

“Making Our Mark”
Sermon by Lisa Crismore
John Knox Presbyterian Church – April 21, 2013

Matthew 14:22-33 “Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from land for the wind was against them. And early in the morning, he came walking towards them on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid.” Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, “Truly, you are the Son of God.”

We have experienced this week numerous storms in our lives. From the threat of golf-sized hail, to flooding in most of central Indiana, we have seen and felt the incredible strength of the wind and the rain. Many of us have seen the images on TV of the homes that are standing in several feet of water. We can only imagine the people’s fear who have lost everything.

We have also been hit by a storm of violence as this past Monday marked another incident where we are reminded that we are totally safe. As I watched a special report Monday night, I was struck by the 26 seconds of silence at the beginning of the Boston Marathon and the memorial at the 26 mile marker both memorializing the 26 killed at Sandy Hook just 4 short months ago. If the 3 killed and 150+ injured wasn’t enough, we experienced nonstop coverage on Friday of Boston being shut down while the manhunt continued for the 1 suspect in the bombing. At the end of the day, this suspect was captured while the other suspect and a police officer were dead. The storm rages on. The world is a frightening place to be in some times!

The disciples find themselves in the midst of a storm in the middle of the night! It is dark! I can hear the fishermen on board telling everyone what to do as they ride it out. They were experienced in these matters. They are doing everything in the power to keep the boat afloat. But what happens next takes everyone by surprise. In the distance, they see something really weird. It looks like a person, but how can that be? They believe it is a ghost. But quickly Jesus sets them straight as he speaks to them saying, “Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid.”

Peter is the one to set his fear aside and seeks the invitation of Jesus to come. I can’t imagine the faces of those disciples in the boat, when Peter asks to walk on the water. Are they rolling their eyes, saying here goes Peter the overachiever! I am sure they are thinking, “Is he crazy? Get over yourself, Peter. Wait! Don’t get out of the boat!”

Christ extends the invitation by simply saying, “Come.” Peter takes the risk and comes toward him on the water. He is doing fine for a while but then he notices the wind and the fear and doubt creeps in. His faith and body begin to sink but he is swiftly caught by Jesus’ loving arms. Jesus is there every step of the way.

In hearing this story, we find ourselves thinking that we are to get out of the boat. We are disciples and it is Peter who accepted the invitation of Christ. He is the one that took the risk and walked on the water. Do we really want to do this? I don't think I am on board with this! I would really like to hang out in the boat with the others where it is safe. Why do I need to get out of the boat?

Will Willimon, who is a great theologian and preacher, says, "If Peter had not ventured forth, had not obeyed the call to walk on the water, then Peter would never have had this great opportunity for recognition of Jesus and rescue by Jesus. I wonder if too many of us are merely splashing about in the safe shallows and therefore have too few opportunities to test and deepen our faith. The story today implies if you want to be close to Jesus, you have to venture forth out on the sea, you have to prove his promises through trusting his promises, through risk and venture." (*Feasting on the Word - Year A, Volume 3*; 2011; by Clifton Patrick; Westminster John Knox Press; p. 336)

We are in the beginning of our Sabbath Journey. We have set sail across the sea. Where will we seek God's promises through risk and venture? Rabbi Dennis Sasso shares the Hebrew word for holy is "kadosh." Kadosh is used when we remember God's commandment "Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy." In keeping Sabbath, the Jewish people believe you are to set aside something ordinary for an extraordinary purpose. I believe this is taking the time to reflect on the ordinary moments in your life and seeing the extraordinary hand of God. My Spiritual Director is often times asking me, "Where do I see God?"

What came to mind was the Bible Study I teach on Wednesday nights for the Kindergarten-2nd graders who come for tutoring. This is my third year to do this. It was an ordinary Wednesday night about mid-February of this year. A new child showed up for class. His name was Angel. As the class begun, Angel shared that he had never gone to church. This brought a gasp from one of the girls. He does not know God! He does not know Jesus. He does not know the Holy Spirit. From that night, he has attended every Wednesday night Bible Study except one. I will never forget the night he was by himself and we began talking about God and creation. He really wanted to know if it was true. As the days unfolded, he wanted to know when the people show up. I told him finally on the sixth day the people are created. Then on the seven day, God takes a break and everything was good! Angel has been so eager and thirsty to learn about God. He has started bringing his two cousins, Jesus and Erick. I really like my job but these are moments when I love my job, from the ordinary come the extraordinary!

In our story today, Jesus takes time for Holy Sabbath once he gets the disciples into the boat and dismisses the crowd. He needs this, if you recall before the feeding of the five thousand he is trying to get away. Now he goes up the mountain to pray and when evening comes Jesus is there alone. He takes the time to breathe, reflect and pause. It is no surprise then that when Jesus sets out on the water to check on the disciples he invites this ordinary guy named Peter to do something extraordinary like walk on the water!

We are on a Sabbath adventure. We seek the invitation to be renewed. This is your opportunity to be renewed by your faith and get closer to Christ. You are invited to take the risk and venture out on the water.

In the Children's Message today, I read the book *The Dot*, written and illustrated by Peter H. Reynolds (Candlewick Press; 2003). Vashti is convinced she can't draw. Until her teacher invites her to make a dot. She makes her mark and then signs it. Once she does this incredible things begin to happen. From an ordinary dot comes something extraordinary.

During our next hymn the ushers will be inviting you to come forward to sign "The Dot", making a commitment to make your mark during this Sabbath journey. This is your invitation. Jesus said, "Come". Will you?

Thanks be to God. Amen!