

Matthew 14:22-33: Faith Is Not a DIY Project

Nuance matters. Comparing different translations of a scripture passage can change the way we hear a familiar story. For example, in Matthew's story of Jesus walking on the water, if we compare the familiar English translations to all the possible meanings of the original Greek, the interaction between Jesus and the disciples, the immensity of the storm, and how Jesus responds to Peter's apparent failure of faith, are sharpened. We are presented with fresh insights. Instead of asking the disciples to *get* into the boat and row across the lake, Jesus *compels* them. Despite the oncoming storm and the lateness of the hour, they have no choice but to obey. And sure enough, by the middle of the night, they are miles from shore, exhausted, frightened, and caught in a storm that in feels like it was sent by the devil himself.

Then Jesus comes to them, walking on the mountainous waves. It has to be a ghost. No man walks on water, let alone this water. What Jesus tells the disciples is much more powerful than our English translations typically imply. He does not merely say what we expect – “do not be afraid. It is I.” He tells the disciples “Do not be afraid. “I AM.” He uses the sacred name of God to identify himself. The disciples are not just seeing a miracle in the middle of their fear; they are being confronted by the presence of the Great I AM.

And then we see Peter—brash, impetuous Peter—who asks Jesus to call him out onto the water. For a moment, Peter has faith enough to do the impossible. Then he sees the waves. He panics, and begins to sink. And in what happens next, we receive the gospel – the good news: faith is **not** a DIY project. Peter cries, “Lord, save me,” and Jesus does. Only after Peter is safe does Jesus gently correct him. Jesus did not begin by telling Peter that his lack of faith was why he was sinking. He began by reaching out his hand and to rescue Peter. God does not expect perfect faith from us. He does not wait to act until we have enough faith. Our cry for help is enough. When our courage fails, when our faith cannot hold us up, and we cry out in our desperation “Lord save me.” God hears us. In our need, we are heard. In our need, we are loved. In our need, we are saved. Thanks be to God. Amen.