

Home Worship Service July 19, 2020



Passamaquoddy Bay from
Minister's Island

Welcoming the Light

As we have been exploring the seashore throughout July,
we have been making connections between the Bible stories
and our own local context.

As we use images of the Passamaquoddy Bay,
we remembered the First People on whose land we find ourselves.
Acknowledging this, we begin today's worship time
by lighting our candle next to the sacred fire
they have kept burning in this place.

The Sunrise Ceremony from the 400th anniversary of settlement at St. Croix Island.

Video: <http://rememberingacadie.cohds.ca/node/33.html>

Song for Centring:

VU 376

"Spirit of the Living God"

performed by Baptist Church Sanctuary Choir

<https://youtu.be/bqMPP5rF9J4>

Gathering Prayer

Holy One, draw us in, draw us close, draw us together.

**As we prepare for worship,
we take with us all the celebrations,
big and small,
from the week that has passed.**

**We leave behind all the negativity, the worry, and the fears
that we do not wish to carry into the week ahead.**

**We ground ourselves in the love found in this community,
ready to find strength, wisdom, and whatever we most need.
May it be so!**

Readings from Our Tradition

Psalms 46 (NRSV) “Be Still and Know”

God is our refuge and strength,
a very present^[a] help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;
though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.
God is in the midst of the city;^[b] it shall not be moved;
God will help it when the morning dawns.
The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.

The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.
Come, behold the works of the LORD;
see what desolations he has brought on the earth.
He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear;
he burns the shields with fire.

“Be still and know that I am God!
I am exalted among the nations,
I am exalted in the earth.”

The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Matthew 14:22-34 (MSG) “Walking on the Water”

As soon as the meal was finished, he insisted that the disciples get in the boat and go on ahead to the other side while he dismissed the people. With the crowd dispersed, he climbed the mountain so he could be by himself and pray. He stayed there alone, late into the night.

Meanwhile, the boat was far out to sea when the wind came up against them and they were battered by the waves. At about four o'clock in the morning, Jesus came toward them walking on the water. They were scared out of their wits. “A ghost!” they said, crying out in terror.

But Jesus was quick to comfort them. “Courage, it’s me. Don’t be afraid.”
Peter, suddenly bold, said, “Master, if it’s really you, call me to come to you on the water.”

He said, “Come ahead.”

Jumping out of the boat, Peter walked on the water to Jesus. But when he looked down at the waves churning beneath his feet, he lost his nerve and started to sink. He cried, “Master, save me!”

Jesus didn’t hesitate. He reached down and grabbed his hand. Then he said, “Faint-heart, what got into you?” The two of them climbed into the boat, and the wind died down. The disciples in the boat, having watched the whole thing, worshiped Jesus, saying, “This is it! You are God’s Son for sure!”

On return, they beached the boat at Gennesaret. When the people got wind that he was back, they sent out word through the neighborhood and rounded up all the sick, who asked for permission to touch the edge of his coat. And whoever touched him was healed.

Song for Preparing: “Be Still and Know” by the Fray, performed by Hannah Thompson
<https://youtu.be/4qvX3zU0zbA>

Played overtop the images from “Diving in Eastport, Maine” by Jonathan Bird Productions: <https://youtu.be/yCXVU8kAjhQ>

Reflection by Ali: “Sinking in the Sea: Faith for the Faithful”

Introduction

I have a son named Peter
who has just turned 11 years old.
He is at the age where the critical thinking skills
are really starting to kick in
and he questions everything.
And since he has two clergy parents,
let me tell you,
he is having a field day with his questions
about church.

One day, he was on a rant about literal interpretations of the Bible.
He had cycled through his normal criticism of Adam and Eve
and the Virgin birth,
when he came around to Jesus and the miracles.

I hear, “Mom, am I really supposed to believe all this?
I mean, have you ever seen anyone walk on water?”

Now normally, I would just tell him
that I see where he is coming from
and that there’s no need to argue with me about these things.

But, on this day, I decided to have some fun with him.

So, when he asked if I had ever seen anyone walk on water,
I said, “I’ll do you one better, Peter.
I’ve actually walked on the ocean myself.
And you have too.”

