

Sermon, 10 Pentecost
August 9, 2020
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Holy Boldness

Part I: Getting out of the Boat

In our Gospel lesson, Peter watches Jesus doing the unthinkable: walking on water. It's hard for me to imagine seeing this the way Peter did. But, I'm confident my first reaction would NOT be to ask for an invitation to walk on water. Deep Water.

Peter is not a stranger to water. He's a fisherman. He lives on the edge of the Sea of Galilee. He understands deep water, and the violent impact of storms at sea.

But, there he goes again, doing Peter as Peter does: "Command me to come to you on the water".

Jesus speaks one word: "Come"

It's a verb Jesus uses many times. In Matthew 11: Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. In Matthew 19: Let the little children come to me...for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs. John 6: Whoever comes to me will never be hungry.

There's a recurring theme in each of these examples. We have to move...Not the U-Haul sort, but emotionally, spiritually, intellectually. Following Christ is not passive or mechanical. It is active: a way of being...living and growing in love.

Following Christ calls us into uncomfortable water....

The holy water of Baptism initiates us into Christian life. And with it comes a humdinger of a covenant—a commitment to discipleship: to studying Scripture, fellowship, communion, and prayer. We commit to a life of confession. We commit that our lives will be our witness. And we commit that we will love our neighbors. And when our neighborhood falls short, we will strive for justice and peace among all people...respecting the dignity of every human being.

The Episcopal Church recently hosted a 3-session conference called "Becoming Beloved Community". Gay Jennings, President of the House of Deputies, coined a term that has stuck me: **Holy Boldness**.

As I thought about Peter's adventure on water, Holy Boldness kept coming to mind. Imagine that you're on a sail boat, crossing a sea. The boat hasn't hit an iceberg or developed some life-threatening problem. The sea is choppy and deep. It's late in the evening. You see Jesus walking toward the boat...he's walking on water.

The disciples do exactly what I think I would do...hunker down in fear. Except Peter. Peter asks to walk on water. Jesus says, "Come" and Peter goes.

Peter doesn't stop to consult OSHA's safety guidelines for walking on water. He just goes.

Holy Boldness.

I am often asked about the ministry to which I'm called. But a friend once posed a deeper question: What were you called *from*? Or, in the context of today's readings, When Jesus says "Come", what are you leaving behind?

I thought about the question for a long time. And then I realized...

I was called from complacency.

I grew up inside the church—my life revolved around church activities. Scripture was at the core of my church. But so were spiritual disciplines. They shaped my way of living, working, and recreating. But that's not the full Baptismal covenant.

At the age of 50, I had participated in 0 marches for the rights of marginalized peoples. I rarely voted in political elections because I didn't think my vote made a difference. I live in Tarrant County, where 20% of the population speaks Spanish. But the only Spanish words I knew are on the menus of Tex-Mex restaurants.

I was complacent...my perch in the boat was pretty comfortable, despite the choppy water other people navigated all around me.

So, what keeps us in the boat?

Homeostasis—When I learned about family systems theory, I was blown away with the idea of homeostasis. It means that the family system seeks to maintain its customary organization and function over time, and it tends to resist change. It applies to church congregations and any other systems of people.

Here's a quick example of my family's homeostasis. When I felt called to go to seminary and told my parents what I was doing, my dad's first statement was, "our people don't become ministers." It was an intensely awkward moment. Dad was really uncomfortable with my decision. And he was doing his best to make me uncomfortable enough to resist getting out of the boat.

In our lesson from Genesis, we heard the story of Joseph, the youngest son of Israel. Joseph is special to his father because he is born late in Israel's life. So Dad makes a special garment for him. Joseph isn't like his brothers. He has dreams which he learns to interpret; and then he interprets the visions of others. But this does not set well with the older brothers, who are rather jealous of their father's special affection for Joseph.

While the brothers are tending their father's flocks, they see Joseph "the dreamer" coming toward them. They conspire to get rid of him....thinking this will restore the family system that existed before Joseph was born. You know, the "good old days"; the "way it used to be". So, they tear Joseph's special clothes and lower him into a well. When a traveling caravan comes along, they sell their youngest brother.

Homeostasis is a powerful motivator.

Holy Boldness can get us into hot water.

For Peter, walking on water was going great...until Peter noticed the strong wind whipping around him ... he became frightened...and *then* he began to sink.

In the life of Dursey, my dog, this is the "SQUIRREL" syndrome. One minute we're playing fetch, and the next minute my dog is in another County chasing the uncatchable squirrel.

Sometimes, we take our eye off the ball. God is present in those moments, too....ready for us to reach out.

Holy Boldness is what it takes to live into the fullness of our Baptismal covenant. To "Boldly Go" where others have not gone. To come close to our neighbors, especially those who do not talk like me, look like me, or pray like me; to love our neighbors; and learn to be allies to marginalized people, as Jesus did.

Jesus speaks one word to us: "Come"

In that one word, there is all the authority of Heaven for Peter-- and you and me-- to do the unthinkable: To get out of the boat. To Go with Holy Boldness.