

1 Kings 19:9-18

⁹At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there. Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁰He answered, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away."

¹¹He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; ¹²and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. ¹³When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁴He answered, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away." ¹⁵Then the LORD said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram. ¹⁶Also you shall anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place. ¹⁷Whoever escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall kill; and whoever escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall kill. ¹⁸Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

Matthew 14:22-33

²²Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. ²⁵And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. ²⁶But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. ²⁷But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

²⁸Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ²⁹He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. ³⁰But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³²When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Matthew 14:22-33, 2014

Funny thing happened this week. I realized I had never preached on this gospel passage for this weekend.

The fact that it only comes up every three years and that I have never preached on it before leads me to believe that I must take vacation on this week every 3 years at least.

By the time this is over we might all wish I had taken vacation this week also.

Well, we have learned, most of us long before today that Jesus could walk on water.

From this story came expressions like He walks on water, or she is a water walker, expressions that are frequently used in the secular world to describe someone,

usually younger than us,

who is working their way up the corporate ladder, and who you know will one day be your boss, and probably hold a much higher position than the one just above you.

Nothing ever seems to go wrong for them.

Everything they touch turns to gold.

Or maybe it is the one you have already watched achieve that level of success.

The gal walks on water.

Those expressions are always a measure of success and of course the reference is to Jesus' walking on the water, not just a few feet,

but out into the middle of the lake where the disciples find themselves having difficulty making their way across because of the winds and rough seas.

They are not a reference to the relatively feeble attempt Peter makes at walking on the water.

But then maybe I shouldn't be so hard on Peter. It was his nature to be the disciple who stepped out, or spoke up first, which usually got him into some difficulty, if not with Jesus then with the other disciples.

And in addition to all that, Peter is the one who later in Matthew's gospel will be proclaimed the "The Rock." I have never seen a rock that could swim let alone walk on water.

This is not the kind of "Rock" we have these days in Dwayne Johnson, of WWF and WWE professional wrestling fame, or GI Joe and Hercules movie fame.

This is rock of Jesus day. It is the kind that sinks in the water, but is also the cornerstone of a new and important structure just like what Peter goes on to become for the Christian Church.

Then, on the other hand, if we did a full study of the characters Dwayne Johnson has played throughout his career, not only in the movies but in the ring,

we might find that they are surprisingly similar to our Peter who achieved great success as a leader in building the Christian Church;

for which, by the way, he was crucified up side down.

But I think in one important way Peter is not like “The Rock,” but like Elijah in our Old Testament reading.

Peter boldly says to the man walking on the water,

Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” And Jesus invites him to,

“Come.”

Peter gets out there and must have realized what he was doing and some doubt snuck in, and all of a sudden he began to sink.

Lord, save me!

Jesus comes, reaches out His hand, and lifts him out of the water so he doesn't drown, and takes him back to the safety of the boat.

Oh “You of little faith, why did you doubt

Similarly, Elijah, in the chapters before the passage we heard in our first reading, had seemed like a very different person from the one we hear about.

- He had ordered the people of Israel around with authority.
- He called on the Lord to accept a sacrifice with great drama.
- He challenged the prophets of Baal to prove the existence of their God and after they failed had them all killed.

Then Queen Jezebel, furious the Elijah had killed all her prophets, sent a message to Elijah that she was going to kill him by the next day.

Elijah was terrorized! He ran and hid. He prayed for death so he would not have to face Jezebel. He got distracted and doubt crept in; he lost trust in God.

And then this messenger from God sends him to Mount Sinai, the same as where Moses received the 10 Commandments, and he spent the night there in a cave.

The next day God pays Elijah a visit and after the wind, and earthquake, and fire,

God passes by in the sound of sheer silence and assures Elijah of his presence.

Now, this is one of the few places, along with the 23rd Psalm, that I prefer the language of the King James Bible.

There it says in “a still small voice” as God passed by.

“And when he heard it he wrapped his face in a mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in the cave, and behold there came a voice.”

And it was the voice of God asking, “Elijah, what are you doing here?”

The first time God asked Elijah that question at the cave Elijah said, I am alone and they seek my life, they are going to kill me, and that was his answer this time too!