His response?
“Mo-om, no we haven’t.
You are making that up.”

I said, “I don’t make things up.
We have *too*.
I can’t believe you don’t you remember?”

He thinks for a minute,
trying to guess where I’m going,
and then finally he says,
“Ummm...no.
When exactly did we walk on the ocean?”

I said, “We’ve done it a few times.
Like at the Blockhouse in St. Andrews, for instance –
when the tide as out.”

He rolled his eyes and said,
“Oh, Mom. I do remember that
but you know what I mean.
And that wasn’t a miracle.”

I said to him, “Ok, maybe not a miracle.
But you have to admit that the way those tides go in and out
is pretty darn impressive.”
He didn’t try to argue with that.

Miracle Stories

Miracle stories have always fascinated me and it's not for the reasons that most people think. Most people read the miracles in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and they watch closely to what Jesus does.

But I am always less impressed with Jesus than I am with the other characters in those stories. I always tell people, if you really want to learn something from these old dusty tales, keep your eye on the disciples.

Walking on Water

So, how about the day that Peter walked on the water? Peter the disciple, not Peter my son.

Now, Jesus usually gets the credit here. Paintings and songs alike depict the bearded Messiah in sandals, making good time, trekking across the waves.

That may be because out of the three versions of the story in the Greek Testament, two of them have him hanging out in the tides all alone. But not Matthew.

You may have heard it said before that Matthew is the most Jewish of the four gospels. He is not writing for people who are new to the faith. He is writing for Jewish people who still live close to the homeland. They are deeply embedded in the faith and have been for generations.

At the time he was writing, the Jewish people were reconstructing themselves after the first revolt. They had been through war and they were facing new tensions as they tried to determine where they were going as a community.

In other words, Matthew was writing about faith for the faithful.

So that's why he includes Peter in this little story about walking on the water. Peter *is* the faithful. Peter is the community he is writing for. Peter is us - you and I - the faithful.

Let's back up just a little bit. Right before the scene in the sea, this incredible gathering happened where Jesus fed the 5000.

A bunch of people were hungry.

There wasn't much food.
Everyone was fed.
The hoards of people who didn't have faith before,
walked away with great faith.

The disciples were there too.
Peter was there too.
But they had faith to begin with.

Jesus then went off by himself for a little while.
Disciples took the boat for a spin across the bay.
And enter Jesus,
gliding across the water,
like it ain't no thing.

But next,
and here's my favourite part:
Peter calls out, "Is that you, Jesus?"

Jesus responds, "Yeah it's me!
Jump out of the boat and come on in!
The water's warm!"

Peter's like, "Ok, sure!"
and over the side he goes,
walking on the water toward his friend.

But then it hits him.
"Wait a minute," he says,
looking down at his soggy shoes.
"What am I doing? I can't walk on water!"

And the minute that self-doubt creeps in – wham! –
down he goes...sinking like a stone.
Peter loses faith.
He doesn't believe that he has the power in him
to do what he needs to do.

Think about the irony of that for a second.
All these people just walked away from a feast on the beach,
filled with an unshakeable faith,
after one little barbeque –
faith that they just found that day.

But then there's Peter,
who has been matching Jesus step for step,
all along the countryside,
from one town to the other,
witnessing his every move,
hearing the sermons,
taking part in the healings,
doing it all.
Peter, who had a front row seat –
Jesus' own right-hand man –
the faithful one in need of more faith.

Boy, have I been there.
Anybody else?

The Work of Faith is Ours

Sometimes it is the most faithful who ask the most questions,
who have the most messiest discussions,
who are filled with doubts about what they are doing and why.

This is not a bad thing.

This is a wonderful thing.

Although I may tire of my 11 year Peter's critiques by times,
I know that he is doing the work of faith,
just like the one for whom he was named.

Sometimes it is us who go to church,
who have spent an awful lot of time watching Jesus in action,
those of us who are most familiar with the faith,
who have trouble keeping the faith.

It is in those moments that we have to remember
that our faith lies,
not in what God can do for us,
but what we can do for the world.

If Peter focused on that,
he could have walked on water.

But instead, he felt overwhelmed by it all
and instead of putting one foot in front of the other,
he waited for Jesus to save him.

