



GPS GUIDE: OCTOBER 31, 2021

Grow. Pray. Study

Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon: Getting Out of the Boat

Matthew 14:22-33

Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Monday: Read Psalm 112

The psalm opens by stating that happiness/blessing comes to the one who "fears the Lord." "Fear" is a good translation of the Hebrew word *yara'*. But in today's culture, the idea of fear is usually connected with the base instincts to run, defend, or close oneself off. The Hebrew word actually encompasses a larger meaning of *awe, reverent respect, honor*. It appears in the Hebrew Bible as a synonym for *love, cling to, serve*. At its core, *yara'* denotes obedience to the divine will. Verses 7-9 describe the happy/blessed person. Despite potential danger, there is no need to be afraid. Loving, clinging to, serving God diminishes fearfulness and strengthens the faithful to reach out and give to those in need. How have you thought about the phrase "fear of the Lord" in the past? How might fearing the Lord make you less afraid to live in service to God and generosity to others?

Prayer: May my life of service be a blessing to others in your name, O God. Amen.

Tuesday: Read 1 John 4: 13-21

What is the opposite of love? Most people would answer hate. But consider for a moment that the opposite of love is actually fear! It is fear that breeds prejudice and hatred. The less sure we are about God's unconditional love toward us, the greater we fear. And the greater we fear, the more likely it is we will find it hard to treat others with the love of Christ because so much of life will feel threatening. But to know God's perfect love is to be filled with that perfect love and all the shalom and security and joy that go with it. There isn't room for fear in a heart filled to the brim with such joyful confidence. And from the overflow of that divinely inspired joy there will come rivers of kindness and love toward others. You just cannot treat other people unlovingly - you cannot hate anyone - if you are filled with God's Spirit of love. Because when you are, there will be no room for the kind of fear that breeds hatred. That kind of fear will have been cast out, John writes. And what remains will be the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. When have your fears moved you toward prejudice or hatred? How has God's unconditional love removed your fears toward others and led you towards love?

Prayer: God of love, may I love others, as you have first love me. Amen.

Wednesday: Read Psalm 23

Rolf Jacobson says you could live everyday life without Psalm 23...but why would you want to? It is an essential text for living out daily faith. It's a trust psalm, a psalm spoken in the midst of dire circumstances or crisis. It describes the difficulty (a dark valley, a table with enemies). And into the difficulty the psalmist speaks trust in God for deliverance (The Lord is my shepherd, he restores my soul). Psalm 23 declares trust in a divine promise. The promise to the psalmist was simple. "I am with you." In response, the psalmist confesses, "I fear no evil, for you are with me." I may be surrounded by enemies, but "you prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies." Can you think of times when you felt lost? In a dark valley? Were you able to trust in the promise of God's presence? How does Psalm 23 help you live faithfully every day?

Prayer: Lord, I will fear no evil, for you are with me, today, tomorrow, every day. Amen.

Thursday: Read Mark 8:31-38

It's hard to follow, isn't it? You can visit Amazon and ask for a list of all books currently in print that have to do with being a leader and exercising leadership. You'll be given a massive list of tens of thousands of books that teach you how to be an effective leader. If you then ask for books that have something to do with following, you'll be given a vastly shorter list of a few hundred titles. But do you know what most of those books are about? They give advice on how to follow your dreams. And what most people dream about? Becoming a leader! Which is all to say that it's really hard to follow. We think we can do just fine by ourselves. We think we know the way. I'm reminded of the person who said, "There are a hundred ways to clean a kitchen - unless you're in my mother's kitchen." It's

hard to follow because we like to be in charge. But even more, it's hard to follow Jesus because where Jesus leads is to the cross. "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me," says Jesus. "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it." What have you had to give up to follow Jesus? How is Christ's path different from your own?

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, help me to follow you wherever you may lead. Amen.

Friday: Read Matthew 4:18-22

I love the call of the disciples because it affirms that Jesus calls ordinary people who have ordinary lives to do extraordinary work! A friend and I were having a conversation about vocation and calling one day. I was surprised to hear her say that, though she had a significant leadership role in a large, religious non-profit organization, she doubted God had called her. "I'm not a minister. God calls preachers, I'm just an ordinary person." In the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) we understand ministry to be everyone's calling. We proclaim the Priesthood of all believers. Some Disciples congregations even proclaim "Every member is a minister" on their bulletins. We may all be ordinary people with fears and doubts, yet God calls us to the ministry of discipleship: to use our lives, and our work, to bring healing and wholeness in our broken world. Have you ever considered that God has a calling for your life? In what ways do you think God is calling you to minister at First Christian Church? What would it sound like to insert your occupation into Jesus' call (I will make you *teach* for people, I will make you a *banker* for people, I will make you a *builder* of people)?

Prayer: Lord, may I answer the call to be a part of your extraordinary ministry that I may live so you can use me. Amen.

Saturday: Read James 1:17-27

The author of James is aware that people sometimes confine their understanding of faith to a simple series of truth claims--something limited to their heads or their words. For James, this is inadequate. People might say they believe one thing and yet do something completely different. Therefore, James insists that true faith is whatever is actually lived out in your life. James says those who hear but don't act are like people who look in a mirror but quickly forget what they look like. Sandra Hask Polaski writes about James' mirror practice, "Presumably the point of looking into a mirror is to tell us something about ourselves - our hair needs combing - that we remember at least long enough to address the issue. Who checks her hair in a mirror and then forgets to comb it? But the one who hears without doing, James implies, has moral dementia - a kind of deep forgetfulness that leaves the religious self unable to function fully." What kinds of faithful actions does James suggest come from our hearing the word? How is what you do a reflection of who God created you to be?

Prayer: God, make me a doer of your word. Amen.

