



Good morning church and Facebook friends. This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Yesterday was our day for “Lunches with Love” always such a heartwarming experience to watch as the beauty of making a lunch reveals itself as God’s grace. Our neighbors love the cold water and the frozen juice. It’s like a slushy!

Checking in...I know that many of you are hanging in and doing what needs to be done to stay safe and healthy and I also know that for many of you this is getting boring not have personal interactions with people you love. Know that your church family is praying for you. I encourage you to reach out and call someone new this week just to say Hi!

For a bit of comic relief, I offer this joke from David Steybe...

A Christian guy name Bill saw an ad online for a Christian horse, so he went to check it out. The horse’s owner said, “It’s easy to ride him. Just say, ‘Praise the Lord!’ to make him go and ‘Amen!’ to make him stop.” Bill got on the horse and said, “Praise the Lord!” Sure, enough the horse started to walk. “Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!” he yelled, and the horse broke into a gallop. Bill was enjoying his ride so much that he almost didn’t notice the cliff he and the horse were about to go over. Bill shouted “Amen!” at the top of his lungs, and the horse stopped right at the edge of the cliff. Relieved, Bill said, “Phew! Praise the Lord!”

Please pray with me, Creator of this amazing universe, you formed the heavens and the earth, gave us night and day, separated the waters so we might have sky and sea, vegetation and swarms of living creatures for all of this and much more we give you thanks. It is through this creation that we were born to be in your image. Walk with us now, embrace us and hold us in your care. Gracious God, I ask that the words of my mouth and the medication of my heart be pleasing unto you O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

This mornings gospel story has so much in I thought it would be fun to create a word search. You should all have a copy either in your email on in your letter. The idea of a word search is that words can be horizontal, vertical, backwards, you circle them and then mark of the words you found and hopefully you find all the words by the end. Just off the top of my head I recognized 36 words that seemed important in today’s story.

Let us hear from the Gospel of Matthew 14: 22-33

²² Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³ And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the

mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone,²⁴ but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land,^[a] for the wind was against them.²⁵ And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea.²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out in fear.²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”

²⁸ Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.”²⁹ He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus.³⁰ But when he noticed the strong wind,^[b] he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!”³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”³² When they got into the boat, the wind ceased.³³ And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

It was like the Thanksgiving dinner...you know the kind of yummy dinner that fills your stomach beyond expansion and all you want to do it lay down on the couch and move into a turkey comma when someone in the family says, “hurry up, hurry up we must get to the park immediately. This sense of urgency is disruptive and alarming not to mention the loss of your turkey comma.

This is where our story starts today...immediately!

We have left the compassion that Jesus felt last week for those he healed and fed and have moved into a sense of urgency. It is the morning after the miracle of the five loaves and 2 fish. Jesus instructs the disciples to go ahead and he will give the bad news to the crowds that they must move on.

Jesus is going to try it again, go up to the mountain to pray. Yesterday was my mom’s birthday and while she is not with us her memory is strong. I recently came across an article where she and my dad had been featured in an Alzheimer’s magazine. My mom was asked about her prayer life. She said something like, “I do not seem to have much “set aside” to time to pray, but I pray all day long as I walk with God. When I read that I felt such a sense of comfort.

I can relate to my mom’s statement. At times, I find it hard to have “set aside” time to pray, yet I pray all day long. But I also can relate to Jesus’ need to go to the mountain for some alone time to reflect and rejuvenate. It did not work so well in the wilderness, just a few chapters ago, where the crowds followed him so this time, he will try the sea.

There are times when I read the gospels and I think, Oh this familiar story. I know what happens next, but do I? Sometimes in the familiar it is hard to find the meaning. Today I want us to focus on prayer (check we just covered that) risk, fear and faith and command.

Dock Hollingsworth raises the question of how many characters are in this story? Thirteen you might say but, there are only three characters, Jesus who speaks and acts, Peter who speaks and acts and the disciples who speak and acts as one. The eleven are treated as one voice.

This is where risk comes in. The effect of one person's risk and what it can mean for the rest of the community. When Jesus begins walking toward the boat the disciples are terrified.

Hollingsworth says, "At the end of the story when they are all back on the boat and the wind has ceased, they worship Jesus. Between the fear and the worship is one disciple's risk and security in the arms of grace. The trust and risk of one follower of Jesus has an effect on the whole community of followers. Individuals who risk boldly and move toward the call of Jesus can make a difference in the lives of other believers."

I was not a risk taker as a child. I could not skip rocks, still can't, I didn't like to play baseball because I was afraid of the ball hitting me which it usually did. No, risk was not something I sought after. I was terrified when Steven was four and climbed this huge bolder at the park in Mammoth. I was mad at Peter for leaving Steven with me – who was this risk-taking child of mine. This week the three of us are going camping for a few days and I am sure Steven will one again climb a huge bolder, this time at Whitney Portal.

Something in my life has shifted from the wilderness to the sea. Because today, I seem to be taking risks all the time. Not unsafe risks that would harm myself or my family but risks of stepping out in the community to say, "this church on the corner of 6th and Grand is important to this community and this is why." Because of this risk you too the church has boldly said "Yes" to the call of following Jesus.

When I was little my brother made me watch Star Trek with him...To boldly go where no one has ever gone before. That is what God commands of us.

Recently we as a church, a community and nation have been given so many different storms to weather through and I cannot tell you when they will cease. But I sure can relate to the image of the battered boat. Honestly, that is what some days feel like for me, a battered boat that has been tossed around in the wind and waves. And because of this chaos we are terrified and afraid.

This theme of being terrified is one that seems important in this gospel. Just in this passage alone we hear the words, "cried in fear," "do not be afraid," "became frightened." Fear plays many roles in this story as if does in our own lives.

Peter has gone out on the water taken the risk yet when the wind comes, and he notices it (this is key - the words notices the wind) and when he does his faith shrinks.

I am sure I am not alone in this exercise, for when we notice what is happening around us or to us we often shrink and retreat and our faith withers away because we allow ourselves to think we are not worthy of the hand of Jesus.

Hollingsworth says, “When we fear Jesus moving toward us, or our fear moves us toward Jesus, or our fears distract us, Jesus remains a constant enemy of all the faces of fear, ‘Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.’” When we focus on the presence of Jesus our fears are softened and they can become much more manageable.

One comment on the word command before we close with faith. I raise this question as a challenge. I invite you to think about your faith journey. Considering what we have seen God do why do we ask God “if it is you God, command me to come to you.” What holds us back from running to God? Why do we need to be commanded to do so when the invitation is already been given?

What we do gain from this passage is that we are all called to take risks, step out in faith (which I do not take lightly, I consider faith to be one of the greatest mysteries of all times) but we called even in troubled waters and devastating wind storms to be faithful to Christ. The other thing we know is that stepping out is not a guarantee that we will not face troubled waters or be filled with fear, but we are assured that Jesus will accompany us and not abandoned us.

The promise is that Jesus will extend his hand to us and lift us up and help us get back in the boat. Amen

Benediction:

Now may the Lord who commands over the winds and the waves bless us and keep us, may the Lord who commands us to take risks so we may follow Jesus, walk beside us and give us peace today, tomorrow and always. Amen!