

**SERMON - REV. CHRISTIE MORROW-WOLFE** *Matthew 14:22-33*  
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“Keep the Faith”

In County Antrim in Northern Ireland, is a rope bridge which stretches about 20 metres across from the mainland to the Isle of Carrick-a-rede. At some 30 metres high, it crosses a rough part of the Atlantic Ocean; the water swirling and churning below. The current suspension bridge was built in 2008, but it is believed that local salmon fishermen had erected a path or bridge there...of sorts...as early as the 1700s.

Now a tourist attraction, for 9 pounds, you can choose to embark on a bit of an adventure, and walk across the Carrick-a-rede Rope Bridge, which is exactly what I did when my husband and I visited there in 2012. My husband, who has a great and abiding fear of heights, had declared early on that he would await my return in what he coined “the chicken section,” situated securely on the mainland. He had a fear, not only of the height of this swaying bridge, but of being “that tourist” who would need rescuing by the British Air force should he make it across to the island, but be unable to make the return trek. I’m not much of a risk taker myself, but a greater sense of adventure always seems to take over my person when I travel and I’m there for all the things...new foods, new opportunities ...meeting new people. I figure I didn’t travel all this way just to watch and who knows when I’ll get back here again, so let’s go!

Crossing the Carrick-a-rede Rope Bridge is probably the closest I’ll ever get to walking on water...or above water, anyway. There’s a natural sway and quite a bit of movement on the bridge both from the wind and other adventurers crossing to the isle at the same time. You can not only hear the ocean which is a deafening roar, but you can also feel the odd bit of spray from where the relentless waves are crashing over the craggy, jagged rocks below. Just enough of a gap exists between the boards on the floor of the bridge to give you a glimpse of what’s happening beneath you...if you dare to look down. The tentative, but determined steps I took on that swaying bridge, reminds me a little of what I imagine Peter’s first steps were like beyond the relative safety of the boat on that stormy night.

There is something so relatable about Peter, isn't there? From very early on, we learn that Peter is all in. In his role as a disciple, Peter continually seems unafraid to ask questions and to try—even when his faith appears to fail him. It's Peter who asks Jesus to explain things; it is Peter whom Jesus calls both a cornerstone and a stumbling block; it is Peter who promises to keep watch in the Garden of Gethsemane...and then it is Peter who falls asleep.<sup>1</sup> Over and over again, it is Peter who is doing all the things, who is seemingly fearless in taking leaps of faith. It is Peter who questions the shadowy figure making its way on top the tempestuous waters, saying “prove it's you, Lord, by having me join you out there!”

Not only was Peter asking Jesus if he could join him in this miracle, but it also means that Peter was going to encounter the same, unknown forces of the deep which is how the ancient world tended to view these...as a wild, untamed place where evil, unpredictable, unknown powers resided. Jesus was able to tame this wild unknown with just the touch of his feet; the stormy, life-threatening waters are no match for the Son of God. But for Peter, venturing out in this storm represented a huge risk ...and you know, for a minute or two, it seemed to work. Peter took a few, tentative steps while the water swirled and the waves were relentless and the wind howled....It was the wind, however, that finally got him—the howling wind caused him to be afraid and Peter began to drown. In this moment, we are reminded that Peter is very human and is also in need of a Saviour. Just think! If Peter were to hop out of the boat and skip across the water, he'd have no need for Jesus. Instead, it's in Jesus' saving touch and in his helping Peter back to the relative safety of the boat, that the disciples are able to recognize Jesus as the I Am, and worship him as a saviour who has dominion over even the waves and the wind...the disciples exclaimed, “truly you are the Son of God!” (14:33). A recognition and a revelation had been made.

A recognition and a revelation. This makes me wonder...how is Christ revealing himself to the church today? Where do you recognize Jesus in your context? It goes without saying that the responses to this question will differ across the board. Where you see Jesus in your life and in the life of your church community is going to look different in your context than it does in

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<sup>1</sup>*The Seeds of Heaven: Sermons on the Gospel of Matthew*, Barbara Brown Taylor, 2004, p.56.

mine. This is right and good. But I do feel that this time we continue to live into—this emerging post-pandemic reality is very much a liminal space, time and place. A liminal space could be described as a “threshold space—the space between ‘now and not yet.’ It’s the space where things aren’t familiar and things are changing. And yet, we don’t know where exactly we’re headed.”<sup>2</sup>

This makes it hard to name where exactly the church is at today. It’s sometimes hard to name the space we’re in when we’re in the middle of it. For those of us who appreciate having a clear path and a plan before us, this can be incredibly discombobulating, and unsettling. It’s hard living in the not knowing and the ‘not yet.’ And yet, we know that God’s spirit is very much at the centre of this unknown, moving through this time and this place. The curious part of my faith is intrigued to see where we are heading as people of God and as communities of faith, as uncertain and uncomfortable as this time might be.

I’m finding more and more, what helps to ground me in this time and place is my prayer life. And when I’ve prayed recently, I regularly hear three words. KEEP. THE. FAITH. As attendance dwindles and more churches talk about mergers, amalgamations or closure – keep the faith. As we contend with fewer resources—both monetary and people—keep the faith. As we wrestle with challenging but necessary questions around inclusion and radical hospitality and the systemic nature of our church structure—keep the faith. As we continue to dream and discern what new thing God is already doing—keep the faith. As we go about doing God’s work in this world, not sure if we’re making a difference and not sure if we can keep going—keep the faith. In this way, I believe God is and has already revealed God’s self to us as people of God and as the church in this day in age...even as we wait for the fullness of time for all to be revealed, our work in the here and now is simply to keep the faith. We do so by continuing to love, learn, pray, preach and sing—all the things the church has been about for hundreds and hundreds of years. We keep drawing the circle wide so that no one is left behind. Some days we do this with the certainty and conviction of a bold disciple. Other times, we call out for God to save us from all this uncertainty and unknowing because our faith feels like it can’t stretch that far. And it’s

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<sup>2</sup> Rev. Lawrence T. Richardson, [www.ucc.org](http://www.ucc.org), “Now and Not Yet,” accessed on June 28, 2023.

on these days that I remember those disciples on that stormy night on the Sea of Galilee, who were there, ultimately, because they had just enough faith to get into that boat. They got into the boat because that's what Jesus asked them to do. They kept the faith—even if they were afraid and their faith in Jesus wasn't perfect. And you know, this was enough—they were enough for Jesus and Jesus came to them and there was a revelation and a recognition...even in their fear and their doubt.

And so too is our faith. Bold and strong; doubting and uncertain. It is enough for Jesus and Jesus will and does and will continue to meet us in any storm and no matter what the future of the church looks like, Jesus will continue to reveal himself to us in this time and in this space wherever we may be. Until the fullness of time, when all shall be revealed, we pray that Jesus will help us keep the faith—the faith to which we have been called. May it be so. *AMEN*.