

“Take Heart”

Matthew 14:22-33

Immediately Jesus 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.”

Take Heart

Matthew 14:22-33

August 13, 2023

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I.

Though the turnip truck is still within easy viewing distance, I am smart enough to know the question which is on everyone's mind this morning. Yes! after five grueling years of intermittent but persistent labor, the *inside* of Linda's "She Shack" was finally completed last week during my vacation.





While I still have to finish a bit of decking and install railings on the *outside*, with the baseboard having been put in place Linda was over the moon to finally be able to move into this long promised abode of her own.



Suffice to say, it was a very good day on the marriage front. I am not sure, though, who has exhibited more patience: me in the actual *building* of it, or Linda in waiting for it to *be* built. Ample measures of each, most probably. Good things truly do come to those who wait.

II.

So there I was early last week, seeing the light at the end of a very long tunnel. Earlier this spring I had dimensioned all the maple down from rough cut lumber. The week before I had spend hours sanding, then days applying 4 coats of finish to the long, maple boards and as well as the cherry corners and, to serve as transitions between the maple, cherry plinth blocks which I

had ordered online with laser cut decorative nautilus shells and, after finally figuring out how to do so, began affixing the maple to the walls.

Everything was going along swimmingly until I realized the small hump which was always been in the subfloor had been exaggerated by the installation of the hardwood floor. Though less than half of an inch in difference, putting a straight piece of maple on it created something of a teeter-totter; meaning one board had to be “scribed” to fit (a skill at which I have little to no experience) and, then, cut with a band saw (one of the few shop tools I do not own).

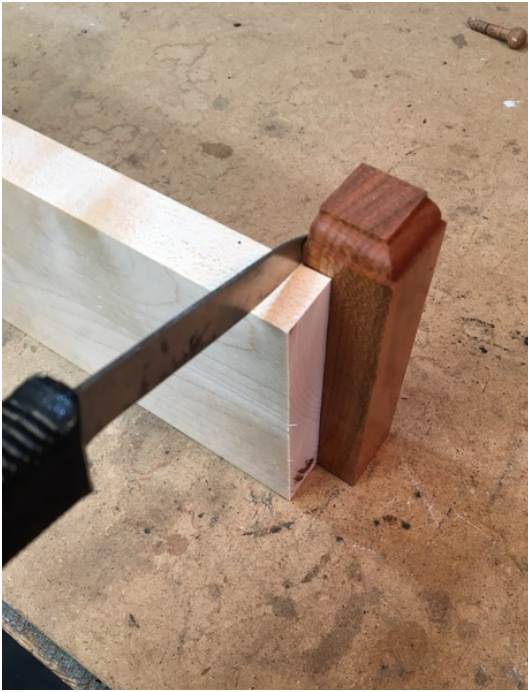
III.

Hence, I found myself on the 1 yard line unable to get the ball into the end zone that would be Linda’s delight. While I certainly could have taken a shot at it, I had only the *exact* number of boards needed and, rather than solve the problem, I was far more likely to botch the job, setting me back at least a week. Something that neither I, or my marriage, was prepared to bear.

The *only* solution to the problem was to call in a professional. Thankfully, I know just the guy; and, so, I texted our own Barry Walch. Not only does he have just about every woodworking tool ever made, Barry actually knows how to *use* them, and is both experienced and skilled at doing so. Graciously, Barry came right out last week and scribed the board, took it back to his shop that evening, returned the following day and when we set it against the wall it was a perfect fit; and I mean *perfect*. He also scribed and planed two other boards that, while passable, were not ideal.

IV.

I tell you this story to express my gratitude to Barry and toot his horn a bit, but also because we shared a very poignant moment together which I think serves to illuminate today’s scripture reading. At one point we were marking a maple board to cut it precisely to fit in between the cherry plinth block at one end and the cherry corner piece at the other. In the past, I would have used a tape measure to get the length and, then, cut it; something of a hit or miss proposition *at best* as the margin for error is so small. Instead, Barry showed me a trick. He set the board in place, then used a knife set flush against the cherry to cut a small notch in the maple giving us the correct length to which to saw.



V.

Excited about this new trick, I tried it when measuring the next board to be sawed. I set the one end of the maple board inside the cherry block, and ran it long past the cherry corner. However, before I marked it with the knife I slid the board out to decrease the angle and, hence, give a truer length. Now, this is an *excruciatingly* small adjustment, as the maple is only $3/4$ of an inch thick and reducing the angle on a 6 ft board is only ever going to be oh so subtle. Interestingly, Barry noticed right away that I had done this and commended me on it. I said I make that suggestion to folks all the time: put the tape measure on the board's edge, not at an angle.



He concurred, adding people always ask how much difference *could* it make?!? The answer, as Barry said: it makes a *difference*, and you would be surprised just how *much*.

