

St Thomas's Episcopal Church
Sermon - Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost
13 August 2023
Reference: Matthew 14:22-33

What time, I am afraid, I will trust in thee. (KJV- Psalm 56:3)

In today's Gospel lesson from the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus and his disciples had a busy day preaching, talking to people, and healing the sick. Then Jesus tells his disciples to get into the boat and go to the other lake of Galilee. Jesus goes up a mountain to pray. Jesus knows his strength and power; doing his work comes from God and communion with Him.

We discussed this Gospel lesson last Thursday at our weekly Vesper Intercessory Prayer. Pam Storrer, Rita Welch, and Judith Ain are regular attendees from St Thomas. Diane Lovelace, one of our lead participants from St Andrews, told us about her insight into this passage. She said getting into the boat to go to the other side is like we get into the boat of life, and Jesus encourages us to a bon voyage, and Jesus knows what is happening on our journey each step of the way. There are anxious and fearful moments that occur on our journey of life. Jesus meets us where we are; we often do not recognize Jesus and keep worrying, nervous, and anxious. When we cry out in fear and pray. Jesus is present and tells us. "Take heart; it is I; do not be afraid." What a comforting message to hear in a fearful and anxious situation.

Look at the current situation in Hawaii. Currently, at least 99 people have been killed in Maui's wildfires. Many people lost their homes. Imagine the fear and anxiety in these people's lives.

In the Old Testament reading for today, we heard in the last few verses that Joseph, a seventeen boy, is sold into Slavery by his brothers to the Ishmaelites. Imagine the fear and anxiety that the boy Joseph experienced. However, we later know that God was present with Joseph, making him famous beside Pharaoh in Egypt. However, we should not minimize the fear Joseph experienced as a kid.

We are still determining where the journey of life will take us. But we know Jesus is in control; Jesus will not leave us or forsake us. I came to the US as an International student to study Engineering. Those were very anxious and fearful days. When I landed at Arizona Phoenix International Airport in the US, I had no one I knew in the US, no family, nor friends; there was no one to meet me at the airport, with a limited financial budget to complete my education. I was not sure if I would make it. I was very anxious. Many days, to save my

money, I would skip meals. On a Friday, after a long hard week, I would go to Dunkin Donuts and buy a donut to treat myself. As I recall, that was the best-tasting Donut I have ever eaten.

Years later, I visited my undergraduate campus with my family and bought a donut at the Dunkin Donuts store at the exact location. It tasted different and was not the first juicy sweet flavor I first experienced. God took care of me to complete my education so that, later, I could continue my graduate studies. Remember, God, will never leave us or forsake us,

Today we have a distinguished guest in our midst, The Rev. Deacon Kathey Crowe. Kathey is a great inspiration to me, a dear friend. I am sad to say, Kathey had a death in her family. She is now grieving and healing and needs our prayers and support. Please keep Kathey and her family in your prayers. Please say hello to Kathey during the coffee hour and ask her any questions you may have about the San Jose State University Spartan Pantry. We are collecting items for the SJSU Spartan Pantry this Sunday and next. Needed items include *toilet paper, feminine hygiene products, bar soap, shampoo & conditioner, toothpaste & toothbrushes*. The collection box will remain at the church until Monday, August 21. You are encouraged to bring your contributions and add them to the box. The collected items will be sent to the SJSU pantry through Deacon Kathey.

Just an introduction to Rev. Deacon Kathey Crowe, she established an international student residence in August 2017, providing shelter and a community that served 40+ students before the pandemic. Later due to the COVID pandemic, it was forced to close. She is currently working with her Board of Directors to increase her Host Family Program, pairing students with seniors or those wishing to open their hearts and homes to needy students. Kathey is an active Emergency Crisis Response Team member at SJSU and works with Student Affairs and the Counseling Center to provide care, counseling, and basic needs for underserved students. Five Episcopal parishes in the Santa Clara Deanery partner with Kathey to collect hygiene products for the Spartan Pantry.

Kathey's ministry helps students; I am not sure if you are aware that some students live in their cars as they cannot afford to pay rent, students skip meals due to lack of financial support, and the list can go on. I wish Kathey's campus ministries were there during my student days. It would have made it a bit easier for students in need.

Jesus is present with us in our anxiety and fears. One of my favorite verses I remember and say even today are the words from Psalm 53: verse three. "What time, I am afraid, I will trust in thee." (KJV- Psalm 56:3). In my jail visits, I tell my friends inside the jail to say these words

when they are anxious or afraid in their prayers. It helped me during my difficult moments, during exams and carried me through the most challenging and trying moments.

To Matthew's Gospel reading, John Ortberg authored his book, titled "If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get out of the Boat." Peter was on the right track when he exited the turbulent boat. Peter was stepping out in faith. Jesus calls us to leave the boat's safety and come to him. We need to have confidence in Jesus and focus our eyes firmly on Jesus. Then we will not sink, despite the wind and the waves. As we saw in the passage, Peter gets distracted and begins to sink. When he fixed his eyes on Jesus, he could walk on water.

Cole Arthur Riley - writer and creator of Black Liturgies. Bring up an interesting analysis of Matthew 14. He states that in our confusion and anxiety. We begin to develop doubt,

In the Gospel passage, Peter used the "If," saying, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." "If it is you ..." If. As we study the Gospels, only a few times someone addresses Jesus with "if," A good example is when Satan tempts Jesus in the wilderness. When Satan says, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." then "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will give his angels charge of you,' When Jesus is hanging on the cross, people mock him, calling out, "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." (Richter, A; Episcopal Church; Proper 14 (A) – 2014). We should never doubt the help and power of Jesus' presence.

Interestingly, Jesus does not scold or chastise Peter for being afraid during a storm. Jesus' question was, why did you doubt my power? Did you think I would not save you?

We need to remember that storms will blow into all lives. Remember that Jesus is present with us, and we are not alone. Jesus, the king of Kings and Lord of Lords is ever present with us to strengthen and help us through the dark patches in our lives.

Take courage and step out in faith, knowing that Jesus is there to protect and guide us through life's storm. Prophet Isaiah writes, God says, "I have chosen you and have not cast you away: Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand." (Isaiah 41: 9 & 10).

Amen.