

This week was fantastic. One of the things that I loved about this particular Summer XP was that it reflected our vision right now at CPC, to become a transformed people, transforming the Peninsula. We've been talking a lot about that, and we will talk more about that in the fall.

One of the themes that we talked about this week with the kids was the idea of making waves. What it really begins with is this idea or this concept that a small ripple can actually become a large wave over time.

It begins then with this small movement where we become transformed. That's the ripple. As God intersects with our life, we become transformed. As we are transformed by the Holy Spirit, by the work of God, we then go out, and that ripple effect becomes a wave. God is working alongside that. Throughout this whole week, we've been teaching these kids about this idea of being a transformed people, transforming the Peninsula.

On day one, we talked about how God has made us for a purpose. We looked at Genesis 1 and 2 and the story of creation. We talked about how all of us have been created with different skill sets and passions and callings to which, when we live into those things, we begin to feel the effects ripple outward.

On day two, we talked about how Jesus invited people to follow him. Not only are we created with a purpose, but we've also been invited into this group of Jesus followers, trying to figure out what it means to live faithful to the way of Jesus in our time. And so we talked about being invited to follow him.

On day three, we talked about how you can trust Jesus with your life. We looked at the death and the resurrection, the center point of our faith tradition, and said, "What does this mean in how we understand our role in the Kingdom of God? And it's through that, we can trust Jesus with our whole life, the whole of who we are.

On day four, we talked about how we can love others the way Jesus loves us. And it's not just that we receive that love, but then we reflect that love outward. That's always been the story ever since Genesis. Abraham was blessed to be a blessing. In the same way, we are receiving this love, but it's not meant to just be for us. Rather it goes out into the world in all the different spaces in which we live. We are loved to go out and love others.

On day five, the last day, we talked about how God can help us change the world around us. As we go, as this wave is forming

of Jesus' followers catching the vision of what it means to follow him, we go out into the world. We can lean into God as he changes the world through us. Again, we are a transformed people transforming the world around us. We are a small ripple that's bubbling up into this much larger wave.

This morning, I want to look at this story of Peter walking on water. Peter has this story that Matthew tells where it's this microcosm of the life of a disciple. We're going to see the dimensions and the drama packed into this tiny story. It really is this invitation for us to make ways to step out in faith and begin to know what it looks like to follow Jesus. Let me set the stage in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 14.

He just finished telling the story about Jesus teaching thousands of people. He's teaching 5,000 people on this mountainside about the Kingdom of God. And as he's teaching them, his disciples are, I imagine, scrambling a bit, realizing this crowd is becoming hungry. What are they going to do about that? And so they look around and see a small boy who's got some loaves and fish. They're like, "Hey, let's bring that." And Jesus just begins to do his thing and begins to miraculously feed these 5,000 people just from this small number of fish and loaves. But it's from that scene that Matthew transitions to telling this story about how immediately from there, they go out with Jesus into this scene we're about to read. So let's pick up in Matthew 14:22.

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, and the boat was already a considerable distance from the land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. Matthew 14:22-24

Now consider our study in Mark, where we've been for quite a while. This scene is probably fairly familiar, right? Jesus goes out, he teaches, he's with the crowds, and then he retreats away. Matthew depicts the similar rhythm that we've seen in Mark.

So Jesus is with this crowd, and then he sends the disciples ahead in the lake. And I think that's an important note by Matthew because Jesus knows the storm that's about to hit the lake. He's aware of those things, and yet he still sends the disciples out onto the water in the midst of that particular storm. He then retreats to pray. It says that the boat's off in the distance, and the waves begin to crash around it.

Now, most of the disciples were professional fishermen. So they're used to being on the water. They're used to storms. They're used to these sorts of experiences. But I think what we see here probably caught them by surprise a little bit. Because we get the sense as we look down at verse 25 that they were fighting this storm all through the night. It says in verse 25, "Shortly before dawn," so Jesus sent them out the night before, but now it's shortly before dawn, before daybreak. It says,

Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." vv. 25-27

You get this sense the disciples are fighting this storm all night. For whatever reason, they can't quite overcome it. They can't cross through it. They're just caught in it, and Jesus, who's away kind of praying on this mountainside, sees the struggle they're in, and it says that he moved toward them.

Think about what Matthew is depicting here. Most of us, when we sense this idea of a storm, and I don't know what the storm is for you; it could look a lot of different ways for you. But whatever that storm is that you're walking through, that you're out in the middle of the lake on, you may feel very much alone. There's something comforting in looking back on the shore and realizing that Jesus is up there praying.

And not only is he praying distantly, but he's also actually moving towards them. See, when most of us get caught in these storms and moments in life where the waves seem to be overcoming us, we can think of God as distant. But Jesus is moving closer to the storm. He's entering into the storm. Jesus has never promised there won't be storms, but Jesus has always promised to be with us in the storm. And as these disciples are navigating life in the midst of these waves, Jesus is moving toward them. He is saying by his actions, "I am with you in the midst of the storm." There's something comforting about realizing that Jesus isn't about taking the storm away, but rather he will walk through it with you. That's the life of the disciple.