Today's sermon text tells the story of Jesus going up on a mountain to pray, while the disciples headed out in a boat and got caught far out from shore in a fierce storm, where they were battered by wind and waves. Suddenly, and with the storm still raging, Jesus comes walking to them on the water saying, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." Jesus then bids Peter to come join him, which he does for a few brief moments, only to begin to sink when his fear sets in. At which point Jesus says, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

VI.

We now arrive at the point in the sermon where I would like to share with all of you one aspect of my own fearfulness which, I am sorry to report, has been steadily increasing over these past few years culminating in something of a crescendo this summer. My hope in sharing this fear with you is that such a crescendo will be capped and, through this truth telling, now begin to abate. If only a little bit, because only a little bit will certainly be enough to make a difference.

Here then, is my fear: that I am failing, as the minister, to convey to you, the congregation, the immensity of the impact our church is having on this community and in this world. Of course, part of this is the nature of the beast. A great many things happen in the life of a congregation about which the minister simply should *not* be talking. Less deep dark secrets, and more the kinds of personal struggles and sorrows which *each* one of us has experienced (or will experience) in our life. Such things simply need to be kept sacred, and shared by the person they most affect when the affected person chooses to do so.

VII.

While I always *have*, and always *will* honor this trust that has been placed in me, doing so creates a tension between what you, as the congregation, assume to be happening and what I, as the minister, know to be actually occurring. More to the point, as our congregation grows the depth, scope and sheer volume of need increases, so too does this tension.

Beyond this, there are two other factors at work which need to be recognized if the whole picture is to be accurately seen and understood. First, while it is always the case that relationships *deepen* over time, they also *broaden*. Primary relationships lead to secondary, and even tertiary

relationships, as parents, children, relatives, friends and neighbors enter the dynamic. Second, the more healthy, vigorous and effective the congregation becomes, the larger its role in, and responsibility to, the wider community. As trust, respect and appreciation grow, so, too, do the expectations and responsibilities placed upon us.

VIII.

There are, though, counter balances to all this; i.e., the good news. As more and more people beyond the congregation come to understand that here on the Park shines a light, they are eager to both add to the light, and to help support that light in finding its way into the shadows, and those places heretofore kept hidden. While a growing church increases the need within the congregation, it also increases the capacity to *meet* that need; even stunningly so (you will be *amazed* to discover this come the annual meeting).

While offerings of treasure certainly affords a greater reach, it is the gifts of time, care and compassion which make the greater impact. Over past few years, the greatest single change to which I can point, is the dramatic rise in leadership taking place. Not only are people stepping *up*, they are stepping *in* to help each other in ways both big and small. We are not talking just Deacons and Elders, but *each* person in the sharing of their lives and your efforts to support each other.

IX.

Having said all that, however, my guess is I really have not told you anymore than you already knew; or, at the very least suspected (or hoped). However, *knowing* it intellectually is not nearly enough. Instead, we need to feel it in our heart and allow that feeling to guide our faith in what God is doing *in* our lives; and, through them, what God is doing through this church of *ours*.

While I appreciate that many of you are curious about the progress of Linda's "She Shack," that really is not the question which is forefront in anyone's mind this morning. Instead, the real question for today, and the real question you should be asking *every* time to you come to church, participate in its life and work, support it financially, and give to it your time and talents, is this: does my faith actually make a difference to me, and to the world around me; and, if so, how much of a difference am I making?

X.

Personally speaking, life has never been busier for me, my family, and here at the church. I can only imagine the same is true for all of you, especially those raising families, caring for loved ones, and meeting work demands. Though we keep telling ourselves things will slow down...eventually, we all know this will almost certainly not be the case. Therefore, what I would like to say to us today is that at least when it comes to our church you can simply just *relax* and take a *breath*.

Whatever small measure you *are* able to offer *absolutely* makes a difference, and you would be surprised just how *much* this church is doing because of the difference *you* are making. Said another way, there is a very real-world tangibleness to the impact of our faith; both on the world around us and in our very own lives. Yes, it certainly would be great if each of us could muster a mountain of faith. However, the truth is, even a little, mustard seed size amount of faith makes *all* the difference.

XI.

It only takes a little to make a big difference. You can see this when measuring boards, and you can see this in Peter's attempt to walk on water. When we read or hear this familiar passage of Peter sinking in the water, we often focus on the little faith Peter had when allowing himself to feel the fear that would arise in *any* of us at the realization that here we are, out in the deeps, in the mist of a storm, precariously walking on water towards the one we understand to, truly, be the Son of God. Here is the thing, though: PETER GOT OUT OF THE BOAT! Whatever little faith Peter did have, it was *enough*.

XII.

God is *not* asking us to have faith so as to walk on water; that is a job for Jesus and we should leave *that* aspect of the operation to him. However, what God *does* ask of us, every day, is to have enough *heart* to simply get out of the boat and try. If we will only do this very small thing it will make all the difference in the world to you in your *own* life and, in turn, *you* will be a difference maker here at this church and, *through* this church we, together, will certainly go on to make a difference to the world around us...and we are. Jesus spoke and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." Good things come to those who wait...upon the Lord. Amen.