

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

August 10, 2014

Proper 14A/Ordinary 19A/Pentecost +9

The readings this week:

◦ Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28 ◦ Psalm 105:1-6, 16-22, 45b

◦ Romans 10:5-15 ◦ Matthew 14:22-33

[*Click here to read this week's Scriptures*](#)

Faith Within Chaos

In Matthew's Gospel, the story of Jesus walking on water morphs into a story of Peter walking on, then sinking into, the same water. It begins as a statement about Jesus' authority; for Jesus' contemporaries had learned from scripture that such mastery over the waters is God's accomplishment. When Peter tells Jesus to call him, too, onto the lake, the story transitions into an illustration of what it looks like when people express faith in Jesus. It serves up food for thought, mostly about who Jesus was and how he was remembered, but also about the nature of faith. Over the centuries this passage has fed Christians' allegorical reflections on what it means to walk faithfully in fearful circumstances.

Faith Among The Disarray

The most important detail to consider is the place Peter asks to go. He and his companions apparently have spent nearly the whole night struggling to get across the blasted lake before Jesus shows up near daybreak. It's not a massive body of water, never more than seven miles across when traveling east-west. Yet they've not been able to traverse it, for the storm has "battered" or "thrashed" their boat. As for the churning sea, in their worldview it represents chaos and danger. Then they think they see a ghost. It's terror all around.

Fear erupts because they anticipate how the story will probably end. All night they have been

threatened by the prospects of established boundaries being overrun. Water leaping up from its environs to pull down an entire boat. A ghost intruding into the realm of the living perhaps to claim new victims. Disciples left to die at the mercy of more powerful forces. Then they realize: it's Jesus, striding over the watery chaos.

So, why would Peter want to go out there? After all, Jesus himself is not exactly respecting the natural boundaries everyone is used to. There's something scary about that, too.

I doubt Peter expects a walk on the sea will alleviate all his fears. Rather, his desire to join Jesus on the water expresses a desire for transcendence. He's not trying to be Jesus, he's trying to be with him. Peter wants to share Jesus' unbounded place, to put himself beyond the forces and expectations that determine our usual existence, whether for better or for worse.

Isn't this what history's most faithful people have demonstrated? Not all of them were great believers, but they knew that if God might be encountered anywhere, God will be found in places where the regular delineations and predictable endings don't apply as before. Sometimes incredibly turbulent places are also "thin places," where God breaks through.



Reflecting on the Word



1st Reading: [Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28](#)

Have you seen the harmful effects of "playing favorites" in your family or that of another? Describe the family relationships at the outset of the story. Jacob's favoritism, Joseph's arrogance and the brothers' envy contribute to this tragedy of rivalry and hatred. To what extent are you involved in a family situation, either your own or that of a friend, with some of these elements? God worked to make great things come of this tragic story, how is He working to change your story (tragic or good) into one of blessing?

Psalm Reading: [Psalm 105:1-6, 16-22, 45b](#)

How many of you have found yourself in a place of dismay? In a place of joy? How many of us have spent hours on our knees in prayer for reassurance, for help, for any word at all? That would be all of us, I shouldn't wonder. Yet how often have we turned to rejoicing and singing? How often do we praise the Lord in the midst of our...whatever? We often don't take the time, really take the time to sing to God on our own, out of our need, out of our heart, and out of our thankfulness. The Psalmist wrote dozens of psalms about depression, but he wrote easily twice that about singing to God and for every psalm of trouble, there is a reference to praising the Lord. That should be a big hint to us that it is important. Take a moment and write a Psalm of your own, bare your heart to Him. [Weekly Devotions](#)

The Nature Of Faith

It is the nature of faith -- humble, active faith -- to be willing to throw oneself into a disorderly world and expect to encounter Jesus there. It is the nature of faith, even "little faith," to want to transcend the normal "rules" and see what possibilities might be brought into being. It is the nature of faith to wonder what other supposedly unalterable outcomes Jesus might want us to take part in messing with. It is the nature of faith even to waver from time to time, when it has stepped into stressful, unfamiliar terrain.

Because, as Peter discovered, Jesus is there where the boundaries are being redrawn, extending life-giving stability when the chaos gets the upper hand.

Excerpts, [Matthew Skinner, Huffington Post](#)

Praying Toward Sunday

Lead my toes to the edge, be there as I exhale fear and breath in me your spirit and courage. Let me bold, let my faith outshine darkness of doubt. Though storms may rage around me, you are peace, you are calm. Fill me with the faith to leap into your arms and help me rest in your quiet.



Psalm 105

He is
He remembers
He made
He swore
He confirmed
He allowed
He called
He sent
He turned
He spoke
He struck
He spoke
He brought
He spread
He opened
He gave

Pastor Fred,
[Grace Harbor Church and School](#)

3rd Reading: [Romans 10:5-15](#)

Can you take yourself to heaven? Can you raise yourself from the dead? Did you have to go to heaven to get God? Can you raise anyone from the grave? Could you stand before God and tell Him that He should save you according to how perfect you have been? Now think about it... who came to who? Did God come for you? Did He bring His Word and His salvation to you? How far do you have to go to be saved? What do you have to do? How amazing is it that God made His gift of salvation so easy that it doesn't matter who you are or where you are at... anyone who believes can be saved. God brings His Word to us. Take a moment and just close your eyes and think about the Scripture verses that you have in your heart. Say one of them now. It doesn't matter which one. Just say one. [Proven Paths Ministries](#)

4th Reading: [Matthew 14:22-33](#)

Teachers use tests during our school years. But tests are not limited to school; God also uses tests throughout our lives. How do you think you've been tested lately? Imagine you are in the boat with the anxious disciples. Describe what you would see, hear and feel. When are you most tempted to take your eyes off the Lord and to sink in doubt? In verse 33 the disciples worship Jesus and declare, "Truly you are the Son of God." What do you see in this incident that leads you to worship Jesus? How can these things help you to trust Jesus the next time you are tempted to doubt? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)