

Homily for August 9, 2026

1 Kings 19:9-18, Roman 10:5-15, Matthew 14:22-33

Our Gospel story today is found not only in Matthew but also in Luke and John. However, there is one very significant difference in Matthew's account: Not only Jesus but Peter, also, walks on the water. Peter wasn't mentioned at all by Luke or John.

Curious but pure speculation on my part:

Perhaps Luke and John thought there was an important meaning in this story that might become obscured by Peter's drama? He did tend to act impulsively or blurt out stuff on occasion without really thinking. And in these moments, everything became focused on Peter. Honestly, as I was researching various commentaries on Matthew's version, again, the focus was mostly on Peter's part of the story. But I am going to reflect on the other parts of the story first and leave Peter until the end.

Jesus is **determined** to take some time for himself. As we learned last week, his cousin John the Baptist had been cruelly murdered, and Jesus needed to be alone with his father. No doubt he was thinking about his own journey and how it would end. He needed comfort, renewal of purpose and strength. We can only imagine. But what we do know for sure is that if Jesus needed time alone talking to God, then so **must** we.

For myself, it is of hungry people clamoring for attention that keeps me from doing this but my own messed up priorities.

So, Jesus dismissed the crowds and the disciples so he could be completely alone. The disciples were packed off in a boat to head to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, where they supposed Jesus would meet them.

Then a storm suddenly erupted. Not uncommon at all in that region. The Sea of Galilee is

700 ft below sea level and encircled by high hills, the Golan Heights in the east (2K high) and other peaks to the west. This creates a basin that makes its own weather and it's very unpredictable.

Several years ago, I was on a tour in Israel. We were on the Mt of the Beatitudes, a hill on the west side of the Sea of Galilee, sitting in a field of mustard. We could look down and see the water. There wasn't a cloud in the sky but we were told that our lunchtime sail on the Sea of Galilee was cancelled due to bad weather. I thought "really?" Literally, not a cloud! Then late in the afternoon, the storm ceased so we could make our boat trip. When we arrived, the waterfront had clearly been hit by a lot of rain and wind, and they were still bailing out the boats.

Now the disciples were fishermen, so they were used to this – not that it wouldn't be difficult and sometimes dangerous. They weren't afraid. Perhaps they were remembering an earlier occasion when Jesus was in the boat with them, asleep. When a massive storm arose. Jesus woke up and calmed the winds and waves. Then, the disciples saw, first hand, the power in Jesus.

So, they are doing what Jesus had asked of them, trying to steer their boat across the water, trusting that he wouldn't let them sink but exhausted by the effort. Although it was a sailboat, in a storm, they needed to row.

Suddenly, this unearthly shape was travelling across the water. Our translations call it a ghost. NOW they were terrified. They didn't recognize that it was Jesus until he spoke. When he got into the boat, the storm calmed down. Their fears were calmed and they found they had re-energy to complete their journey.

In each version of this story, Jesus speaks the same words: **Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.** Jesus' miraculous power to still the storm was not the point of the story. The disciples and we, ourselves, are often traveling through turbulent waters. **Life is often stormy.** The question is whether we can recognize Jesus with us and **hear his voice.** We don't need to feel afraid or anxious if we find Jesus Jesus but he might show up in unexpected ways.

Let's pause for a moment and look at the plight of Elijah in our reading from 1 Kings. For many years Elijah has been trying to persuade the Israelites, and especially their King Ahab, to return to God's ways. He feels that he has failed totally. And now, he has called out Ahab and his wife Jezebel for their unjust behavior in killing a man who wouldn't sell his vineyard to them. Jezebel is threatening to have Elijah killed. He's had enough and goes up a mountain and hides in a cave.

He is exhausted to the point of defeat. This is emotional/mental exhaustion not physical Exhaustion like the disciples. He says twice in this passage "I am alone" Like Jesus, he knows that he needs to spend time with God. Again, God announced his coming in a terrifying way but when He finally speaks, it is through the pure silence.

