

“VOICES OF LENT (#2): THE VOICE OF INVITATION”

Matthew 14:22-33

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[Cornerstone U.M.C.; 3-3-24]

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1. Read Text: Matthew 14:22-33 (portrayed as dramatic character monologue by "Peter").
2. We're in the midst of a sermon series called Voices of Lent in which -- during these four weeks leading up to Easter -- we're using the spiritual themes of the season to explore ways in which God *speaks* in order to sustain and empower us in and for life.

A--And in today's dramatic monologue of Matthew 14, shared so well by _____, we are introduced to what I'm calling the “VOICE OF INVITATION”, and to consider what we're to do when we hear it.

1--For me, Peter's encounter with Jesus in this story reminds me that for all of us, there are times in life when we go through times of challenge and decision, and end up encountering God/Jesus precisely in the midst of those.

2--Trish and I experienced this in 2006 when we found out that she'd just been diagnosed with breast cancer, and then again in 2014 when our (then unwed) daughter in college told us she was pregnant.

3--Perhaps some of you have experienced this when you went through a divorce, or were laid off from your job, or were relocated to a new home by your work

B--But whatever form the "storm" of our lives takes, often in the very midst of it, Jesus calls out to us and -- like he did with Peter -- invites us to stretch outside our comfort zone in order to do and become more than we already are.

3. Yes, such times can seem scary and uncertain. But instead of focusing on the fear, today I want us to notice Peter's reaction, and suggest that *his* response gives us **a three-fold pattern for how you & I can respond** to such times and situations, as well. ¹

--II--

4. First, when you and I hear Jesus' "Voice of Invitation" in the midst of challenging times, we should “CALL OUT” -- that is: pray and ask God, *“Lord is this really you?”* or, stated another way: in the midst of tough situation, ask *“Lord, where ARE you in this?”*

A--That's precisely what we find Peter doing in Verse 28 after Jesus calls to the disciples:
“Peter answered him, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.'”

B--Now, it might seem that this would be an obvious first step to take in challenging situations like this -- but too often it's the last thing on people's minds!

1--No. Many of us we want to blame God *for* the bad things happening to us, rather than first asking *where* He is in those things (or assuming He's not there at all!)

2--Yet, as I've heard it said, "*God sometimes ALLOWS what God doesn't WILL.*"

3--In other words, God is not the *author* of bad things, but He can USE bad things to bring about our betterment, if we'll allow it.

C--And what's more is that before we go sticking our necks out to do something in God's name, we should be sure that it's really something HE wants us to do.

1--One author put it this way: "*Without this summons [to 'come'] we have not the right to throw ourselves into the waters -- it would be presumptuous, imprudent and rash, and a risk to the life of the soul.*" ²

2--Too often, though, I (and perhaps many of you) leap right in doing even good "church" things without *first* asking God if its what HE wants, and the result is that our endeavor/work often falls flat on its face, never gets off the ground, or we end up burning out before its accomplished.

D--Yet, Peter's encounter with Jesus reminds us that until we hear God's invitation and/or call, OUR duty is merely to pray, to wait upon Him, and to rest in His presence. ³

5. According to today's story, though, the second step we should take when we experience God/Jesus' "Voice of Invitation" is to "**JUMP IN.**"

A--The first part of Vs. 29 simply reads "[Jesus] said 'Come.' So Peter got out of the boat"

1--That is: he got up the nerve to get out of his comfort zone, trust God, and try something new = he took a "leap of faith," in other words.

2--You see, if we know that God is with us in our situation (i.e., cancer, death of a loved one, illness, etc.), or has spoken to us and given us a vision about something He's calling us to (i.e., a new job, a relationship, a mission opportunity, etc.) then we don't need to fear the outcome. ⁴

3--OUR part is merely to step out in faith and be willing to *trust God through it* so that His will and His presence become plain.

B--Perhaps you've heard it said before, "*We don't know what the future holds; But we know who holds the future.*"

C--God's "Voice of Invitation," you see, can actually empower us to take a "leap of faith" -- to encourage us to "jump in" to the unknown waters of life by trusting in God for every step that we take.

6. Yet, once God' confirms His presence after we "call out" to Him, and after we then surrender ourselves to His will and way, **ONLY THEN** are we able to take the third and final step: to **WALK ON THE WATER**.

