

Psalm 69:1-3, 13-14, 30, 33-34 (New Revised Standard Version)

Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me. I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God. But as for me, my prayer is to you, O Lord. At an acceptable time, O God, in the abundance of your steadfast love, answer me. With your faithful help rescue me from sinking in the mire; let me be delivered from my enemies and from the deep waters. I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving. For the Lord hears the needy, and does not despise his own that are in bonds. Let heaven and earth praise him, the seas and everything that moves in them.

Matthew 14:22-33 (New Revised Standard Version)

Immediately he made the disciples get into the 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."

One time when Mark Twain and his wife were traveling in the Holy Land,  
on a beautiful moonlit evening he thought it would be pleasant  
to take his wife on a romantic boat ride out on the Sea of Galilee.

He asked a guy with a boat how much to take them out on the water,  
and supposing that Mark Twain must be a very wealthy man,  
the boatman named a ridiculously high price,  
and as he walked away Twain said, "Now I know why Jesus walked."

The passage we read from Matthew 14 does more  
than just describe an event from the life of Jesus.

Each of the Gospels were written intending to identify who Jesus is,  
and the retelling of this story ends with a faith-statement vs. 33,  
And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "**Truly you are the Son of God.**"

The particular way that the author chooses to tell the story,  
is meant to connect and encourage Matthew's readers  
with a hopeful promise of God's presence and power,  
especially when feeling fearful, troubled or anxious,  
or facing adversity, **and wondering where is God in all this?**

Specifically, the disciples had been sent by Jesus to cross the sea.  
Along the way they encountered life-threatening winds and waves,  
and then later **Jesus came to them amid the raging storm.**

The author of Matthew's begins by retelling the story, vs. 22, 24.  
... he(Jesus) made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, ... but by this time the

boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them.

In Matthew's Gospel there is a clear connection being made between the disciples trying to cross the treacherous and turbulent sea, and the struggling Christians of that early Church, and the intense rejection, suffering and persecution that Matthew's faith-community was having to endure.

After the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, including the Temple, they drove out the Jewish people, including the Christians, forcing them to relocate out into the gentile world, amid harsh winds and waves of animosity and persecution.

The Christians of Matthew's community of faith were struggling, they were suffering and even their loved ones were being killed **even though they were being faithful and trying to obey Christ**, just as the disciples were being faithful out on the water.

Like the disciples struggling to obey amid the storm at sea  
Matthew's faith community was struggling to obey Jesus.

The Greek that the author of Matthew uses is very specific & graphic, literally 'the boat was being **tortured** by the waves' and 'the wind was in **hostile opposition** to them'

Like the disciples struggling in the boat crossing a rough sea, so too, those Christians were obeying as Jesus had commanded...  
... which left them wondering, **why and where is Jesus in all of this?**

That image of a small boat, far from land, in a stormy raging sea, against severe crashing waves and hostile opposing winds, is also a pretty good description of our world and culture.

But Matthew's message is about hope, assurance and encouragement, that just as Jesus was **near the disciples in their boat and was walking toward them across the raging wind and sea -- -so too** in hopeful answer and promise to our fear and concern: vs. 27  
...Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; **do not be afraid.**"

### **Take heart**

meaning: **be confident because of God's faithfulness & promises.**

That defines the true source of hope, power and confidence, **our God.**  
We trust because God's power and steadfast love are with us, **which was clearly the trust, promise, hope and message that Matthew's Christian community most needed to hear,** and these days especially, so do we!

Several commentators & preachers condemn Peter in this next scene, claiming that he was impetuous and presumptuous in asking, vs. 28  
you, command me to come to you on the water."

"Lord, if it is

They insist that he should have stayed in the boat with the others, **just as we should remain safe and secure in the comfort of church as our safe place to stand against and apart from the raging storms, chaos and tumult of our world,** like monks safe and secure away in their monasteries, or the Amish who stay totally separated from culture...

... but there is another way **a better way** to read this story.

