remaining in a state on innocence long after that innocence is dead turns himself into a monster.”*

God is calling us beyond willful ignorance of the blood, sweat and tears of other people. Innocence and willful ignorance of the system of racism - that is in the land of monsters. You can walk on water, but it will cost you. Get out anyway. Get embarrassed. Get called out. Get education but get out of the boat so that you can be the miracle of courage and love.

Todd