

“Sit Down You’re Rocking the Boat”

August 10, 2014

Matthew 14:22-33

22 Then he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. 23 And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, 24 but the boat by this time was many furlongs distant from the land, beaten by the waves; for the wind was against them. 25 And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking 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 for fear. 27 But immediately he spoke to them, saying, "Take heart, it is I; have no fear." 28 And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water." 29 He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus; 30 but when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." 31 Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "O man of little faith, why did you doubt?" 32 And 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."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICfGjUfXUIE> (4:23)

“Sit down you’re rocking the Boat” This clip came to us from the 1955 Film version starring Frank Sinatra, Marlon Brando, Jean Simmons, and Vivian Blaine. Nicely Nicely, who is the main singer of this particular song was played by Stubby Kaye. The song comes to us when the men present are forced to be in the prayer meeting because Sky Masterson, played by Marlon Brando had won them in a dice game. We hear all the “confessions” of the men and then Nicely Nicely stands up and ‘the people all say sit down, sit down you’re rocking the boat.’

Sit down you’re rocking the boat. What boat? The boat of complacency. The boat of tradition. The boat of comfort. The boat of familiarity. The boat of injustice. The boat of normal. The boat of this is how it has always been. The boat of ignorance. The boat of denial. The boat of silence. The boat of inaction. The boat of...

I should back up a moment, and instead of asking what boat we are on, the first question we should ask ourselves is are we the one doing the rocking, or the one wanting the rocking to stop? We are not a bunch of gamblers who lost a bet to join in a prayer meeting. Yet this question is pertinent to us as faithful followers of Jesus too.

Our scripture today is one where Jesus is on the Lake, with his Disciples. There are two big stories of this in the Gospels, the one where Jesus calms the Storm and then this one where Jesus Walks on Water. Not only does Jesus walk on Water but one of his Disciples, Peter, gets up, and steps out of the boat and heads towards Jesus walking on top of the water too.

Remember most of the Disciples are fisherman or grew up around the sea so they were well aware of the power of water during storms or extreme winds as they were experiencing on that particular day. Most of us here understand the extreme power of the forces of nature.

But, up stands Peter, and not only does he stand up, he stands up and begins to step out onto the water. I can almost hear the Disciples yelling at him to sit down because he was rocking the boat. The Disciples are incredibly human and embody us so often throughout scriptures. Their reaction is what we would expect when in similar circumstances. By this point in scripture they are fairly used to the uniqueness of Jesus. They had seen him perform miracles, they had seen him interpret scripture and teach radical new things. While what he was doing was extraordinary it was not out of the realm of possibility for Jesus as the Disciples knew him. They also trusted him enough that when he said do not be afraid, they were no longer afraid.

Peter however, changes the game. By him standing up and stepping out he is decidedly rocking the boat of the Disciples up until that point. The Disciples were followers of Jesus but what Peter was doing was an extreme version of following. Remember of the twelve men who are close to Jesus. Close enough to live with him, and travel around with him. Of those twelve men, only one stepped out of that boat and walked towards Jesus.

He followed after Jesus and kept going until the wind buffeted him and caused him to be afraid. But then Jesus reached out his hand and lifted him up and together they turned and walked towards the rest of the Disciples.

Often times we will read this story as how even when we are afraid when following Jesus we can put our trust in him and he will reach out his hand and help us along our difficult ways. This is a wonderful and comforting interpretation. It gives us the warm fuzzy feeling to know that when we are sinking in a stormy sea of life Jesus will reach out his hand to us and lift us up so we can not only stand but also continue to walk beside him.

But some of the challenges of our faith are to look beyond an initial surface level interpretation and view the story through another lens. Jesus reaching out and helping us is only one facet to the story. I want us to explore it from the angle of the Disciples. The Disciples are on this boat together, they had left Jesus to pray and were heading to the other side. They see him in front of them almost ghost like until he asks them to not be afraid. So they calm down until one out of twelve stands up and rocks the boat.

You see how insane that average is? Of the twelve people closest to Jesus only one stands up and willing rocks the boat to follow after him. How often do we have Jesus in front of us doing miraculous and wonderful things and yet we remain seated unwilling to rock the boat, we listen to the cries of those who surround us and sit down so we do not rock anything.

Now, to be clear these are the Disciples, they are some of the most faithful people and they are the men who become the apostles who share with the world our understanding of Jesus. They believed in Jesus and loved him and trusted in him enough that the phrase “do not be afraid” in his voice was enough to still their fears. Their belief and love of him though does not mean they did not get complacent and comfortable in their boat of faith.

It takes courage to step up and stand and eventually leave the boat. While Peter is blessed to see and know Jesus is in front of him, there to reach out his hand. We do not have the same luxury. Being faithful today is harder than it was for the Disciples. They lived, worked, and truly walked with Jesus and still as we see so often they failed to grasp who was with them. We do not have the same circumstances but we do have the beauty of the whole story.

Peter stepped out not knowing or understanding the full power of whom he was walking towards. We know it. We know when we step up and step out that Jesus is not only there we know Jesus will reach out his hand when we perhaps falter and help us stand strong. We know this, our faith is based on these stories of the Disciples and the Gospels, our reading and knowledge of the New and Old Testaments. Yet, still sometimes we struggle to stand up and step out and walk towards Jesus.

The thing to remember is that Peter was walking on stormy water. We are not promised easy passage but we are certainly promised Jesus. Our faith assures us of his presence there to guide us and to help us when we falter. So it begs the question of why do we join in the chorus saying ‘sit down you’re rocking the boat’. Why when we have been invited by our faith in Jesus to be along for the ride so complacent that we forget why we are even in the boat in the first place. There is nothing in our lives but our faith in Jesus that invites us on the boat. But often we are too blinded by our own way to be able to stand up and rock the boat as we follow after Jesus.

It is up to us to determine when and where and how but our calling compels and asks us to take a chance, be like Peter and follow Christ.