

the Rev. Karen Millard
Squamish United Church

July 3, 2016

Readings

Galatians 6:1-16

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Water Walking

You may or may not be aware I altered the gospel reading this week. I chose the Matthew reading because while I was on study leave a week ago I had an opportunity to spend the afternoon with a small group of clergy and the Right Rev. Jordon Cantwell the current moderator of the United Church. We had a very engaging conversation over lunch and then in the evening she preached and shared in worship with us and several other congregations from Vancouver Burrard Presbytery. The scripture she chose to preach on was the scripture I chose for us today because I wanted to take some time to reflect on some of what she shared for us as clergy, and congregations who attended.

Lets go back to the gospel for a moment (I know some of you who attended our last board meeting have already done this so bare with me for a moment and try not to answer the first question too quickly). For the rest of you - these are real questions that I would love for you to have a brief conversation with me about.

What happened in the gospel reading today?

What did Jesus do?

What happened to Peter?

Most commonly, just as you did today people respond Peter sank. And yet that is not all that happened to Peter. Before Peter sank what did he do? He walked on water. We get so focused on how Peter fails we miss what happens when he has faith. We tend to do that in our culture - we do that in our churches - we go directly to the negative, we miss a lot when we do that. All we see is the failures and we completely miss the strengths.

In all honesty most of us are comfortable with Jesus walking on water. We expect that. He's God. He can do miraculous things. We however, are not so comfortable with Peter walking on water, he is only human. He's a doubting disciple. And so we read the scripture and we reflect on how and why he sunk. And yet our scripture says (after the disciples figured out it was Jesus on the water and not a ghost) "28 Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." 29 He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus." Wow. That's amazing. Do you know what that means? It means we can walk on water if we have enough faith. Really. What if for a moment we stopped there. "Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus."

What does that mean for us?

As a child I thought I understood this. What I can tell you however is walking on water is not easy. I grew up spending a lot of time on the sailboat and I distinctly remember a day that I tried this. I remember holding onto the side of the boat and working hard to muster up enough faith so that I could walk on water. Truth is I stepped off the dock and I sank. I sank because like Peter my doubt was stronger than my faith. And I likely was trying to put my faith more in myself than in Jesus. In my story it was my brother who reached down his hand and helped me up but for Peter it was Jesus. Jesus did not let Peter drown, he let him walk on water and then challenged him on his lack of faith when he started to focus on his fears rather than on trust.

Most likely walking on water is not what Jesus is asking of us today but we are being ask to live in faith and courage. Jordan really wants us as people of faith to hear this, to recognize our capacity, our ability, our strengths as people of faith. Jordan wants us to hear this as members of the United Church of Canada and all mainline churches. In so many ways we have stopped trusting in Jesus so completely that unlike Peter we aren't even willing to get out of the boat. We talk about our churches dying, we focus on lack of numbers, we spend most of our time talking about our budgets and we forget that within us we have a Spirit of faith with an ability to walk on water. We within our churches have created a culture of doubt stronger than our culture of faith. That is not what we are called to, and it is certainly not why we exist. We are called to believe, to strive to live in hope.

The Galatians passage says we reap what we sow. We are called to bear one another burdens, to carry our loads. "If you sow to the Spirit you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will eat at harvest-time, if we do not give up." Most of know that we live into what we believe or focus on. We know that at times we create our own destiny for better or worse. There is no question that sometimes life happens to us. And yet we also must choose how we live the life that is and has happened.

You may or may not know that I have a third degree black belt in Tae-Kwondo. That means I have been in the ring fighting quite a few times. Now I am not naturally a fighter but my sport has given me great confidence, and an ability to do it with self-control and power rather than aggression. In self-defence courses the first thing you are taught is that if you are ever attacked attitude is what will save you. You must believe you are worth it, you must believe you have the ability to fight your aggressor, you must know you can do it. And then you do...

It's that way in all of life. If we focus on what cannot be done we are almost guaranteed to fail. What if when we read the story of Peter walking on water from now on we chose to focus on the fact he walked on water over he doubted and sank (which by the way he never sank Jesus saved him - God does not leave us in our doubt). In our faith, church and congregational life we often focus on what we do not have the capacity for, we rarely focus on what we have. We forget how the Holy has carried us through. Squamish United look at what you as a community of faith have

accomplished in mission and ministry over the years. You began with humble beginnings and I am sure your founders never dreamed one day you would be making it possible for a 8 million dollar facility to be built that cares for those most in need in the Sea to Sky corridor. That is what you are doing with your mustard seed of faith. You jumped out of the boat and walked on water. Now you might feel like you are sinking a bit right now but fortunately our scripture tells us that Jesus' hand is there waiting for us to grab on.

Just imagine what we could do as communities of faith as we work together. Jordan also spoke about her passion for ecumenical and inter-faith ministry. The ability to find ways to come together as christian churches enhances and builds up the body of Christ. We get so focused on our way of doing faith and church that we cannot see the strengths of the others, we loose sight of our commonalities, we forget that the core and foundation of our faith is the same and then we fail to walk alongside one another bearing each others burdens.

I do not know what God is calling us to as St. John's and Squamish United but I do know that the Spirit always desires we build one another up. I do know that we need to think about how God is calling us to support one another, not just for now but for always. I do know that in a time of change we often feel like the disciples in the storm and in the storms of life at times we loose faith. But what if like Peter we heard Jesus say come to me and journey in a way you never have before? What if we looked up and focussed on the core of our faith? We just might walk on water together.

I am a firm believer that we have the Spirit within us. God has created us for so much more than we believe we have the ability for. What if we truly lived as if God will carry us through any storm and give us abilities beyond our own beliefs and understandings. We as individuals, as congregations and as denominations would be something entirely different, beyond our wildest imaginings. We might even discover we can walk on water after all.

Amen. Let us so live.