

Worship Service Resources “Step Up”

Pentecost 11, Sunday, Year A

13th August 2023

Romans 10:5-15 NRSVUE / Matthew 14:22-33 NRSVUE

Prelude (Video) [\(1\) Hymn](#) performed by Annie Center, by Mark Dorian

[\(2\) Chant](#) performed by Annie Center, by Mark Dorian

Opening Music [We've Come This Far By Faith](#) performed by Eric Reed,

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Welcome/Announcements

Passing the Peace (Video) [Evensong](#) performed by Annie Center,
by Mark Dorian,

Opening Hymn [Sweet Hour of Prayer](#) 11

music by William B. Bradbury, posted to YouTube by sda songs

Call to Worship

Here, in this place, God welcomes all the dreamers, as well as the doubters: here, the worriers and wanderers can call on God by name.

Here, in this time, we can remember all the ways God has graced us: here, in these moments, we are reminded that God is with us, always!

Here are gathered those daring enough to step out of comfort into the unknown: here, in this faith space, let us seek the presence and guidance of God together.

Invocation

Join me in a word of prayer.

God of Solitude, help us to find the quiet moments, away from fear, away from worry, away from all the thoughts running through our head.

Help us to find that quiet space to focus on You, physically and mentally.

Open our minds to the vastness of Your wisdom.

Open our hearts to the fullness of Your love.

Open our lives to make space for You, to clear out the clutter of the world and to focus our hearts and minds on Your ways, Your life that You have intended for us.

Come close to us, drawing us out of the noise of the world and into the quiet peace of Your presence. Amen.

Our Epistle reading this morning Paul's letter to the Romans reflects the promise of our faith in Christ but stresses the importance of faith as the foundation of all our efforts. As we listen to this passage, let's reflect on the strength of our own faith, and how we trust in that faith to guide our journeys.

Epistle Reading Romans 10:5-15 NRSVUE

Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that “the person who does these things will live by them.”

But the righteousness that comes from faith says, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’ ” (that is, to bring Christ down)

“or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ ” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).

But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim),

because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

For one believes with the heart, leading to righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, leading to salvation.

The scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.”

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him.

For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?

And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

A Time of Prayer

Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer

God,

You have called us to be a people of prayer—to continue the ministry of intercession handed on to us by Jesus Christ Himself.

And so we come before You with confidence, bringing our prayers for the world You love. In Your mercy, hear and answer. We pray for those who, like Jesus' disciples, find themselves surrounded by high winds and stormy seas; those who feel overwhelmed by events and circumstances—the loss of a job, the death of a loved one, serious accident or illness, chronic pain, depression, and fractured relationships, and who don't know where to turn.

We pray for those who, like Joseph, find themselves deeply wounded by people they love—people they thought they knew and trusted—and who are struggling to know how to respond.

We pray for those who, like Peter, are experiencing a crisis of faith; who long to whole-heartedly trust in God but are held back by questions and doubts.

We pray for those who, like the prophet Elijah, have fallen into despair; who have begun to doubt God's presence and power; or question God's call in their lives.

We pray for those who, like Joseph, have had their hopes and dreams crushed; those whose lives have suddenly taken a different turn, and who now wonder what lies ahead for them. Loving God, it is not Your will that any should suffer. We offer our prayers for all those who hunger and thirst, those who live in the midst of violence or poverty, and those who feel abandoned or ignored by the world around them.

Through the life-giving power of Your Holy Spirit, make Your sustaining presence known to all who are in pain or need, so that they, too, may know Your love and live.

In the name Jesus Christ, our Saviour, who lives to intercede for us,cAmen.

Hymn

[When the Storms of Life are Raging](#)

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SING-ALONG HYMN: "When the Storms of Life Are Raging. (Stand By Me)". Words and Music: Charles Albert Tindley. United Methodist Hymnal 512. Hymn history:

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resou...> Background pictures: videolibrarynocopyrightfootage , posted to YouTube by Ayo Ogunmekan

Our gospel lesson this morning is all about what it means to have faith and trust. As we listen to this story from Matthew, let's think about how we let faith lead us, and how we might have more trust in following that faith into situations beyond our own control.

Gospel Lesson

Matthew 14:22-33 NRSVUE

Immediately he made the disciples get into a 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."

Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."

He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus.

But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and, beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!"

Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

When they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Message – Step Up

So this morning we have yet another story about our impulsive friend Peter. Often he's the first to speak up, and ready to get in the thick of things. Yet when the going gets tough, his resolve isn't as strong as he thinks. His adventure leaving the boat reminds me of a similar story about a young hiker. A man slipped and fell off a cliff while hiking on a mountaintop. Luckily he was able to grab a branch on his way down. Holding on for dear life, he looked down only to see a rock valley some fifteen hundred feet below. When he looked up, it was twenty feet to the top of the cliff where he had fallen from. Panicked he yelled, "Help! Help! Is anybody there? Help!" A booming voice spoke up, "I am here, and I will save you if you believe in me." "I believe! I believe!" yelled back the man. "If you believe in me, let go of the branch and then I will save you." The young man, hearing what the voice said, looked down again. Seeing the rock valley below, he quickly looked back up and shouted, "Is there anybody else up there?" Like Peter, his faith is strong until he's faced with a real test, to let go and trust completely in another for his very life. How many of us would be able to let go?

