

Eyes Wide Open: Life Boat Matthew 14:22-33

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²² Immediately after this, Jesus insisted that his disciples get back into the boat and cross to the other side of the lake, while he sent the people home. ²³ After sending them home, he went up into the hills by himself to pray. Night fell while he was there alone. ²⁴ Meanwhile, the disciples were in trouble far away from land, for a strong wind had risen, and they were fighting heavy waves. ²⁵ About three o'clock in the morning Jesus came toward them, walking on the water. ²⁶ When the disciples saw him walking on the water, they were terrified. In their fear, they cried out, "It's a ghost!" ²⁷ But Jesus spoke to them at once. "Don't be afraid," he said. "Take courage. I am here!" ²⁸ Then Peter called to him, "Lord, if it's really you, tell me to come to you, walking on the water." ²⁹ "Yes, come," Jesus said. So Peter went over the side of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the strong wind and the waves, he was terrified and began to sink. "Save me, Lord!" he shouted. ³¹ Jesus immediately reached out and grabbed him. "You have so little faith," Jesus said. "Why did you doubt me?" ³² When they climbed back into the boat, the wind stopped. ³³ Then the disciples worshiped him. "You really are the Son of God!" they exclaimed.

Scene 1:

Interviewer: How does this story fit into what Matthew is saying?"

Teaching: Well, Matthew spends pretty much the first half of his story about Jesus setting up conflict that requires some sort of answer. I mean you've got Herod who is a local strong man, who is just on a hair trigger. Among the people Matthew was writing to, a mostly Jewish audience, there was a significant number of people who felt alienated by government, the Romans. And there were even more people in this story that felt like their religious leaders didn't have what they were looking for in terms of a connection to God.

Matthew was just reminding people of what they pretty much already knew: the world was broken and in need of some kind of rescue. And that for people

that want to follow Jesus, leaning into that life will lead to them becoming part of that rescue mission, to go into a world that's caught up in a storm.

Scene 2:

Interviewer: So, have you ever felt like you've been caught in a storm in life?

- *Planning a wedding during Covid felt like a storm, because we had planned what our wedding was going to look like a year ago and that's totally changed now.*

- *Growing up, I went to majority white schools from kindergarten to 12th grade. It was really hard for me to feel seen and feel like I belonged.*

- *Recently I've been preparing to go to college and a lot of stuff has been really thrown off by what's happening right now. Dates are being changed, times are being changed, the way that we handle everything is being changed. It's been kind of a challenge for me lately.*

Scene 3:

Interviewer: So, Matthew goes from talking about these other types of storms to a real one? What's the significance of that?

Teaching: By the time we get to chapter 14, Matthew hits the gas on what he is trying to tell us about Jesus. We get this sudden expansion of the frame or picture of who Jesus is. So, we've learned that Jesus wants to engage with local issues. He's head and shoulders above what the religious leaders are offering. He's a healer of people who are sick, held captive by demons, and just before this we find out he can turn a little bit of food into a feast for something like 15,000 people. It's amazing stuff.

It's all stuff which would definitely change your perspective on who Jesus is, what it means to be his disciple, but it's in line with what the prophets did. In an odd way, expected, but then we're in this storm. If you've been in a little boat on big water in a storm, it is terrifying. And it is scary because it reminds you just how big, wild, and out of control the world can be and just how small you are.

But, then they look out on the waves beating up their boat and who do they see? Jesus.

All of these other things which Jesus brought rescue to were to scale for a human. Not saying they weren't miraculous and wonderful, but this seems to be different, Jesus is walking on the waves of a storm. Matthew is blowing up the scope of Jesus' vocation as messiah to an extraordinary level because this is

power over creation type rescue. And the disciples, well, they are rattled. I would be. Wouldn't you be?

Scene 4:

Interviewer: When did it feel like things were really out of control?

- This past week I was faced with the reality that I may not see my students for a long time face to face, and that's where I really feed off of those connections.

- Yesterday was a really good example of things feeling out of control. I had my immunization records for college apparently didn't go through, I had to take a strengths test, I had to do about five different things for college in a span of about three hours, for a zoom meeting. It just feels like a lot.

Scene 5:

Teaching: This situation provokes a range of responses in the disciples. Prior to seeing Jesus, some of the disciples are clinging to the side of the boat, praying, "God, just get me out of this." Others are rowing like their lives depended on it, hoping that they can muscle their way out of that mess. Others are probably realists. This is a little boat on big water. This is it. And then they see Jesus out on the water and they are overwhelmed, they can't process it. It's too much. He's got to be a ghost!

I feel like, if we're honest, in our storms, we have been one of these disciples at some point or another. If there is one thing that storms and Jesus do, it is show you what's going on in your heart which will then make you available for where you'll need to go. And that's what happens with Peter. He was looking for God to show up.

