

Matthew 14:22-33

Jesus 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."

Sermon, August 9, 2026 Wilton Ecumenical service

Lakes are great places to reflect and pray – maybe early morning or evening best when its quiet.

Jesus certainly needed that time also.

He had just fed 5,000 people by multipllyng five loaves and two fish. "Phew", he said, "Pulled that one off but I'm exhausted".

And like the exhausted parent who needs a little peace and quiet and lets the kids watch a movie just as long as they're quiet, Jesus at last has sent the crowds away and convinced his disciples to get in a boat and cross over ahead of him. Finally he has found time to pray. He is praying, perhaps lifting up each of his fears to God and exchanging them for faith, allowing the comfort and healing and power of God to fill his inner life, his heart, mind, emotions, will. But prayer time never lasts long enough. I know a pastor who puts his cell phone in the next room when he goes into his study at home to pray. Except sometimes he forgets to turn the ringer off.

In our story, the disciples are in the next room, but the ringer is on and Jesus' prayer time is over. They are in distress. As Jesus squints at the horizon he sees the disciples' little boat bobbing side to side, back and forth, (*bob and sway*)

Now these kinds of winds are not unusual on the Sea of Galilee Scripture tells us three things about their situation and leaves us to come to our own conclusion. We are told they are battered by the waves, far from shore, and that the wind was against them.

If it were just one out of three, the disciples might be able to get free. Battered by waves, but near the shore and no wind. Or far from shore, but no waves and no wind. Or wind, but close to shore and minimal waves.

But three out of three signals that they're in a situation they can't get out of by themselves and they are out of reach of any human help. Pity the souls in such a situation. (*bob and sway*)

Perhaps that's us when we feel stuck in a situation we can't get out of:

An addiction to food, drugs, cigarettes, alcohol that just seems too big for us.
A diagnosis of a serious illness that the medical folks don't seem to know how to cure.
A relationship that seems so broken or shattered it will never be put back together.

Here comes someone walking toward them (us) — why? Because he chooses to do so.
And he does it by walking on the water.

Who is it that comes walking toward your boat on the water — someone who has the power to come to the place where you can't help yourself, where you are beyond all human help, and reach out a hand?

Someone is coming toward your boat walking on the sea. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, called that divine perambulation "prevenient Grace," the Grace that "goes before." So every time we call on Jesus it is because he is already coming toward us. Every time we invite Jesus, we are actually RSVPing to his prior invitation.

There is an African American saying that we are always either going into a storm, in a storm, or coming out of a storm. Disciples are those who are learning to call on Jesus the Son of God, in all three conditions. When our boat is battered by waves, we can call on Jesus. When our boat is far from land, we can call on Jesus. When our boat has the wind against it, we can call on Jesus. He knows our sufferings. He is approaching. He is present and able to offer assistance. He has been here all along. The question is, how are we going to respond to that knowledge? Are we going to keep focusing on the wind and the waves, or on the outstretched hand of our Lord?

If God is for us, who can be against us?