As Presbyterians, we have understood that our task as Christians is to make a difference as salt and light **sent out** into the world, by living faithfully and boldly proclaiming **the Good News of God's gracious love through Jesus Christ for all people**, and that no one's life, needs or struggles don't matter.

Peter's request begins in vs. 28, 'Lord, **if** it is you', (Grk- εἰ σὺ) is also correctly and accurately translated, 'Lord, **since** it is you', a seemingly subtle difference, yet quite significant.

So the verse would read,

"Lord, **since** it is you command me to come to you upon the water"  
**Peter wants more than just the complacent safety of waiting and watching from the boat.**

**What a bold and courageous act and example of God-trusting faith,** to step out from the boat at sea far from land and into the turbulent stormy waves and gusting wind.

The next scene, the beginning of vs. 30, **But when he (Peter) noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink ...** That reminds me of a Wile E. Coyote and Road Runner cartoon, that look when he suddenly realizes he's chased Road Runner way past the edge of the cliff, stops & drops the way down.

When Jesus told Peter to come out on the water, it was hope & promise, "I really hope you can. I promise I'll be there with you if you can't."  
Obviously Jesus didn't say, 'come', so that he could watch Peter sink like a rock –  
**- for that's not the sort of God we serve.**

The point was for Peter to try, and be rescued when he failed.

Several commentators have placed a harsh spin on Peter's failure, claiming that had he kept his eyes on Jesus instead of the storm,  
**and that if he'd tried just a little bit harder, then he wouldn't have lost his footing & failed.**

And then they go on and make a personal warning and application, that we fail because we don't focus on Jesus **hard enough**, and are too easily distracted by the things of this world...  
... and maybe that's all true, **but where is the grace and hope in that?**

How does that help me when I struggle, when I am afraid or hurting?  
How does that strengthen or encourage me when I fail and fall?

Isn't that approach a bit like taking an easy and cheap shot at someone who is already wounded, feeling guilty and broken?

Haven't you ever given it your very best, and yet still failed?, and despite your all-out efforts, you still crashed and burned?

**That's when I most need Jesus Christ, grace amid my failure and loss, even more than when I am successful, and all is good and going well.**

**This story in Matthew 14 is about Jesus and God's grace, and not about what we can or should do for ourselves.**

Continuing that scene, vs. 30

... and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!"

Peter echoes the cry and hopeful promise of Psalm 69: vs. 1-2, 13, 33

Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. ... my prayer, O Lord ... at an acceptable time, O God, in the abundance of your steadfast love, answer me. With your faithful help rescue me ... For the Lord hears the needy.

**That's the God I need to know, one who will always be there for me.**

The grace and the intended message of this passage is not that Peter should have had more faith and tried harder,

**but that at least he ventured out from the boat**

**and that even when he failed and started to sink,**

**at least he knew where to turn, and who to ask,**

as in Psalm 69:1, Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck.

Consider the Christians first hearing Matthew retelling this story.

They were struggling and hurting, loved ones have been killed.

They are being driven out from their Jewish homeland,  
and challenged to live faithfully in the gentile world.

This story points toward grace, the conclusion of Matthew's Gospel,

the final verse where Jesus urges and promises, Matthew 28:19-20,

"Go therefore and make disciples ... and remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

**Isn't that exactly what this story in chapter 14 is describing?**

**Go and serve me boldly, even when it's strange and difficult,**

**and even if you fail, I will still be there with you always.**

Peter was caught between the frightful raging storm all around him

and his trust and faithfulness and love for Jesus Christ,

with at least enough faith **to step out of the boat and try...**

**... and surely Peter's failure and fall is far bolder and more faithful**

**than the other disciples who never dared to venture from the boat.**

This passage challenges me to ponder and ask myself,

what have I been afraid to do and where have I refused to go?

What were the dreams that I have allowed to wither and die?

Our call not just sit and watch the world happen all around us

**trying not to make waves** while we're waiting out life's storms.

It is to follow and venture beyond mere comfort, ease and security,

into the perilous seas & storms of **dangerous discipleship**,

so to proclaim the God's grace out into the world around us.

Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24-25)