I think today's lesson from Matthew hits home for us in more ways than one. Certainly at the core is this issue of the depth of our personal faith. How much do we really trust God to save

us from the trials we face in life? Have we really mastered the art of “letting go,” of truly putting those worries in God's hands? Those are important questions to consider. This story is deeper than it appears on the surface. Certainly it's a story about miracles, of the messianic power and justification of Jesus as the Christ. But like so many other stories in Matthew, there's a fair amount of symbolism involved as well.

Jesus controls the waters, like God in the Exodus story, as well as the Creation story in Genesis. And for the early Christians, the boat itself was symbolic of the church. The boat image, along with images of fishes and loaves, are prominent on the graves of early Christians in the Roman catacombs.

For the followers of Matthew who would be the early readers of this gospel, that imagery would have a deeper meaning. For them, the boat represented the safety of the church in times of persecution and tribulation. A safe haven from the storm. They could really identify with the fears and concerns of the disciples fighting the waves, working together to keep the ship afloat. I think that's something we can identify with too. Like the early Christians, aren't we struggling to keep our ship afloat in our own time? Unlike our predecessors though, our dilemma isn't so much persecution as a smaller crew, issues with recruiting new sailors, and what heading we should be taking. But we're still fighting to keep our ship afloat as well. But therein lies the dilemma. If we keep to the safety and security of the ship, we will never be able to reach potential new recruits. And if we focus only on maintaining the ship and keeping it afloat, and choose the wrong course, will we ever reach our destination and accomplish our mission?

That sense of security the boat provides isn't just a group dynamic, it applies to us personally as well. What in our own lives do we cling to for the security those things provide, even though they may be keeping us from our calling as disciples? What are our own personal boats?

John Ortberg, a Presbyterian minister and author, describes it in a series of hypothetical examples. He asks, “want to know what your boat is? Your fear will tell you. Just ask yourself this: What is it that produces fear in me - especially when I think of leaving it behind and stepping out in faith?” He gives the following examples. “For David, it is his vocation. He has been a builder for thirty-five years; he is in his late fifties now. But he has been gnawed his whole life by a sense that God was calling him into church ministry. He has quieted his conscience by giving away a lot of money and doing many good things, but he can't shake off the haunting fear that he has missed his calling. And he's afraid that perhaps it's too late.

For Kathy, it is a relationship. She has been involved for years with a man whose commitment to her is ambivalent at best. He is sending her signals that everyone else can read clearly; he never initiates the language of affection, avoids talking about their future, and creates as much distance as possible. But she never pursues discovering his true feelings -- she's too frightened. She doesn't believe she could handle losing him. Her boat is pretty shaky. But she's too scared to leave.

Ralph is the pastor of a church he neither fits nor loves. It is filled with division and petty squabbling. Rather than speaking prophetic truth or leading with clear vision, he finds himself constantly trying to placate angry attendees and keeping the peace. He does not like the church; he resents and fears it. But it's his boat. If he leaves it, it will only be to find himself in another just like it.

Kim's boat is her dad. She raises her children, keeps her house, and pursues a career designed to make her dad happy. The irony is that her dad is not happy, and nothing she can do will ever be enough to please him. But the thought of crossing him terrifies her. His approval is a pretty leaky vessel. But it's her boat." And just for clarification's sake, the Pastor Ralph example is straight from the author's book.

Any resemblance to ministerial leadership here is purely coincidental. But what is your boat? I think we all have at least one that we cling to. As we can see from those examples, the boats that provide us security can also be a hindrance to moving forward, to being the best disciples we can be. And the same is true of the church. A big part of its purpose is to provide nurture and security. But when we focus too much on that aspect, the missional purpose suffers. And a church that is out of balance is not an attractive boat for those who are still struggling in the storm. Those people are looking for a church that takes that leap of faith and gets out of the boat to help and guide them.

Christian author Philip Yancey describes an encounter he had when promoting his book, *Where is God When It Hurts*. A man came up to him and said, 'Sorry, I don't have time to read your book. Can you just answer that question for me in a sentence or two?' He thought for a moment and said, 'I guess the answer to that question is another question. Where is the church when it hurts? If the church is doing its job—binding wounds, comforting the grieving, offering food to the hungry—I don't think people will wonder so much where God is when it hurts. They'll know where God is: in the presence of his people on earth.'"