He is afraid and filled with doubt.

Reassured by God he is then sent to complete his mission.

Let me ask you this.

Have you ever started a project that involved some level of risk, maybe because it was something new to you,

something you had never done before or because you knew it was going to require a significant amount of your resources in terms of,

skill, intellect, problem solving, financial necessity,

or in some way you stood to lose a great deal?

From the very beginning you went at that project enthusiastically, confidently,

self assured and you knew just how successful you were going to be.

And then one day all of a sudden when you have reached a significant point along the way, you get distracted or for some other reason doubt crept in and you began to question yourself and the decisions you had made along the way?

What in the world have I done? What am I doing?!!

It was kind of like that when I, along with Laura, decided to go to seminary just short of my 46th birthday, with two children, 5 and 6 years old, leaving behind a good life,

a nice home on a cul-de-sac that the kids had claimed as their own playground, swimming pool in the back yard, regular paycheck which was enough so that Laura could be a stay at home mom except for her work with the National Guard.

The life changes of that new calling, the anticipation and yes the fear was all invigorating, exciting.

God's presence was obvious in the middle of all that. His hand at work to place everything in order was awe inspiring and our emotional level soared.

In August of 1996 I showed up at seminary in Columbia, S.C., alone because Laura was on National Guard duty for the Olympics in Atlanta.

I had sold our 2,000+ square foot house, and moved all our belongings into a small about 1,000 square foot cottage built in the early 1900s.

Things were stacked to the ceiling.

I sat down and cried,

I cried out, "O God, what have I done?"

What have I gotten my family into? What have I done to Laura and her life?

That week at chapel this passage from 1 Kings was the lesson that was preached on. It was the one I needed to hear. It was about God who comes in that still small voice.

God passed by me that evening, quieted my spirit, calmed my soul, reassured me and sent me on to accomplish what He sent me to do.

He doesn't always come in the raging wind, the earthquake that rattles your life, the blazing fire or the crushing waves of the sea,

But in the still small voice as He passes by;

Sometimes you have to stop, stand in the quiet and listen.

God comes when the excitement has passed, the emotions are calmed and when it may seem that God has left the building.

The point was then as it is now;

have faith, trust that when God calls you to something He will provide all you need to carry it out.

That trust and faith are not always so easy to come by.

We were talking at Men's Group on Saturday about trust and one of the questions was,

What kind of relationship do you have to have with someone to be able to trust them absolutely with anything?

The first requirement is that you have to have a relationship with them, but for that kind of trust much more is required.

- An investment in each other's life
- Love for one another.
- For that unquestioning trust to exist you typically have had to go through a hard time with their unfailing support.

So it is with God; so it is with Jesus.

Elijah was paralyzed with fear and couldn't go on and God passed by, reassured him, cared for him and spoke to him, and sent him to complete his mission.

And Elijah did. In the end God lifted Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind accompanied by chariots of fire.

Peter, in fear of drowning, cried out, "Save me Lord!" as he began to sink into the sea. Jesus drew him out of the water.

He continued to teach and shape Peter into the disciple He needed to carry on His mission in the world.

With His ascension Jesus sent him to continue the work He had begun.

Peter completed his work and has been received by Jesus in the home He had prepared for him.

So it is with each of you. You are sent.

You have struggled. God has passed by you. Did you see Him, hear him?

Jesus has reached out to you, taken you by the hand,
saved you from drowning in your troubles.

God has provided for you abundantly. Now you are to carry out
your mission in this world, and I pray through this community of
faith right here at All Saints.

Figure out what that means for you

This congregation was called into existence 35 years ago, and
the Lord knows has struggled at times. But we are still called to
mission in this community and the world.

The leadership here is figuring out what that means for
us and the congregation is going to be a part of that
conversation.

I need you, you need you, to go to entrance of your cave, watch,
listen for God to pass by, to hear what He has to say and know
He has visited you.

I need you, Jesus in inviting you, “Come! Get out of the boat!”
and walk with Him!

When you begin to sink, when you are afraid, cry out!

“Jesus save me!”

Take His hand and let Jesus lift you out of your
trouble.

Then get to work.