

**The Federated Church of Hyannis ~ Reverend Derek L. White, Pastor
Sunday, March 7, 2021 10:00 AM Worship Service**

Scripture: Matthew 14:22-33

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Introduction

Welcome to week three of our Lenten Series titles "Letting Go". We have been on this journey of learning how to let go of things.

In week one of the series, we discussed the theme of letting go in order to take up something new. This connected to the theme of fasting and pilgrimage.

In week two we looked at tradition and the need to let go of misunderstanding. It was how the meanings and purposes of traditions get lost and these practices can become hard rules.

And this week in part three of our series we will look at letting go of fear. I am really excited about this week because letting go of fear can be such a hard thing to do.

Part 1: Letting Go of Fear

Shortly after Carolyn and I got married I took out a new life insurance policy. It is one of those things people do when they get married. A few days after I took out the policy, I took a group of High School students on a Senior High Youth Group trip. One of the activities was a high wire zip line. Now this was a winter retreat,

and it was freezing cold at this Christian Camp. Forty feet above the ground there was a high wire zip line as one of the activities for the kids. None of the kids wanted to climb the ladder and jump off the platform with the zip line. But all of the kids wanted me as the youth group leader to do it. So I climbed the tower, put on the equipment, and clipped onto the zip line. And the college kid who was a camp volunteer said to me “Congratulations on being the first one down the zip line this year”. Now that is not something a person should ever say to another person about to take a leap of death on a zip line. It made me pause for a minute or two. The thought that kept going through my head was - had the life insurance policy cleared yet?

Now let me interject something here. Youth Ministers should be paid a lot more for what they have to do. I am a strong advocate for youth ministry because I know it is not for the faint of heart.

Well, I said the Lord’s Prayer. The kids were all down below chanting for me to jump. I finally decided to commit and take the leap. I leaned forward and fell about three feet before the tension of the harness jerked me back upward and I went flying down this zip line in the middle of winter. That day I became a legendary youth pastor. Of course, none of the kids did the zipline, but I had seized the day.

Part 2: Peter Walking on Water

I wonder what was going through Peter’s head when he said, “Lord if that is you call me to come to you on the water”. If Peter got out of the boat and he just splashed in the water it was no big deal, he would have just swum back to the boat and gotten in. Unless these were shark infested waters, it was no big deal taking a swim. But what must it have been like for Peter to step on the water and start taking steps? The scriptures said he became afraid. As a fisherman he probably fell out of boats and went for a swim hundreds of times. But never had he ever walked on water. He must have climbed in and out of boats thousands of times, but not once had he ever walked on water. One might think in that moment everything must have changed for Peter. Sadly, everything did not change. Peter could not let go of his fear. And this became his greatest weakness as a disciple. Peter always lived in fear.

Part 3: Fear of Peter

We know Peter lived in fear because the scriptures show how he reacted to so many things. In one moment, he says Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. And in the next moment he warns Jesus not to go to Jerusalem because he is afraid of the persecution there. On Good Friday we know Peter three times denied

knowing Jesus because he was afraid of strangers asking him if he was a disciple. Even after the resurrection for forty days Peter is hiding in the upper room unsure what to do until the Holy Spirit shows up on Pentecost and motivates him and the disciples to go out and preach the good news. Even in the book of Acts we see Peter afraid to eat with Gentiles. It is only after he has a vision of the scroll from heaven showing him he can eat food previously forbidden that he eats with the Gentile converts. He shows a willingness to fight when he cuts the ear off the soldier in the garden of Gethsemane, and then fear from strangers at the trial of Jesus when he is asked if he is a disciple of Jesus. When Peter is unafraid, he does amazing things. But often his fear held him back from doing what Jesus commanded him to do.

Part 4: Letting Go of Fear

Jesus taught us to let go of fear and trust in the Lord. When we can have trust like that, we the Church can do amazing things. Like Peter, when fear and doubt begin to set in, we begin to sink.

I didn't know when I took that leap of faith on the zip-line at the Youth Retreat how it would help me to be a better youth leader. I can say that because that year we had three students in the youth group who were baptized. They stood up in the church, gave their confession of faith, and they were baptized. I know they were afraid of making a public confession of faith and doing what Jesus commanded of his disciples to do. Go and be baptized. But they got over that fear, and they made a decision to follow Jesus publicly for all to see.

We as Christians cannot be about the "what ifs?". There comes a moment when it is time to commit. To let go of fear. To take a step of faith. To trust in God.

Conclusion

Let me offer this final thought. When Peter saw Jesus walking on the water, he asked Jesus to call him to come to him on the water. If Jesus asked him to do it, Peter was willing to commit to it. He didn't have enough faith on his own to do it without Jesus. When we take steps of faith, it is always good to ask Jesus first to call us to do it. If it is something the Lord is calling us to, Jesus will make it possible. All we need to do is ask and we will receive, knock and the door will be opened unto us.

Faith is not the absence of fear, it is the act of letting go of fear and trusting in the Lord. So let us all learn and grow in learning to let go of the things that keep us from what the Lord calls us to.