



Hear the Word

from Pastor Andrew Yoos

Gather... Encourage... Equip... Send...

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

August 13, 2017

Matthew 14:22-33

So my background is working with kids

- I worked at a Lutheran camp in North Carolina for 5 years, youth director, and after school programs etc.
- I love middle schoolers especially, favorite age

As you all know there are good middle schoolers and then there are bad middle schoolers

There are the kids who do what you ask and look up to you.

And there are the ones who ask a million questions and intentionally do the thing you told them not to do and who have just learned what sarcasm is.

And then one day at an after school program, I walked in and none of the kids were there

- I called down to the office
- I texted the program director- she didn't know anything about it

So I started wandering around looking for them and finally I found them- all 9 of them drinking hot chocolate in the courtyard

- "What are you guys doing?!" You know you are supposed to come to me, I've been worried
- and then one of them said- It was Kara's idea
- What?
- Surely not Kara. Kara was the good one. The sweetest kid. Yes, Mr. Drew. Always on time, always doing homework Kara. She orchestrated this mutiny?
- That's the day I learned that there is no such thing as good kids and bad kids, especially with middle schoolers
- They all have some good and some bad in them

It's one thing to say that about kids but what about when it comes to faith?

Most people assume that you either have faith in Jesus or you don't.

Or that you've got lots of faith or none- good faith or bad faith.

I'm a believer, she's not.

And We think this way because of what we think faith is.

We are raised to think of faith as this mental checklist.

It's like we would go down the creed and say

- ... I believe in God the father almighty- check
- Jesus Christ- born of the virgin Mary- check
- resurrection of the body- check
- life everlasting- check
- OK, Mr Johnson our list indicates that you DO in fact have faith and here's your ticket to everlasting life.

That's at least the most familiar concept of how faith works

But this particular story is odd because it shows that faith may not be as black and white as we think.

The disciples are in a wind battered boat in the middle of the lake after a long night.

- first thing in the morning, Jesus comes walking on top of the lake toward them

And their first reaction could be classified as the opposite of faith- fear.

- forget, not believing in Jesus, the disciples are just screaming in terror at this point

And then Jesus identifies himself and it's Peter who says, "Ok then, Command me to come towards you"

- Now this seems like quite the transition from screaming in terror one minute to wanting to get out of the boat and try walking on the water the next
- I'd actually call this a huge movement in faith here. So Peter steps out of the boat and starts walking on the water... amazing faith

Then... what happens next? He gets terrified again... because who wouldn't?

And he starts to sink into the water which I can only assume would ramp up the terror he's feeling... so...pretty weak faith

But then, as he's doggy paddling trying to keep his head out of water, he reaches out to Jesus and says, "Save me."

- Call it what you will, but that's a pretty tremendous faith right there. Forget swimming for the boat or calling for the boat to come get you, he calls out to Jesus as he is drowning.

And once everyone is back in the boat Jesus seemingly scolds Peter and says, "You of little faith."

And at first glance, those words sound kind of harsh.

Because what we just heard is that Peter's faith is all over the place in this story. It's great, it's not so good, it's non-existent, then it's pretty good again.

So what if Jesus' words- you of little faith- isn't so much a dig at Peter. Scolding him to have more faith. What if it's simply Jesus holding a mirror up to Peter. A statement of fact with no judgment attached. You have a little faith.

Because one thing we learn from this crazy story is that faith isn't an either/or. It's not as if Peter has no faith.

- Faith for Peter exists on a spectrum. And even in this story, he bounces all over the spectrum of faith, from one extreme to the other

And when Jesus says "you of little faith" he might as well be showing Peter a spectrum and saying, "right now you're about right... here" You've got a little faith. And I can work with a little faith.

And if we go through life thinking that our faith is the exact same and consistent from one day to the next, one hour to the next, one experience to the next, I think this story also holds a mirror to us.

Consider how you feel when everything in your life is going great:

- You are excelling at your job and finding your work experience meaningful and life-giving
- You and your family don't have any major health issues
- All your relationships are healthy

And you feel confident and step out of the boat with your eyes fixed on Jesus.. You of great faith!

Now consider how you feel at other times:

- When you are struggling to find meaning and opportunities in work
- When you or loved ones are sick, suffering, or dying
- When relationships are broken

And when you step out of the boat, the fear of life is just too overwhelming and you feel like you are sinking... You of little faith.

And there are days like Peter when our faith bounces around to all ends of the spectrum. Living in confident trust in God one minute, wondering if you are worthy of grace the next, later so fearful that you forget to even look for Jesus, and then reaching out your hand to see if there is something there to grab hold of. This is the normal human faith experience. To follow Jesus fully involves all the peaks and valleys of a life of faith. Sometimes things are going great and you are walking on water. And other times, it's just not there and you're sinking.

And when we hear Jesus' words "You of little faith" as a scold or a rebuke, we miss the point of what actually happened in this story. If we hear Jesus telling Peter, you need to always be at this end of the spectrum or else... then we can't possibly grab hold of the miracle that happens. Jesus reaches down and grabs Peter by the hand and pulls him back safely into the boat.

Salvation happens in this story

Jesus doesn't save Peter here because his faith is so great and outstanding in this moment. Peter isn't rewarded with salvation because of his perfect faith. Jesus saves Peter in the lowest point of his faith. Jesus saves Peter when his faith is nowhere to be found and all he can do is stretch out his hand.

Sometimes we may be tempted to think- ok if faith is a spectrum, just stop me when I have enough to earn salvation. Is it this..... this? Stop me when I get there...

And Jesus says, no. Salvation is not about always having the best faith. It's not about having the most faith or the greatest faith. It's about reaching out when you have little or no faith at all. When you are at your lowest and the wind is battering the boat and you feel like you are sinking. And that's when Jesus reaches out toward you and says...I've got you.