Unlike the followers of Baal who only knew their Gods through fireworks and trickery, our God talks to us! He speaks the words that we need to hear: guidance, comfort and love After God speaks to Elijah, Elijah is ready to go back into the fight, renewed in hope with the promise that 7,000 others will be saved. Definitely, he's not alone.

When I reflected on these stories, I thought of us at Trinity. Here in our boat – churches are built to resemble a ship. Here is the crew, our community of faith, like the disciples, we're

trusting that we're rowing our boat in the right direction. But sometimes it's a hard row.

This week we begin the process of discernment with our seventh candidate in three and a half years. A lot of hard work and time involved here, struggle and disappointment. But God is with us on this journey, I know this.

Once, when I was still a warden, we met with a candidate who seemed perfect to me but as we prayed and discussed; we knew clearly that this was not the one for us. It was so disappointing but fortunately, God was speaking to the candidate too and leading them in a different direction which confirmed it. That was a time when it was so clear to me that God was guiding us and would be with us for the whole journey.

I'm sure many of you have Trinity stories of how God has guided us at different times
So, we **will keep trusting** we're sailing in the right direction, and believing that a captain will soon come on board to help steer the boat.

What about Peter?

Some commentators were quite harsh. They suggested that Peter demanded that Jesus prove himself, even though he knew it was his Lord, by letting him also walk on water, so Jesus let him sink a little to teach him a lesson! I choose to be more generous.

Perhaps Peter remembered that earlier monumental occasion when Jesus sent out the disciples, two by two to do his work of healing the sick and ministering to the people.

They were doing what Jesus did and they were successful. So perhaps Peter thought it's another way to follow in his footsteps! But this was a unique moment. A clear miracle!

But no, sorry, not for us. When our tour group finally made it on to the sailing boat for our little cruise on the Sea of Galilee, the captain was very insistent: we were to stay seated in

the boat. He said it several times.

Our guide said there was a sign somewhere, it said : Many have tried; none have succeeded!

So how do we think about Peter's adventure? He had the courage to leave the relative safety of the boat and follow Jesus' voice. And he walked on water!

Perhaps he didn't realize how difficult it would be to do this? Perhaps he lost sight of Jesus in the spray. He doubted and panicked. Why did he doubt? It seems probable that he suddenly became focused on what **he** was trying to do. in other words, it became about self. He was no longer looking to Jesus to keep him afloat. Whatever the reason when Peter doubted and also when we doubt, the Lord is there to rescue us and bring us to safety.

God can call us to step out of our metaphorical boat of safe assumptions and well-tested ways to follow him on a new path. This takes courage. There is risk and doubt, will we succeed? We have to stay fixed on Jesus.

If we fail, He will pick us up and lead us to safety. I think of God as a divine GPS that Can recalculate when we take a wrong turn and leads us back to the correct path. Sometimes God might even let us sink a bit when we've over-reached perhaps; so we realize we must rethink our mission.

A few years ago, when I was finishing up my PhD in England and trying to figure out where to go for postdoctoral studies. I had several offers. In those days, I was in a Baptist church and we were expected to meet with our elder to pray about important decisions.

So I met with him to learn what as God's choice. There had to be a **right** choice, in my mind. I felt led to head to Tennessee, the Oak Ridge National Labs. Talk about moving out

of my comfort zones. But I remember my elder telling me that all that really mattered was that I **believed** God was with me. If it didn't work out, God would steer me to the next place. Somehow, following that advice, I have ended up here.

In conclusion: What are lovely truths can we take from these readings:

Life is a storm. Don't be afraid. Jesus walks over it.

God can show up in unexpected ways, Keep looking out for him

Listen for His voice and follow that voice even though the way might seem impossible.

He will rescue you if you fall.

Take heart. It is I: DO NOT BE AFRAID

Amen