What is faith?

Sermon by the Rev. Bernadette Hartsough

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It is good to be here in this place. It reminds me of 3 years ago having communion out here every Sunday because of Covid-19. Today we are here by choice to enjoy God’s creation, our habitat garden, our memorial garden, and our beautiful courtyard.

Our gospel reading today takes place in God’s creation. Jesus spent a lot of time outdoors and most of his teaching makes references to seeds, plants, vines, trees, and water. the events leading up to today’s gospel are not joyful. Jesus had heard that John the Baptist had been killed. Jesus tried to go off by himself to pray. He was followed by the crowds. He healed and taught, then fed 5,000 people with the loaves and fishes. After he dismissed the people, he put the disciples on a boat and went off to be alone and to pray.

I am struck by the amount of work that Jesus had to do to be alone to grieve and pray but he made it a priority. He needed to rest and reenergize. He is giving us this example.

Jesus’s time is cut short because a storm came up on the sea. His disciples that HE sent out on the boat were being tossed around. Jesus appears to them walking on the water. I am not going to debate if Jesus was on a sandbar, using his mind to prevent his body from sinking or really just walking on the water. It appeared to the disciples that he was walking on the water and Peter wanted to join him.

This passage has revolved around faith. Faith and the way that we interpret faith in this passage is important. There are different ways to think about faith. First there is the faith that Jesus is the Messiah, and he has the power to control nature and to defeat death. The Roman’s passage today describes this faith. “But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one in whom they have never heard?” Paul in this Roman’s passage goes on to make a great case for going out into the world to share the story of Jesus. If you do not know the story, you cannot believe.

Then, there is the faith that Jesus can impact your life-not always in the ways you think are possible. A relationship with Jesus will change you if you remember that Jesus is NOT your magical genie giving you your every wish. Jesus will support and strengthen you but that doesn’t mean that life will be easy, and you will get everything that you want. I do not think that Jesus was sent here to make us spoiled children of God.

Lastly, faith means that even when you fall into the water of life, someone will be there to extend a hand. You must be willing to reach out and take it. We must be the ones extending the hand and the ones reaching for a hand.

So, in today’s gospel, even though it looks as though Peter had no faith, he got out of the boat. He called out to Jesus. He allowed Jesus to reach out and grab him. Let’s not be too hard on Peter or on ourselves when we think that we have lost our faith. Remember the many parts of faith and keep going.