In the midst of the chaos, Jesus is there before them. And as Jesus is going, there are the disciples who are, I imagine, physically exhausted. I imagine they are emotionally exhausted, probably a bit spiritually exhausted. They just went through the scene with the 5,000. Now they're fighting this storm all night long. And so when they see this guy walking on the water, they're terrified. I think we might have been terrified as well. They look out, and they think, "Who is this person walking on the water?"

Do you view Jesus like that? Do you, like these disciples, see Jesus out in the midst of the chaos and think, "Who is this out here?" What is your view of Jesus? Does Jesus move closer to you in these moments? It's in this moment that Jesus, in his moving

forward, sees them, and his immediate response is, "Listen, take courage. It's me. I'm here." I think to the disciple's credit, Jesus calling out to them did resolve their fears. "Lord, if it is you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." It's no longer this fear in terror. It's rather, "Jesus, if that's you, I will enter even further. I'll come out of the boat and pursue you more." He says, "I will move towards you."

"Lord, if it is you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" vv. 28-31

So imagine the scene. Peter. Terrified. The waves are still crashing, and yet when he sees this Jesus out there, his rabbi, his teacher, his soon-to-be Savior through the work on the cross. And he sees him out here, and he says, I want to be with him. And he does this so much; the faith is so empowering to him that he actually takes the step. Imagine taking your foot over the edge of the boat. It's at that moment that Peter moves towards Jesus. He says, "Yes, Jesus. I want to be with you."

This moment is both inspiring for us and probably was inspiring for those other disciples in the boat, but at the same time, it's a bit commonplace. And what I mean by that is this is exactly what disciples are to do. The whole business of being a disciple was imitating your rabbi. It was to become like your rabbi. It was to take on the life of your rabbi. So when Peter sees Jesus walking on the water, he's actually doing what we would anticipate a disciple to do, as crazy as that sounds. He sees his rabbi, his teacher, and says, "I have to go wherever this Jesus goes." Even if it means out in the middle of this lake where there are all sorts of trouble and chaos happening. But Peter responds to this because, again, that's what disciples do.

What is it that Jesus is asking you to do? If we call ourselves disciples, our task is the same. We are to imitate Jesus. We are to imitate our rabbi, our teacher. And so, for Peter, it meant him walking on the water. Yet, very much like Peter, the scene begins to shift. It changes in a very similar way that we would experience as well. As he's walking on the water, he takes a few steps, but then the waves begin to come into view. His eyes shift off of Jesus, and into focus comes the chaos of the moment. It appears that once Peter takes his eyes off Jesus, he begins to sink. I would imagine, if you've ever watched someone learn how to walk, the scene looked a little bit like that because I don't think Peter's ever walked on water before. He begins to stumble. He begins to look around and think, how can I continue doing what my rabbi is doing?

Is that not the same for us? As we step out in obedience to Jesus, saying, "God, I'm ready to obey. I'm ready to follow you,

to imitate you, my teacher, my Savior. I want to do what you are doing." And we get out of the boat, but then the cost comes. Think of the parable of the soils last week. The worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth, the thorns, begin to pop up in the rocky soil. We think, "How can I do this thing? It doesn't seem logical. It doesn't seem rational for me to continue following Jesus." But the invitation is always to come to Jesus. He's there on the water. Look at what New Testament scholar Craig Keener says about this scene.

Still Peter knows by this point whom to cry out to; his feeble attempt to walk on water is no more feeble than our first attempts to walk on land. Our faith may be more infantile than Peter's if we have never even tried to step out in obedience to Jesus' commands or direction for our lives; many of us have less practice walking in faith than two-year-olds have walking physically. It is important to note that while Jesus is disappointed with Peter's inadequate faith, Peter has acted in greater faith than the other disciples—he is learning. Faith cannot be worked up by formulas or emotion, but it grows through various tests as we continue to trust our Lord and he continues to teach us. Faith grows out of a relationship with the person of Jesus and in no other way.

Notice that although Peter's faith faltered while walking, his first reaction was, "Jesus save me." Now, even in the midst of that doubt, there was enough in him to muster the courage to cry out, to not resort to his own abilities. Rather he leans further into Jesus. You see this moment of great faith where he's stepping out following Jesus. He's taking the steps amongst the chaos and the waves, yet just a few chapters later, we're going to see him deny the very existence of Jesus.

A few chapters after that, he's going to become the pillar on which the church stands. Peter is a case of three steps forward, two steps back. He's the case of that two-year-old, Keener's talking about trying to walk physically but still stumbling around in the dark. See, I find so much solace in Peter. As we draw towards the close of this scene, I want to note two things we can learn through this story.