For that brief moment,
Peter forgot that he had great power inside of him.

He forgot that he followed Jesus around that whole time,
not to be impressed by his great acts,
but to be empowered
and to learn how to do his *own* great acts.

I don't mean to be judgemental toward Peter, though.
After all, we all forget from time to time
that we are called to perform our own miracles,
that we are called to do the work.

Be the Change

As I mentioned to you,
I have been spending the last month,
teaching a small group of adults.

When we started out,
each morning, I would have an inspirational quote
written on the board
for us to ponder throughout the day.

I didn't say much about these quotes.
I would just put them up there.

I tried to make them relatable to twenty-somethings,
sticking to athletes and pop singers and movie stars.
Arnold Schwarzenegger made an appearance.
Madonna was up there too.
And I couldn't resist including Sylvester Stallone.

One day, one of the students excitedly said,
“I’ve got a quote for your board.”

So, I erased what I had chosen
and invited her to write it on there.

When I next turned around,
she had written,
“Be the change you wish to see in the world.” – Muhatma Ghandi.

No Rocky or Terminator for her.
She pulled out the big guns.

I said, “I love that quote.
That’s a great quote to think about.”

She said to me, “No, you don’t have to think about it...you have to live it.”

And that’s just it.
Ghandi knew it, Jesus knew it, we know it.
But we have to live it, don’t we?
We have to do the work.

So whether you find yourself on dry land or out in the bay,
whether you’re wearing sandals or Crocs,
take those steps.
And have faith –
not just in God –
but in yourself.
It is the only thing that has ever changed the world.

Song for Empowering:

“Sing it Louder” by Dave Gunning
<https://youtu.be/SNalnPdXms>

Offertory

With open palms from giving and open hearts from loving, we come to you now, Great Spirit. May your presence stir our offering to life, making meaning from paper or coin and online amounts in online accounts. Likewise, may you transform our time and talents into action, making a difference where one is needed. It is with great joy we give. Amen.

Minute for Mission:

“Second Chances”
<https://youtu.be/NbqtIMI7HdU>

Prayer for Change by Michael Morwood

We gather today mindful of the many times we have professed our readiness to be true disciples of Jesus to be salt of the earth to be light in the world.

We acknowledge the daunting challenge of this profession in the society in which we live, with its economic systems that impoverish and disempower people, and its political systems that enable the rich to get richer and the earth to become poorer.

We remember that Jesus encountered in his day systems as unjust as those we experience in our day, and who surely felt powerless to change anything on his own.

We turn our hearts and minds to his message, to his hopes and dreams, to his ardent desire for a better society.

We focus on his struggle, his reflections, his prayer, his questions – where to start? how to start? what to say? whom to choose? how to keep going? how to be salt? how to be light?

We call to mind how Jesus urged his listeners to put their trust in the power of being neighbor, in the power of God's Spirit within them, in the power of conversion from religious thinking and practices that made them feel inadequate and worthless.

Our prayer today is a prayer of resolve, a prayer of determination that we, each one of us, will do whatever we can, however small, in whatever way, to bring the real dream of Jesus to fruition in our lives and in our world today.

May we focus on Jesus, human like us, a man with a dream for a better world and may we recognize that we are the keepers of that dream. We are the ones he taught to pray: Our Father . . .

Announcements, Joys and Concerns

Blessing

We prepare now to go from this space
that we have created together by our presence and by our intention.
And, as we do, we prepare ourselves to walk the path away from here
a little differently than we walked it on the way in.
May we go forth singing songs of praise to our God
whatever that might sound like coming from our lips.
We do so knowing it is indeed a blessing to be on the journey.

Song for Going Forth: MV 30 "It's a Song of Praise to the Maker" performed by Pacific Spirit United Church
<https://youtu.be/vf63mbiP6S0>

Sharing the Light

We turn once more to our candle
that has lit the way through this holy time –
a time we have set apart
to be in community, to be in contemplation, to simply be.
As we carry forth the light,
we carry forth this holy time,
wishing to infuse it into our every day.
Here is the light for you.

All images, prayers, and reflections by Ali Anningson unless otherwise stated.