In order for the church to do its missional work, that requires a leap of faith. It means leaving the safety of the church building and stepping out into uncharted waters. It involves braving the uncertain depths of the water around us, having faith that God will keep us from sinking. Like the man clinging to a branch on a cliff, it means trusting that voice that tells us to have faith, to let go. It may mean letting go of the comfort of "the way we've always done things" or the "way it's always been." It may mean embracing new ideas or opportunities. Regardless, it will involve stepping out in faith.

You may ask, what is so bad about just staying safe in the boat with like-minded people? What is the harm in that? Well, let me share one final little story from a book by Chuck Swindoll to illustrate what happens to a church that just keeps to itself in bible study and worship.

Chuck starts out by saying, "Let's pretend that you work for me. In fact, you are my executive assistant in a company that is growing rapidly. I'm the owner and I'm interested in expanding

overseas. To pull this off, I make plans to travel abroad and stay there until the new branch office gets established. I make all the arrangements to take my family in the move to Europe for six to eight months, and I leave you in charge of the busy stateside organization. I tell you that I will write to you regularly and give you direction and instructions. I leave and you stay. Months pass. A flow of letters are mailed from Europe and received by you at the national headquarters. I spell out all my expectations. Finally, I return. Soon after my arrival I drive down to the office. I am stunned! Grass and weeds have grown up high. A few windows along the street are broken. I walk into the receptionist's room and she is doing her nails, chewing gum, and listening to her favorite pop music station. I look around and notice the wastebaskets are overflowing, the carpet has been vacuumed in weeks, and nobody seems concerned that the owner has returned. I ask for you and someone in the crowded lounge area points down the hall and yells, "I think he's down there." Disturbed, I move in that direction and bump into you as you are finishing a chess game with our sales manager. I ask you to step into my office (which has been turned into a television room for watching afternoon soap operas). "What in the world is going on, man?" "What do ya' mean?" "Well, look at this place! Didn't you get any of my letters?" "Letters? Oh, yeah – sure, got every one of them. As a matter of fact ... we have a letter study every Friday night since you left. We even divide all the personnel into small groups and discuss many of the things you wrote. Some of those things were really interesting. You'll be pleased to know that a few of us have actually committed to memory some of your sentences and paragraphs. One or two memorized an entire letter or two! Great stuff in those letters!" "Okay, okay – you got my letters, you studied them and meditated on them, discussed them and even memorized them. BUT WHAT DID YOU DO ABOUT THEM?" "Do? Uh – we didn't do anything about them."

So what do you think would happen if our boss came back now and found us just hanging out by ourselves at church? Would he be amused that we were so very diligent at studying and memorizing his lessons, yet did nothing about them in a meaningful way? What would he say about how we've addressed the state of affairs in our community, our country, our world? Would he also have to ask, "where is the church when it hurts?" The ball is in our court. We've received the instructions to follow. Jesus has given us his expectations. Are we willing to take that leap of faith each of us is called to? Are we willing to step out of the safety of our own boats, and are we willing as a church to step off our collective boat into the water, trusting in our Lord to hold us up?

I hope and pray we are. I hope we are willing to speak up or speak out when the occasion calls, when the world around us is desperately seeking a shelter from the storm. There is no shortage of hate and violence to be found today, from political vitriol to systemic racism and police violence and its reactionary response. There is plenty of need and suffering as well, from record levels of unemployment and homelessness to widespread food and housing insecurity.

We may not be led to resolve every issue, but we are called by our savior to step out and follow him wherever he leads. We need to follow our calling and get out of our boats to follow that lead. The alternative is to stay in the illusion of security and watch as the boat sinks. Will we choose faith in Christ, or faith in ourselves? Can we keep our eyes on Jesus and step out of the boat to follow him, or will we choose to look away and sink? It's a simple choice.. May we choose wisely. Amen.

Call to Serve

The gifts of faith come to us in many ways, and the miracles we witness are not always so obvious. May the manifestation of God's great abundance in our lives inspire us to generosity in as many ways as we see God's love unfurl.

As we listen to the following interlude, Let's think about how we can step out of the safety of our own boats and make a difference as the presence of Christ in this world.

A Time for Reflection (video) [Aria](#) performed by Annie Center

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

Gracious God, You call us to let go of the things we cling to and step out in faith, trusting in Your love and provision.

Give us courage to step out boldly, and sufficient faith to follow without fear.

Take our lives and our gifts. Use them to accomplish more than we could possibly imagine, so that, through us, Your kingdom might come and Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen

Hymn *Great is thy Faithfulness* **327**

Congregational singing Grace Community Church - Sun Valley, California Text: Thomas Chisholm, posted to YouTube by Martijn de Groot

Benediction

Friends, Jesus calls us to step out on to the water with him, to leave the safety of our boats, and to walk toward Him in faith, joining Him in the work He is already doing in our world. And when the wind and waves get high and threaten to overwhelm us, we remember His words: *"Don't be afraid. Take courage. I am here."* So let's go with faith, to follow where Jesus leads, confident that His love and presence go with us. Amen

Postlude (Video) [Song of Joy](#) by Mark Dorian, performed by Annie Center