Get Out of the Boat

The first thing we can learn is if we want to follow Jesus, we have to get out of the boat. If you're going to follow Jesus, there will be a moment in which you have to hoist your leg over the edge of the boat and take that first step. It will be hard. It will be challenging. It may, in fact, even cost you something. But if we want to follow our rabbi, we have to begin to take that step. If we want to grow in Christlikeness, we have to trust and follow Jesus.

So what is it for you? I don't know what storm it is that you're facing. Maybe you're in the boat, and you're in the midst of it, and life is just throwing things at you. Maybe it's a diagnosis; maybe it's a broken relationship. Maybe it's job struggles.

Whatever the waves are, whatever the chaos is that's breaking in on you, I wonder if Jesus is still there saying, "Come out to me. I've been watching you. I've been praying for you. I've been drawing closer to you. And now I'm right here in the midst of the waves inviting you to come. If we want to follow Jesus, we have to get out of the boat.

Fix Your Eyes on Jesus

And then, the second thing that we learn from Peter that we, too, can take away is that to walk with Jesus through the storm; you have to fix your eyes on him. It was the moment that he drew his attention away from Jesus and onto the circumstances that he began to sink. He began to allow the circumstances to actually overcome the faith that he had. And so, church, what does it look like in the midst of that storm, in whatever it is that you're facing, to just fix your eyes on Jesus and say, "I'm going to continue one step at a time. I don't know how we're going to get through this. I don't know how this all makes sense, but one step at a time, I'm just going to follow Jesus a little more and a little more.

I think that happens in mundane things. If you remember, earlier in our Gospel of Mark series, Jesus was getting away to the wilderness. The *eremos*, the lonely place where he'd connect with God. Where he'd get away, amongst all the busyness and chaos of ministry, and in the quiet, just let his heart be saturated in the love of God. I wonder if that's a way in which we fix our eyes on Jesus. Amongst all that this life brings, amongst all the pressures, anxieties, and stresses that we face, I wonder if just starting each morning in the quiet is an act of rebellion to say, "I will fix my eyes on Jesus, not on the circumstances." If we want to walk with Jesus, particularly through the storms, we have to fix our eyes on Jesus.

Listen to the way the story closes. *"Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. 'You have little faith,' he said, 'why did you doubt?'" (v. 31).* I love that image because as we step out into that, as we get out of the boat, as we fix our eyes on Jesus, we very much, like Peter, will falter. It will happen. But I love that little word, "immediately," Jesus reached out his hand and saved him—immediately. Peter called out, and Jesus was there. *"And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'" (vv. 32-33).* It was that small movement of Peter getting out of the boat and moving towards Jesus that began a movement of worship in the boat.

It was that ripple that created a wave in which the whole boat looked at Jesus when they climbed back in and said, "This guy truly is the Son of God." It was Peter's small movement of moving closer to Jesus. He got out of the boat and fixed his eyes on Jesus. It was Peter saying, "I'm going to step out in obedience as disciples do." And when Peter and Jesus got back in the boat, the wave of worship had taken place, and they began to declare that Jesus is the Son of God.

Peter, at that moment, became a transformed person who was transforming those around him. There was something in that movement, that witness of that simple yet profound act of faith, that started something far beyond Peter himself. Church, I wonder again if this is the invitation for us. And for some of us stepping out of the boat, we need to hear Jesus say, "Take courage. It's I. Come." Others of you are in the midst of the storm. You're there, and you need to see that visual of Jesus reaching his hand out to save you. It's there. Immediately he's doing that.

Wherever it is, the call for us as the people of God is to continue to pursue Jesus. So, my hope is that we learned from these kids this week. As we watched them step out more and more into that obedience, we could understand our role in following Jesus. And maybe we, as we go from here, begin to recognize this storm that we may be in at this moment, that we are ready to get out of the boat and take one step further towards following Jesus because he's a good God. He's one whom we can trust. And he's with us in the midst of our storm.

Lord, I pray that we can learn from Peter. I think about that scene as he's getting out of the boat, and the thoughts that must have been going through his head. But God, I do know that it appears the most predominant thought was that I can trust this Jesus.

God, I pray for us as we go, as we have learned all week about what it means to make a wave for you, Lord, to pursue you, to follow you more. God, I pray that we would be inspired like Peter to take that first step. God, for some of us, the first step is to just say yes to you. God, for others of us, we're in the storm. We're trying hard to fix our eyes on you, but God, the waves seem to be getting bigger and bigger.

And so, God, I pray for those who are in the midst of the storm that they would feel your welcome. That they would sense your hand reaching towards them. God, would you be with those who are in the midst of that chaos? Because you've promised always to do that. So, God, we thank you for being that kind of God who pursues us. God, help us. Charge us up as we go to follow you more closely. In Jesus' name, amen.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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