

I want to invite us to think about risks that we are scared to take. Start thinking because in a little while I am going to invite anyone willing to share about the kinds of risks that we are scared to take and why we are scared to take them. While we are thinking about our own personal risks I am going to invite us to watch a clip from the movie *Unbroken*.

The movie *Unbroken* is the true story about Louie Zamperini. Zamperini becomes a world class runner and makes it to the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games, the games most famous for the presence of Adolf Hitler and the success of Jesse Owens. Zamperini becomes a pilot in World War II but his plane goes down and he becomes a prisoner of war. The movie is about his perseverance in the face of very difficult circumstances including prejudice against him as a child for being Italian American.

In the clip we are about to see, Zamperini is a young teenager and he is caught being under the bleachers while the teenage girls are sitting above. His running skills are then discovered. In the next scene, Louie Zamperini's brother is riding a bike and is pushing his brother to become a great runner. But as we will see, Louie doubts his abilities to succeed.

Show clip from movie "Unbroken" (13:47-18:47)

Now I invite us into the larger story we are seeking to understand this morning. In the biblical story that the youth acted out this morning, the first act has Jesus inviting his disciples into the boat and going ahead of him to the other side. Jesus dismisses the crowd and goes up the mountain by himself to pray.

Note that Jesus does not hold the disciples' hands and say, "I will go with you in the boat." Jesus trusts that they can get in the boat and get into the water by themselves. Jesus has crowds to dismiss and private prayers to offer.

Evening comes and the winds pick up. As some of you know, I was able to visit the Sea of Galilee where this scene takes place and I got to see for myself how quickly storms can come upon the Sea of Galilee. The sea is not that large but the way it is situated allows for storms to come up quickly and overwhelm the boats that are on the water. In the scene described by the gospel writer Matthew, the winds pick up and the waves batter the boat.

Did you notice that the gospel writer Matthew does not say that the disciples are afraid when the winds pick up and the waves come crashing? Matthew tells us that the disciples become scared when they see Jesus walking toward them. The disciples think that he is a ghost and they cry out in fear.

But immediately Jesus says to them "do not be afraid, it is I." Another way to translate what he says is that Jesus says, "I am." "I am" is the way that God describes God's self in the story of the burning bush from Exodus when Moses asks for God's name. Jesus says to these disciples to trust him. For he is God.

Peter then takes the lead, "If you truly are who you say that you are then command me to come to you on the water." What faith that Peter expresses at this point. He yearns for Jesus to call upon him to do something which has not been done before to our knowledge. And Peter takes the chance and he gets out of the boat and he attempts to walk toward Jesus.

At this point I want to pause and go back to the question that I began with earlier. What are the risks that are hard for us to take and that keep us in the boat? I will begin by sharing mine. I face doubts pretty much every day about my abilities. I worry that I don't have the skills to be a good pastor. As a result I can become hesitant to take the risks necessary to follow God and follow God's call in my life.

How about you??

After taking the bold step to get out of the boat, Peter begins to notice the strong wind and he starts to sink. At this point he reaches out to Jesus and calls out to Jesus to "save him." Jesus then reaches out to Peter and catches him by the hand. "Oh ye of little faith" he shares with Peter. "Trust me," Jesus says. "I am God."

And those words are spoken to us as well. We may be being invited into some risks in our lives and we are fearful that we do not have what it takes. We think back to our history of failure and we think that we are always going to be failures. We compare ourselves to successful people in our family or where we work or in our school or in the society and we think that we can never be like them. We look at the daunting situation in front of us and we do not believe that we have what it takes to succeed.

But Jesus doesn't call us toward tasks that we cannot succeed at doing. Jesus invites us to take some chances and to take risks and follow.

The other aspect of this biblical story that is interesting to note is that while the disciples are taking risks Jesus is sitting on a mountain and praying. Jesus is also sitting on that mountain and praying for us as well as we take our own risks of faith. We are not alone as we take risks in response to God's call upon our lives. For Jesus is praying for you and me.

We do not need to worry during those times that we notice the strong winds around us. Jesus invites us to call out to him and he will be there to pick us up if and when we fail.

Today we were blessed to baptize Grady Scott Marcum. Baptism is a visible reminder that we are never, ever left alone. We are loved by God from the beginning and throughout. We take the risks that our faith calls us to take and we trust in God to be there if and when we fail.

It may be time for us to take a risk of faith and get out of the boat and walk into the raging wind and trust God to be with you all of the way. AMEN.

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-Text: Matthew 14:22-33

-Given: May 3, 2015 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)