



WEEKLY STUDY March 12 – March 18, 2023

(Use this guide to individually or with a group dive deeper into this week's sermon.)

Our sermon series for Lent is: "Made For a Miracle"

On Ash Wednesday we began our new sermon series: Made for a miracle. As we journey to the cross with Jesus this Lent, we will be examining the miracles in the book of John. Each one offers us an invitation to conversion: from emptiness to overflow; from holding on to letting go; from fear to courage; from spiritual blindness to depth of sight; from death to life. We are encouraged to make the season of Lent a meaningful one through practices that enrich our spiritual life and increase our missional outreach to family, church, and community.

Our scripture this week is John 6:16-24 (NRSV)

"When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were frightened. But he said to them, 'It is I; don't be afraid.' Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.

The next day the crowd that had stayed on the opposite shore of the lake realized that only one boat had been there, and that Jesus had not entered it with his disciples, but that they had gone away alone. Then some boats from Tiberius landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus."

- 1)** Our scripture this week recounts the miracle (called sign in the Gospel of John) of Jesus walking on water – in the midst of a storm. This appears also in Matthew 14:22-36 and Mark 6:45-56. Remember - chronologically, the gospel of Mark (written 66-70) is the oldest gospel and Matthew and Luke (both written 70-80) both draw heavily from Mark. Read all 3 accounts – starting with Mark, then Matthew, then John. There are differences to note from one account to the next. By far Matthew is the account that many find most familiar.

Question: Do the differing accounts offer up different insights for you? Which one speaks most to you? Why?

- 2) In reading this week's scripture did anyone else find it humorous that the people realized while they were watching boats that not just the disciples but Jesus as well had slipped away to Capernaum? For me, it was one of those real life moments that reminded me that many more than the 12 were following Jesus. And I could imagine both the confusion of the crowd about where Jesus might be and their determination to find him once more. This bit of the story is only in John.

Question: Why do you think John included this part of the story about the crowd following Jesus to Capernaum? Imagine yourself as part of the crowd. What do you think your reaction might have been? How might that relate to your personal faith journey?

- 3) One of the things that Rev. Christopher included in Sunday's sermon were examples of people who lives are familiar to us walking into the chaos instead of away from it. He talked of Dietrich Bonhoeffer leaving the safety of the U.S. and returning to Germany even though he knew his fate would be death. He talked about Martin Luther King walking into the chaos in spite of certain death. He challenged us to see that just because we are in chaos – in sorrow – in uncertainty – unsafe – to doesn't mean that God does not love us; that God does not take care of us. God doesn't take the chaos away but is there with us. He warned us that we had to set aside the feeling that God takes away those things out of our control like being caught in a tornado. He talked about setting aside a "transactional relationship" with God.

Question: In what ways would you interpret what Rev. Christopher had to say about a relationship with God that is transactional will leave us feeling abandoned by God when we suffer and are hurting and overpowered by the chaos in the world?

- 4) Once again, the song response to the sermon in the 8:30 service was memorable for me. Rev. Christopher spoke about the fact that God is in the chaos and in the calm, and the song Josh played and sang captured that observation for me. Here is a portion of the lyrics from the song:

"Spirit lead me where my trust is without borders
Let me walk upon the waters whoever 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 Savior
And I will call upon Your Name
And keep my eyes above the waves
When oceans rise, my soul will rest in Your embrace
For I am Yours and you are mine."

Question: In what ways did Rev Christopher's message that God is in the chaos and the calm speak to you? Are there other hymns or songs that help you recognize God in the chaos as well as the calm?

Prayer: (Our prayer this week is the Affirmation of Faith from Sunday's service.)

"O God of miracles, bring peace to our chaos, clarity to our uncertainty, and calm to our storms. May your presence change the way we move through the storms of life. In our pain

and suffering, in our loss and loneliness, in our hopelessness and powerlessness, help us receive your grace as an empowering force that will guide us to the next shore. AMEN”

Weekly Challenge: This Sunday was the third Sunday in Lent. (Remember – every Sunday is a feast day because that was the day Jesus was resurrected.) Lent is the time to deepen our faith; to spend time listening for God’s guidance; to give witness in our actions and practices to our faith. Pray for those in chaos (sorrow; loss; war; violence; victims of nature) whom you know personally, and those who are beyond your personal knowing.

(Weekly study guide prepared by Rev. MaryJane Pierce Norton)