And then God did show up and says to them in their fear, "Take courage. Don't fear. I'm here!"

Scene 6:

Interviewer: So that's when Peter gets out of the boat?

Teaching: Yeah. Because he SEES Jesus. Peter is having the sort of reaction to Jesus that Matthew hopes all of us will have as a result of reading this story. It's important to know that Peter has been with Jesus all along. He's been seeing firsthand, he's been experiencing firsthand this unfolding picture of who Jesus is and thereby what it might mean to follow him and now he's there for this storm, this massive escalation of the picture of who Jesus is and it moves him to this place of availability.

So, yeah, Peter asks Jesus to tell him to get out of the boat and Jesus says, yeah, come.

Scene 7:

Interviewer: So he goes out to meet Jesus?

Teaching: Yeah, he gets out of the boat and he, too, is walking over the water, on this storm. I mean, can you imagine, the waves are crashing, going nuts, but Peter is just locked into getting to Jesus. So he walks.

Then, maybe it's the sheer "what is happening?!" of the moment, but reality sets in, you know how it does, for Peter and he begins to sink in the water. And he's in trouble, at least it feels like he is.

Scene 8:

Interviewer: Were there or are there moments when you have fear or doubt that Jesus can help you through your storm?

- I think we know that Jesus is walking this with us, but there's definitely been times when the fear and the anxiety and the stress of it all has certainly taken over our emotions.

- I think the doubt comes from things being completely out of my control and it has actually caused me to dive deeper into God's word and into my prayer life and to rely on Jesus more to combat that doubt.

Scene 9:

Interviewer: So, then what happens?

Teaching: Well, Jesus does for Peter what I think Jesus does for all of us when things go sideways, when we sink below the surface in life and the storms we experience. He reaches into the water and he grabs Peter by the arm and he rescues him. He's got him. No judgment, no condemnation. He rescues him and pulls him out of the water, and Jesus sees Peter and it's this amazing moment that we all hope to have with Jesus in our lives when life is difficult. Jesus lends him his strength, his power so that the two of them can walk on the storm together back to the boat. The text doesn't even have to say it for us to know that Peter had a life-changing experience that day. He's never going to be the same.

Scene 10:

Interviewer: So, what does that mean for us; a lot of us feel like we are going through a storm right now?

Teaching: "All of us," me included, you know? I've been in quarantine, I know people who are sick, I'm afraid of getting sick, I know people that have died, I've been to virtual funerals. I think what is good news in this story is that Jesus cares about what's going on in our lives. We are invited to lay it all out there, to be honest. This is an invitation to be who we are, failures and all, before our God, and to know that God is interested in

the details about the storms of our life. He wants to do something about them. That's good news.

I also think that Jesus isn't leaving me or us where we are; he's moving me from fear to courage. I can hardly watch the news anymore because I think so much of it is just one big highlight reel designed to scare us. Scare us from one another, scare us from understanding one another, and scare us from changing or growing. Jesus came to the disciples and comes to a world that is stuck in fear to show us the way to freedom. To move people from fear to courage so that we can be the church.

Lastly, I think it is important to pay attention to the fact that Jesus and Peter don't walk away from the other disciples; they go back to the boat and they lead the disciples to where they were going, to more ministry. This encounter isn't an end in itself, it's a beginning and a model – a pattern for us to follow, for us to know how to be the church. Jesus changes us so that we can go change people's situations.

Like I said, we're only halfway through the conflict Matthew is setting up in this story. And while Peter and the disciples are where they are and know what they know as characters in the story, Matthew is writing this and we're reading this a couple thousand years after. After the resurrection. After Jesus gives us the Spirit so that we might do for others what he has done for us: which is to show up in each other's storms.

For a long, long time the church has been understood as a boat, a life boat of sorts, where people can go for rest and for shelter when life gets rough. And while that is true, nowadays there's more to it. This boat is filled with known and changed followers of Jesus needs to go to where the hurting people are to be the hands and feet of Jesus where people are actually struggling.

So, that's what I'm gonna do. I came to this side of the lake to be with some friends that are in the middle of a storm so that we can weather it together. My hope is that everyone watching this will do the same. Because it changes things. It changes us. And that's good news.

Scene 11:

Interviewer: How has your church family supported you in this season?

- Shortly after everything shut down with Covid we were in the Wilderness series, and I remember to this day, and will continue to remember this all the way through the school year, the sermon about there's always enough for today.

- One time when I was at Prince of Peace, I was feeling particularly alone as a biracial woman in this world, and a woman that I did not know at all came up to me and asked if she could sit with me and pray for me, and it was then that I felt seen and felt like I mattered.

- I've felt a lot of support by our church family by seeming genuinely interested in how we're doing and asking what they can do for us and just showing love.