A--The last part of Verse 29 simply says "[Peter]... *started walking on the water; and came toward Jesus*" -- that is: he accomplished the seemingly "impossible."

1--You see, when we step out of the "boat" of our comfort zone and "jump in" to the unknown waters of life and change,...

2--...if we're keeping our eyes focused on GOD'S purpose and plan for our life (rather than our own), then the "impossible" becomes not only "possible," but actually comes to pass.

B--This was the case not only through Trish's breast cancer (that I talked about earlier), but also through our daughter's pregnancy, as well:

1--...Trish and I grew stronger/closer as a couple through her cancer treatment;

2--And even though the first few years of having a young baby were challenging for our daughter and eventual son-in-law, not only have they turned out to be great parents, but today Trish and I wouldn't trade having our oldest grandchild Hannah in our lives for anything in the world!

C--Now some of you will point out that in today's story, Peter goes on to falter and has to be helped by Jesus.

1--But notice WHY... Verse 30 says "*when [Peter] noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and [began] to sink*" -- in other words, he faltered ***because he took his eyes off of Jesus.***

2--In the same way, when we as individuals, families, or even as a *church* take our eyes off of the will and ways of God...

3--...and instead allow ourselves to be distracted by the "what ifs" of life, by the activities and side issues that do NOT reflect God's will, THEN we -- like Peter -- are going to begin to falter.

D--But the good news is that, just as he did with Peter, Jesus will save us from our faltering, too.

1--Sure, as he did with Peter (Vs. 31) he may also say to us, "*You of little faith, why did you doubt?*"

2--In other words...

(a) "*Why didn't you trust my presence in you to be enough in the first place?*"

(b) "*Why did you try to do things in your own strength?*"

(c) "*Why did you allow your trust in me to be distracted by these other things?*"

3--Some of the most difficult struggles of my own life (and that I've seen in the lives of various churches I've served) have occurred because I (or they) took our eyes off of the "main thing" of God's will and way...

4--...and have instead become distracted & bogged down in issues, topics, politics, and other things that are ultimately trivial and petty, and which cause us to miss God's presence and power in a given situation.

E--The key to "walking on the water", you see (to getting through the "challenging" things of life) is to keep our eyes focused on the Savior and the power He can provide

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7. So, I believe that Matthew 14 gives us three steps we can take whenever we -- like Peter -- experience the "Voice of Invitation" in our own lives.

A--We should:

1-- "*Call Out*" -- that is: ask God to reveal His presence in it.

2-- "*Jump In*" -- get out of our comfort zone and take a "leap of faith" by trusting God to get us through.

3--And when we do those first two, then we can finally "*Walk on Water*" -- "do the impossible," through the power and presence of the Lord.

B--So, will you be willing to listen and respond to God's "***Voice of Invitation***" in your own life today?

8. [PRAYER]

9. [SUGGESTED CLOSING TRADITIONAL SONG: UMH#467, "Trust And Obey"]

ENDNOTES:

¹ This three-fold pattern was inspired by the thoughts of Charles de Foucauld in Meditations of a Hermit, cited in Reuben P. Job, A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Other Servants, p. 60.

² Charles de Foucauld, cited in Reuben Job, A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Other Servants, p. 60.

³ Jesus' invitation to "come" also carries with it a certain comfort that eases (or in some cases eliminates) our doubts and fears. As Charles de Foucauld relates, *"After our Lord said 'come' to him, Peter had no more fear and walked upon the waters. So that when Jesus has certainly called us to certain circumstances in life, given us a certain vocation, we need fear nothing, but should attack the most insurmountable obstacles without hesitation"* (de Foucauld, cited in Reuben Job, A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Other Servants, p. 60).

⁴ We find this in Verse 27, where -- in response to the disciples' fears -- says that Jesus responded *"Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid!"* In other words, Jesus didn't give them all the *answers* at that time, but He instead reminded them that He was WITH them even in their *questions*. In the words of the medieval Christian mystic Charles de Foucauld, when we experience a vision or the call of Jesus, we should *"Hesitate no more, but throw ourselves into the waters like Saint Peter"* (de Foucauld, cited in Reuben Job, A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Other Servants, p. 60).