

Stretching Toward Sunday

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

August 13, 2017
Proper 14A/Ordinary 19A/Pentecost +10

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](#)

Fear and Faith

They say it's the first step that's the hardest.

Fear often keeps us rooted in our place, afraid that any movement will make things worse.

Sometimes well-meaning people will remind us to have faith in God, who can do all things. Remember Peter who stepped out of the boat on faith, they might say.

To tell you the truth, I've never thought Peter sounded too smart in that story. I mean, who in the world decides to walk on water just because Jesus could do it? ("If Jesus jumped off a cliff would you do it?" asks your mother.) Peter steps onto the water and then starts to sink. He seems surprised. Surprised! Hellooo, Peter—it's water! What were you thinking? Jesus picks him up and helps him back to the boat. "You of little faith. Why did you doubt?" Why? He doubted because it's water he was trying to walk on! Jesus seems awfully hard on Peter. I could be hard on Peter, too, but for a different reason. "'Oh, you of simple reasoning, why did you think you could walk on water?' But not, 'Why did you doubt?'" It just doesn't seem fair.

The fear that Peter felt is probably not unfamiliar to you.

Maybe you haven't attempted to walk on water lately, but you know what fear feels like. You have felt the fear of having a sick child or a helpless parent. You have felt the fear of not knowing if you'd have enough money to pay the bills at the end of the month. You have felt the fear of wondering if your relationship would last. You have felt the fear of being in a new situation—a new school room this fall, for example. You have felt the fear of imminent loss. You have felt the fear of grave illness. We live in a universe that is very frightening at times.

Fear has a way of leading us in different directions. Some people smother their fears with alcohol or

drugs. Some try to pretend they are not afraid. Some deny that there's anything to be afraid of. Some say that having enough faith will handle it.

Like Peter, I think we tend to alternate between courage and fear. Between "I can get through this" and "this storm will never end until it takes me under." Sometimes both in the same moment.

Jesus told Peter that he hadn't had enough faith. In the usual sense, that seems an unrealistic and unfair accusation. It also seems less than helpful.

I wonder if what Jesus was saying to Peter was not that he should have had enough faith to stay on top of the water, but that he should have had enough faith to reach out to Jesus sooner.

We need help in this world. It comes from God; it comes from other people who care about us. We may not be able to walk on water, but we can stretch out a hand to give or receive help.

When we find ourselves standing on a surface that won't support us, we have two choices. We can sink alone, or we can reach out. Neither one sounds appealing. But, truly, the choice is pretty clear.

Have faith, and grab a hand.

~ Melissa Bane Sevier, [Contemplative Viewfinder](#)



Reflecting on the Word



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

Ponder the roles of various parties in this story (Joseph, Jacob, Reuben, the brothers, etc.) In what ways do you see God working in this story – directly or indirectly? Have you experienced times of God’s absence? If you have, how did you look for God working in your life? [Sermons that Work](#)

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

Discuss the elements of Psalm 105:16-22 in relation to Gen 37:1-4, 12-28. What is similar or different? Where in your life have you seen God’s hand? How do you give thanks to God, or respond, when you feel that God is moving and working for your benefit? [Sermons that Work](#)

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

According to Paul in verse 5, what is the attitude of people who live by the keeping the Law of the Old Testament? In verses 7-8, what is Paul saying about Jesus? Where is he present? What must we do to have access to him? Verses 9-10 are probably familiar to you. What does Paul say is necessary for salvation? In verses 11-13, he quotes two Old Testament passages that were written to and about the Jewish people. What point is Paul making in these verses – to whom can righteousness now belong? Again in 14-15 we find a set of verses that are likely familiar. While Paul is not establishing a mission organization in these two short verses, it is helpful for us to understand who is involved in the process. Paul talks about the One-Believed-In, the senders, the proclaimers, and the hearers. What is the role of each? What is the responsibility of each? How is each related to the others? Through these rhetorical questions, what do you think Paul was saying to his audience, the Christians in Rome? What is comforting about the message of verses 6-8? How close is Christ... even when we feel distant? [Faith Element](#)



Here is Strength

(Matthew 14: 22-33)

Consider the wild wave, its wet tension, tissues of torn foam in its curled fist; contradiction of calm, enemy of evenness, it says to the stormed soul: fear my strength.

Consider the flinty wind, its walled power, shreds of white clouds in its biting teeth; uncaring and unkind to brittle weakness, it says to the scoured soul: fear my strength.

Consider the fragile flesh, its limitations, gravity’s slave and tattered by time; weak against wave and wind’s toughness, it says to the struggling soul: I’ve little strength.

Consider Christ who walks through storm toward us, who reaches out, compassion in his hands, counters fearing with God’s loving faithfulness. Who says to the yearning soul: here is strength.

~ Andrew King, [A Poetic Kind of Place](#)

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

What kind of things do you tend to trust in when life gets stormy, that makes you feel comfortable and secure rather than fearful? In this story who really failed? Was it Peter who asked Jesus to call him out of the boat or was it the other eleven who didn’t budge? Have you ever been accused of failing at something that in reality wasn’t really failure? Thus far in life, what has been your experience with failure? How do we know when God is calling you to do something? How does God speak to you? Have you ever asked Him to allow you to do something crazy or supernatural like Peter? Did you get out of the boat? If you don’t feel that you are living out God’s calling for your life, what steps might you take to begin exploring what his calling for your life may be? [Rock Church](#)

Praying Toward Sunday

Spirit lead me where my trust is without borders
Let me walk upon the waters
Wherever You would call me
Take me deeper than my feet could ever wander
And my faith will be made stronger
In the presence of my Saviour

~ Joel Houston, Matt Crocker, Salomon Ligthelm,
Hillsong Music