

"Reaching Out"  
Matthew 14:22-36  
August 10, 2025  
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Christ UMC, Lansdale, PA

Worship Question: Why is your faith important to you?

Just the other week Jen and I helped at Gretna Glen for their Music camp. It was a very hot week, but overall it was good. I thank you for your prayers throughout the week. We had 14 kids in our camp and we did some pretty fun things. We had music practice for the show for the end of the week. We had choice time where the kids could go boating or fishing in the lake, go swimming in the pool, or go to archery, gaga, or the craft cave. We had all camp games and programming and staff led activities for just our group. Some of the skits that the campers came up with for the improv activity were hysterical.

But after breakfast the day started with our Bible discovery groups where we went through the camp Bible study curriculum. Some of the campers had some pretty deep insights as we discussed the various Bible passages we looked at each day. The topic for the week was "Reaching Out." It focused on how God reaches out to us, and we are to reach out to God and to others. The daily topics were God reaches out, God comforts, God overcomes, God redeems, and God celebrates. So for today I wanted to talk about this same topic because sometimes I think it is one we may overlook sometimes. Our scripture for today was technically for the topic of "God overcomes", but I think it fits "God reaches out" very well.

How many of you have ever felt like God was reaching out to you? Maybe it was a gentle nudge to do something or talk to someone. Maybe it was a door opening at just the right time to point you in the right direction. Or maybe it was a little more like a miraculous writing on the wall for you. God often reaches out into our lives for us. Sometimes it is to get our attention. Sometimes it is to push us in the right direction. Sometimes it is to bring us into a relationship with God in the first place. We Methodists would call this prevenient grace - the grace that goes before.

God often works in our lives in amazing ways but sometimes we don't always see it. Today we celebrate a baptism (at the 11am service), and while the child may not be old enough to answer for themselves, the family is making the commitment to raise the child in a Christian manner to show them who God is. This is just one example of prevenient grace-God working in our lives before we even realize we need God in our lives.

On the other hand there are times where God works in our lives in ways which leave no doubt about it that God is there. Like me receiving my call into

ministry where impossible doors opened in my life to allow me to take that path. Where reassurances that I was doing the right thing came to me in spectacular fashion. Even being appointed at my first church, a church that supported me through the process but where I was told I could never serve there. Even being appointed here at Christ Church in the midst of the pandemic. I do not doubt God had a hand in all of it.

Our story today is another example of God working in mighty ways. Our story picks up just after Jesus fed 5,000 men as well as women and children with just five loaves of bread and two small fish. He had his disciples get in the boat and sail out ahead of him as he dispersed the crowd and then spent some time alone in prayer.

A few things pop out to me right away. How was Jesus going to join them? The only logical option was that he was going to get into another boat on his own and follow behind because walking around would take way too long. What were the disciples thinking when they were told to go ahead without him? So I think Jesus had this planned from the beginning. So hours later the disciples were a considerable way off shore after sailing throughout the night and Jesus started walking on the water to get to them.

I don't know about you but when I think of this story I often think of Jesus walking on a pristinely calm sea. But that was not the case. The boat was being buffeted by waves because of the wind. And so maybe Jesus was walking in between the waves. Maybe he was walking over them. Maybe the waves parted for him. I really don't know, but it is interesting to think about. And since this is not something any person would normally see, these disciples were flabbergasted to say the least. They thought it was a ghost. But Jesus called out to them to calm their fears.

You gotta love Peter in all of these stories. I don't know if he is trying to prove himself to the others. I don't know if he is trying to prove his own faith to himself. Or if he truly is "all in" for Jesus. But he called out to Jesus, "Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water" (v. 28). Miraculously, Peter starts to walk on the water. This is not Peter's miracle. This is Jesus' miracle and Peter is participating. Peter is showing an incredible amount of trust in Jesus right now.

I don't know about you, but I don't know if I would have the nerve to try and walk on water. I am not the best swimmer. I can hold my own in the pool (and my kids have yet to dunk me), but in the middle of the lake with waves slapping against the side of the boat - not gonna happen.

But it is amazing the trust Peter has. They are seeing something for the very first time - someone walking on water - and Peter's first inclination is to trust Jesus enough that he would be able to walk on the water too. Trust is an interesting thing. Sometimes we give it freely. Oftentimes it can take a while to earn it. But trust can be lost quickly and quite easily if it is broken.

