

We continue reading this week from the 14th chapter of Matthew. Last week in worship we read from earlier in this chapter the story of Jesus feeding over 5,000 people with just 5 loaves of bread and two fish.

We talked about how the disciples looked at the problem from the point of view of human scarcity while Jesus looked at the same problem from the perspective of God's abundance. Jesus showed what he could accomplish with just a few resources.

Today we pick up where we left off last week. After assembling these thousands of people and feeding them with so little, Jesus now directs his attention toward the disciples according to the way that Matthew tells the story.

As we read this story note how Jesus commands the disciples to get in the boat. Jesus is not interested in a faith based on safety and security.

Read Matthew 14:22-33

How many parents have heard these words come out of their mouth as they watched their children at play: "Watch out." "Be careful." "Don't go over there." "Don't climb so high." "Don't swim out so far." I have certainly said those words to my children at different times in their lives.

I read an article this week in which the author is critical of parents for being overly protective of their children. According to the author, it's not the responsibility of parents to decide what is risky play for a child. She argues that children should be given the mental and physical space to figure this out for themselves. Far enough space so that it feels exhilarating but not so much space that it becomes scary.

In today's passage Jesus appears to be one of these parents that wants his kids to take risks. His kids are the disciples in this story.

I asked you to observe who initiated the disciples going out into the boat. Jesus does not ask them to get into the boat. Jesus does not suggest they get in the boat. The text, according to our version in Matthew, says that Jesus made or commanded the disciples to get in the boat. The disciples are given no choice.

Why is that? Doesn't Jesus know that getting in a boat in the Sea of Galilee can be a dangerous proposition? It is not uncommon for winds to suddenly arise putting any boaters at risk. People die on the Sea of Galilee.

But Jesus makes the disciples get into a boat, Jesus dismisses the crowd, and then Jesus goes off to a mountain by himself leaving the disciples all alone on the water. Strong winds do come up on the sea and the winds force the boat farther and farther out into the water away from safety and security.

Sometime between 3:00 and 6:00 in the morning while it is still dark, the disciples notice something along the water. While the winds pick up and the waves are crashing a figure comes walking toward them on the water. They assume that this shadowy figure is a ghost as any of us would. But Jesus then speaks up and says it is I.

When Jesus says "it is I" he is literally saying, "Here I Am." These are the words that God uses in the Old Testament story of the Exodus when Moses asks God for a name when he encounters the voice of God through a burning bush. God says my name is, "I Am."

Peter speaks up at this point. "Command me to come to you," Peter petitions to Jesus. "Come," is the response. So Peter gets out of the boat and heads toward Jesus. But then Peter notices the strong winds and the waves and he starts to waver. Peter begins to sink and cries out to Jesus, "Save me."

At that point Jesus reaches out his hand and catches Peter. “Why did you doubt me?” Jesus asks him. At this point the disciples in the boat proclaim that Jesus is the Son of God. The first time in the gospel of Matthew that this term is used for Jesus.

Notice again in this story that Peter and the rest of the disciples were forced to take a risk and to get in the boat. So what does that teach us? Why was it important to Jesus that the disciples put themselves into a dangerous situation? Doesn't Jesus want our faith to depend on us feeling safe and secure like the old hymn reminds us and to lean on the everlasting arms?

Well, according to this story, Jesus does not want our faith to be dependent on security and safety. In this story, Jesus pushes us to take risks, leave fear behind, to be vulnerable and to be honest.

Brene Brown studies vulnerability. Listen to the first part of a lecture that she gave about taking risks and what it leads to: [\(share up to 3:52\)](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UoMXF73j0c&list=PLF1DBBE74831153>

It is definitely risky to be vulnerable and honest with God. It is definitely risky to be open to God guiding you to do something that is not part of your comfort zone.

But it is clear from this story that Jesus wants us to live out a risky faith. If Jesus had not forced his disciples to take risks for their faith then they would have missed the opportunity to see God revealed so clearly in their midst.

If we don't take risks then we become comfortable with our modest faith success and we have a sense that we no longer need God. But if we constantly push ourselves then we discover more of the depth of God than we would encounter otherwise.

Faith in God is not about faith and stability. If it was then Jesus would have told the disciples to never get in that boat. But Jesus forced the disciples into the boat and was able to show them that when they begin to sink he will be there.

So how about you and me? How afraid are we to take the risks of faith?

Yesterday I watched as David Duke was interviewed in Charlottesville, VA and I was reminded of a similar event that I attended in North Carolina 20 years ago. I watched footage last night of the protests and violence in Charlottesville and was reminded of the time that David Duke, former leader of the Ku Klux Klan and a state representative from a Southern state, was invited to speak at a rally in Siler City, NC where I was a pastor at the time. Like yesterday, this event 20 years ago was organized to protest immigration and perceived loss of white privilege.

20 years ago I was there as cars poured into town with white nationalist symbols flying from their windows. I was there as Duke and others decried the loss of the white race. I was there as lots and lots of local, state, and National Guard troops maintained the peace. I was there when other city leaders met to decide how to respond to the events in our small town.

Our small town was targeted because the population of Siler City began to change from majority white to majority Hispanic and African-American. This change created great fear among some of the white people in our community and they reacted out of fear. These white people were Christians flying symbols that were based on Christian symbols.

So what does it mean to jump out of the boat and trust Jesus and be willing to sink for one's faith? It means standing up and being courageous as harsh words are expressed toward the most vulnerable in our society. It means rejecting fear and intolerance toward people who are targeted because of where they are from, who they love, how and who they worship, or the color of their skin.

If we are willing to jump out of the boat and trust Jesus to save us then we stand up against the angry and hate filled speech that many Christians shout. I for one am tired of the bigoted speech which comes from the mouths of many Christians who smugly sit in comfortable pews on Sunday mornings and sing songs about how they love Jesus.

This speech of intolerance and hatred are the words of people who are not willing to get out of the boat and walk toward Jesus. Bigoted and hate filled speech are not the words of people yelling out to Jesus to save me.

According to this story that we read, strong faith in God is not built on safety and security. Faith in God is built on taking risks and trusting God to pick you up when you start to sink.

Take the risk and trust that when you begin to sink for doing what is faithful that Jesus will be there to pick you up. AMEN.

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-Brussoni, Marianna, <https://theconversation.com/why-kids-need-risk-fear-and-excitement-in-play-81450>

-Given: August 13, 2017 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)