

1 Kings 19:9-18

Matthew 14:9-18

Romans 10:5-15

“Let us hear what God, the Lord will speak,
for God will speak peace to all of God’s people.”

AMEN!

So St. Stephen, we have been
singing our way into the beginning of sermons
and we will do so again this morning.

Song, especially when done together,
softens the heart and readies the body
and mind to receive God’s word.

So your line is “Walk on water.”
And I’ll sing, “Do you believe?”

(Sing it!)

Those words come from the refrain of
the hit song by the band,
Thirty Seconds to Mars.

They also come to us in our gospel lesson today.

Well, sort of! :-)

There’s walking on water (Jesus and Peter)
and there’s a teaching about belief or “faith.”

And for perfectly legitimate reasons,
many a sermon have been preached
on this text with Peter being the focus.

He's been lifted positively in sermons for
his willingness to step out of the boat
and follow Jesus, even on water.

There has also been the focus of the negative, too.

Sermons about the way Peter got distracted,
took his eyes off of Jesus, and
for doing so he "began to drown."

And then Jesus said he had "little faith."

That can't be good, can it?

But it's all about the tone, right?

If we read this as (scoffing)

"You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Then it sounds like Jesus admonishes Peter, but
if we read it the way, I believe, it should be read.

Then, we hear Jesus say,

(Gently) “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”

Then we align the words from Jesus
to be more like the Son of Humanity’s
true character.

The same character which is described and
testified to in the gospels.

The character of One who is patient,
kind, direct in language (yes!), but always
with a teacher’s heart and always done in love.

And if that, in itself isn’t enough for us
to understand Jesus’ tone here, then
we can simply look at the
other places in Matthew’s gospel

where we find the words... “little faith.”

Jesus will talk about little faith
as in the “size of mustard seeds” and it being
enough to move mountains.

And the word “little” is not derogatory
for Jesus as we find, also in Matthew,

Jesus teaching the disciples to
“Let the ‘little’ children come to me.

For it is for these that
the kingdom of heaven belongs.”

Clearly, for Jesus, a “little” is a perfect amount. (Pause)

Jesus may have asked why he doubted or
didn't believe but he didn't ask it
to shame Peter.

Nor should his question be used to shame us. (Pause)

So doing this little exercise of discerning
the tone of Jesus's voice, and then doing
a little word study, we begin to see that

the sermon should not focus on Peter, really.

It is all about Jesus!

And when we keep the spotlight on Jesus
we remember why he went to be
by himself in the first place.

To grieve the death of John the Baptizer.

So he sent the disciples away in a boat.

The translation is that Jesus “compelled”
them to get into the boat.

Then Jesus dispersed the crowd that had
been miraculously fed with bread and fish.

Now was the time to go
and be alone with God.

Lesson number one for us.

We need to be sure to carve
this time to be alone with the Lord, too.

Especially in times of grief
and exhaustion.

But we don't want to always be in seclusion, either.

Lesson two is we want to get into
the boat with other people.

This is about Jesus, but we learn
to live the way he did and become obedient to
God's will. (Pause)

Not because of what I say,
but because of what humans need. (Pause)

Still, I don't think any of us will learn
to walk on water,

but that's not the point of
Matthew's testament either.

You see, Peter, like the church that
comes later, is growing in faith.

We, like Peter, are learning
to step out into a new role.

We are finding that the boat
was not a safe place.

Even though Jesus compelled
the disciples into the boat,
we don't want to miss that point.

It's not always safe.

Being sent by Jesus is scary, even dangerous,
but this account
serves to remind us that
we are not alone.

It also serves to remind us that
we've been created for such things.

We are standing on the shoulders of our ancestors
and our predecessors who, though imperfect,
have taught and nurtured us.

Peter, said,

“If you are you, Jesus, then command me
to come to you.

We can say those words, too.

Even in seclusion, the Lord is with you. (Pause)

That’s is our tie in with the text from 1 Kings.

Elijah was sent into seclusion by God.

His life was in danger and he’s
encountering abandonment, fear, and chaos
until God reminded him that God’s there,
in the silence.

This question from God,
“What are you doing here, Elijah?”

It, too, needs to be heard in the right tone.

(Say the question with an accusing voice then say it
with a little chuckle in the voice.)

What would God’s tone be?

Yeah, I believe it surely to be the latter. (Laughing)

“What are you doing here, Elijah?”

Don't you know I am with you and
have always been with you...

Gently, God reminded Elijah that
God was right there.

Along side him the whole time.

He was not alone in the cave;
nor was he abandoned in his fears.

This encounter is not all about Elijah,
he had a community to return to.

The disciples were not alone in the boat, either
amidst the life threatening storm.

Just like the walking on water account is
not all about Peter.

A community was counting on him.

Today, we learn about God and
God's protective
and caring character.

And something else, too.

We find out about God's character of love.

Paul's letter to the Romans, especially
the part we read today, is about God's
loving character.

It is a complex argument he proposed
to help his listener understand.

But when one boils it all down
it is about trust and love.

Two character traits that humans struggle with.

We sense it missing in our society.

Trust and Love..

It's a turbulent time,
a storm filled life,
chaos seems to be all around...

So think of the ways God meets us.

In the singing songs and in singing psalms.

"God will speak peace

and we turn our hearts to God.”

AMEN!