

Sermon /13 August 2023/Matthew 14:22-33/ Rev. David Martin, Deacon / St. Mark's Episcopal Church, ABQ / Try It, You'll Like It

Try. That's what Jesus asks of us. Try.

We don't have to be great. We don't have to do it by ourselves. We don't even have to succeed.

But Jesus calls us to try. Try.

In today's gospel, the disciples are trapped in their boat on the water during a violent storm. They see Jesus coming toward them.... he's walking on the water! The friends are terrified and believe they are seeing a ghost...but Jesus assures them it is he. Peter decides to speak up.

Peter! Oh, Peter!

Peter wants to believe but needs some proof. If he can walk on the water himself, Peter will know for sure what Jesus is saying is true.

Peter says, "Hey, Jesus. Make me able to walk on the water, too."

Jesus says, "Come." Jesus says, "C'mon Peter. Give it a try."

And Peter does. Peter tries. Peter gets out of the boat. He puts his feet in.... rather ON the water. He starts to walk toward Jesus. Peter walks on the water.

But then Peter realizes what is actually happening. He's walking on water and there's a storm and he's scared. He probably wishes he hadn't tried this stunt after all. He sinks into the water and pleads with Jesus to save him.

Of course, Jesus saves him. And Jesus says, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

I've often wondered what "doubt" Jesus is referencing?

Why did the disciples doubt that it was actually Jesus walking the water?

Why did Peter doubt Jesus' word?

Why did Peter doubt he'd be able to walk on water if Jesus said he could?

Why did Peter doubt his own ability to follow through?

All of the above doubts?

Jesus asks, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Jesus' question isn't, "Peter, you fool, why did you even try to walk on the water?"

Jesus doesn't wonder why Peter wanted proof. Jesus doesn't ask Peter why he thought he could walk on the water. Jesus doesn't ask why Peter panicked.

Jesus doesn't ask why Peter TRIED. Jesus seems to be asking why Peter gave up.

I imagine what Jesus was saying was something like this, "You of little faith, why did you doubt? But at least you tried. At least you put yourself out there and tested your faith. Good try, Peter. Try harder next time."

Jesus final statement is NOT criticizing Peter for trying, but for not believing the task he was trying could be accomplished.

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I must admit that Peter is my favorite character in the Bible. That's probably because I identify with him so much.

Peter, whose name was originally Simon, fished for a living. Jesus asked him to leave his profession and life behind and follow him during his ministry. C'mon, Simon Peter, give it a try. Peter did.

Peter, who did his best and tried to listen to Jesus' teaching. It's Peter who is the first to say out loud that he believes Jesus is the Messiah who has come to save the world. That's when Jesus changes Simon's name to Peter – Petra – rock – on which the church will be built. Build the church, Peter. Give it a try. Peter tried.

Peter, who after hearing Jesus tell his friends he's going to be killed, pulls Jesus aside and tells him they cannot let that happen. Jesus replies, "Get away from me, Satan. We must try to concentrate on God's plan for the kingdom, not on our earthly desires." Jesus encourages his friends to follow him by taking up their own crosses. C'mon Peter, give it a try. Peter tried.

Peter, who didn't want Jesus to wash his feet at the last supper because it was demeaning to Jesus. But then after learning of Jesus example of being a servant, instructs Jesus to also wash his face and hands....and is told that isn't necessary. C'mon Peter, keep up. Try to listen. Peter tried.

Peter, who drew his sword in Gethsemane and cut off the ear of a soldier trying to arrest Jesus. No violence, Peter. Try not to be such a hot head.

Peter, who denied three times that he knew who Jesus was while Jesus was being interrogated by the authorities. Try to be stronger, Peter.

Peter, who was the first to get to the tomb after the women told the disciples Jesus was gone – after Mary Magdaline told them Jesus was alive. Tell the world, Peter. Try to get them to believe Jesus has risen from the dead. Peter tried.

Peter, who after a lousy night of fishing took the resurrected Jesus' advice and gave it another try and threw the nets in a different location. The result was an abundance of fish and Peter was so excited he got dressed, jumped in the water, and swam to thank Jesus. Listen, Peter, and try things another way.

Peter, who is upset when Jesus asks him three times how much Peter loves him. Jesus says, “feed my sheep.” Try Peter. It’s going to be hard but try.

That’s why I like Peter so much. He’s just like me.... just like us.

He says inappropriate things at the wrong time. He doesn’t always catch on as fast as he should. He’s impulsive. He’s reckless. He’s a know-it-all. Peter. He’s just like us.

But Peter always tried. He always spoke up. He did his best. Even when he made the worst choices, Peter never stopped trying.

Like he did with Peter, Jesus asks us to get out of the boat and to try something we’ve never done before.

Something that will allow us to stop doubting.

Something that will not only increase our own faith, but something that will show the rest of the world what our faith is about and what our faith can accomplish. Try something. Try.

Jesus constantly calls us to try new things.

Try new ways to reach out in love to a world in need and share the good news of God through Christ. