

**8 Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 14 – Year A – August 7, 2011**  
**Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28; Psalm 105: 1-6, 16-22, 45b; Romans 10:5-15; Matthew 14:22-33**  
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“Come,” says Jesus, and Peter steps out of the boat in faithful response to the Lord. It’s been said that “the reason that we seem to lack faith in our time is that we are not doing anything that requires it” (Ernest Campbell). Is it true? When did we last step out into turbulent waters or even calm seas to answer Jesus’ call? Peter risks his life for the sake of faith. What are we willing to risk to come closer to God in Christ Jesus?

Today’s Gospel reading follows the stories of John the Baptist’s murder, and the gracious feeding of the multitude, as well as Jesus’ parables and teachings on the kingdom of God. On the face of it, the story is a revelation of Jesus’ divinity. In the Hebrew Scriptures, only God has the authority to tread on the waters, and to calm the seas of chaos. For example, Exodus 14 recounts God’s deliverance of the Israelites as they cross the Red Sea on dry ground. In Psalm 107: 28-29, we read, “Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he brought them out from their distress; he made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed.” God speaks in the prophetic voice of Isaiah (43:1-2), “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you.” Each passage includes a decisive act of power over the elements of chaos, pain and peril, and an act of gracious deliverance. Similarly, in our Gospel reading, Jesus’ divine self-revelation is two-fold. Firstly, in Jesus’ word, “It is I; do not be afraid”. The Great I AM is the name of God. The reassurance against fear is a sign of God’s presence in the birth and resurrection of the Word made flesh. Secondly, Jesus’ identity is made explicit through His act of delivering Peter and the rest of the disciples from the dangerous storm. We too can feel the comfort and assurance that Jesus brings salvation, healing, and deliverance for all God’s children. Jesus shows us how to live out God’s mercy, grace, and compassion in our own lives.

Since we already know and proclaim Jesus as our savior and Lord, let’s look more closely at the relational dimension of discipleship. This includes the source of our strength and courage when life presents challenges, as life always does. It also includes how to live in healthy fear, attentively, as one fully awake to God in Christ Jesus. As Peter shows us, part of discipleship is about moving beyond our comfort zone. As disciples, we accept the call to step out of the boat, and into unknown waters. Faith in action pushes the boundaries of our courage, and stretches us to grow in the Lord, as well as in the depth and breadth of our relationships with God and others. As disciples, we’re willing to take risks for the sake of the Gospel. As the story goes, a disciple’s life is what happens between our prayers, and our worship of God in Christ Jesus. Prayer grounds us in God, and helps us to discern His will. Prayer keeps us focused on God, which is *the* most important relationship in our lives. Worship is our proper response to God’s self-revelation through creation, Scripture, and the Word made flesh. As we say in our Eucharistic prayer, it is good and right to offer God worship and praise, for all that He has done for us. To worship God is to rejoice and give thanks for the reality of God’s kingdom. Worship is part of our stewardship of God’s blessings in our lives. Through worship, we offer all that we have and ourselves to God, Who is the source of all life. Worshipping God in joy we give thanks for God’s abundant love and grace, because only in Him do we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28). Worship is movement towards God; it fills and strengthens each of us as vessels of God.

Peter responds to Jesus’ call in faith, even when it means stepping out into troubled waters, and putting his life on the line. Theologian, Søren Kierkegaard says, “Without risk, faith is an impossibility.” The story literally speaks of the fearful disciples in a boat, threatened by a storm, Peter’s risky move, and Jesus’ gracious deliverance. Going deeper now, what if we are meant to see ourselves as the boats, the vessels of God’s grace, the bearers of the Gospel cargo, ships that sail out into the world strengthened through our prayer and worship to love and serve others? What if Peter’s response is also about stepping

out of ourselves, and taking a risk in order to move closer to Jesus? Is this what Jesus means when he tells us to lose our lives for His sake? What if Peter's act of stepping out of the boat also shows us what a difference the courage of one disciple can make in the lives of many? Only Peter boldly takes the risk when Jesus calls. Only then are the other disciples encouraged in their faith, and worship the Lord. Peter's risky move helps others to recognize Jesus as God's Son, and gives Jesus the opportunity to demonstrate God's saving grace in a tangible, life-giving way. The Lord is always ready to reach out and save us from ourselves. Staying focused on Him helps us to resist unhealthy fear that paralyzes our ministries, or stifles our spiritual growth.

It's said that "A ship is safe in harbor, but that is not what ships are for" (William Shedd). In the last several days, many members of this community have stepped out in faith at Jesus' call, set aside self for His sake, and walked on water. A life of discipleship involves paying attention, especially in matters of faith. You can bet that any time we're caught doing God's work, we'll see an outpouring of God's love, grace, mercy and compassion. From one perspective, the annual rummage sale is a week of hard work, or a kind of sweat equity if you like. Yet it is more. Despite the effort, some of us focus on the bottom line and get excited about the money we raise for outreach. Again, it's more than just raising money. Let's step out of our boat, and reflect on the week as a faithful response to Jesus' call. When we do, we'll realize that we've been moved beyond anxious busy-ness into deeper waters of faith and trust. We can also see and rejoice in the miraculous multiplication of God's abundant love and blessings. Here's what I'm talking about.

In the Great Commandment Jesus tells us, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." Raising money and giving it all away is a fabulous way to share God's love. However, by God's grace, participating in the rummage sale also helps us to grow spiritually. We grow in our relationship with God when we share our time, talents and resources generously as disciples of Jesus. Giving back to God is part of our worship and part of being a good steward of God's blessings. We grow in our relationship with others by sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ in words and deeds, in smiles and thanks. Giving of ourselves, welcoming friends and strangers, and loving our neighbors enough to help those in need, builds and strengthens the bonds of our common humanity. The triumph of God's love and grace multiplies because we show the world what it means to be a part of God's kingdom of love and justice, compassion and abundance. The rummage sale is a wonderful example of how we live out divine justice, and divine hospitality.

Another miracle of God's abundant love is that everyone has something to share: be it the gift of time, service, a smile, a donation, or the gift of a purchase. One of our youngest members shared her gift of hospitality by waving and smiling at everyone. Throughout the sale, both individually, and as a community, we step out of our boat in response to Jesus' call. We touch the lives of hundreds of people, and who knows how that might change the world? We meet the needs of some of our poorest neighbors with compassion. As the face of Christ to a host of strangers, and as the hands and feet of God, the rummage sale is faith in action. We give thanks to God that we can share His abundance with Shepherd's Kitchen in Snowflake. In turn, they will share the blessing by feeding almost eight thousand people this year. We've also extended the presence of God's kingdom by treading faithfully over the chaotic waters of a dog-eat-dog world. Finally, we've demonstrated tangibly that God's justice **is** a living reality, available for all. Did it require prayer and faith? You bet! Now let's praise God from whom all blessings flow!

Amen.