One of the activities we did at Gretna was the Trust Trail. There is a rope that winds through the woods. The participants are all blindfolded and place one

hand on the rope and the other on the shoulder of the person in front of them. They were to walk silently through the trail over logs and rocks, even over large boulders (with assistance from the adult spotters on the larger obstacles). And if the chain is broken everyone in front has to stop until those who fell behind could catch up. It is an interesting thing to watch. But it takes a certain level of trust. Trust that everyone will do what they are supposed to do. Trust that the spotters will help you and that the space was created to be a safe way to experience it. But even with this activity some of the campers found it hard to trust. Some did it with the blindfold off. Some tried to reach out behind them for the people who were following them. Some wanted to talk throughout to explain what was going on. "There's a tree on your right or there's a small rock you need to climb over."

How well do we trust? Do we trust one another? Do we trust Jesus? Do we trust enough to get out of the boat to follow where Jesus is calling us to go? Peter shows us trust. However his trust falters. And why? Because he was distracted. It tells us that "when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord, save me!'" (v. 30).

What distracts us? I know there has been a lot going on for me right now. And sometimes it is hard for me to gain traction in what I am trying to do. Something gets in the way and I am distracted until I finally make my way back to what I need to focus on. Sometimes that means I cannot do exactly what God wants me to do at the exact time I am supposed to do it. But even in the midst of our distractions, Jesus reaches out to us. It tells us, "Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. 'You of little faith,' he said, 'why did you doubt?'" (v. 31).

This should increase our trust in Jesus knowing that he is there reaching out his hand to us. God put on humanity to come down here as Jesus Christ. He walked among us, lived our lives, and literally stepped into our story. He showed us how to live this life perfectly - showing us God's love in the process. He died on the cross to save us from our sins. He did that out of love for us. For each one of us. And if that is not God reaching out to us, I don't know what else is.

But the thing is, Jesus reached out to Peter to lift him up just like he reaches out to each and every one of us. Our scripture says Jesus grabbed a hold of Peter, but I think Peter also needed to reach back out to Jesus. He needed to take Jesus' hand to be rescued from drowning. What about us? Are there times we are drowning in whatever it is we are dealing with and Jesus is reaching out to us but we refuse to turn to him? We have to take his hand. We have to reach out to Jesus to accept what he has to offer us.

Oftentimes we will end this story with Peter and Jesus getting back into the boat as the winds subside. But I wanted to include the following verses. As they landed on shore they were swamped with all the people in the region coming to Jesus to be healed. Can you imagine the crowd reaching out to Jesus? They knew the power Jesus had to heal them. They begged just to touch the edge of his

cloak because they believed that would be enough to cure them of whatever plagued them. And it did.

For those of us who believe that was us at one point. We reached out to Jesus just to touch the edge of his cloak. To accept his forgiveness and follow him. Sadly, the longer we go from that initial contact with Jesus, the less that energy and impact tends to drive our lives. That same excitement of our faith doesn't always come as easily as it once did. And so it is important that we renew our passion for Christ regularly. Which is another benefit of celebrating a baptism, because it is an opportunity for us to renew our own baptismal covenant. It is a time for us to share once again in remembering what Christ did for us and our choice to follow him.

But the thing about the end of this scripture is not just about reaching out to Christ, but about helping others do the same. And when we read it we may miss it. The end of v 35 and then 36 says, "People brought all their sick to him and begged him to let the sick just touch the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed." It wasn't just the sick that came to Christ. There were people who brought others to Christ to be healed.

We who know the power of Jesus should be bringing others to him to be healed. We should be reaching out and telling others about Jesus. We should be sharing his love with others. We should be helping others find Jesus. I saw a quote from an author that says, "Sometimes, reaching out and taking someone's hand is the beginning of a journey. At other times, it is allowing another to take yours" (Vera Nazarian).

I am sure there have been people in all of our lives that have reached out to us and allowed us to walk with them as they walked with Jesus. That is what it is like to make disciples for Christ. Who did that for you in your life? Maybe it was a parent or grandparent. Maybe a friend or neighbor. Maybe it was a Sunday school teacher or another church leader. Who helped you find your way to Christ?

We need to pass that along. We need to show people Christ and help them find him. And that means not only do we need to reach out to Jesus who is reaching out to us, but we also need to reach out to others to help them join us on this journey. We are all on this journey of life together and we need to care for one another, love each other, and help all people see the love of God for themselves. Because someone did that for us. Jesus is reaching out to all of us and all we need to do is take his hand.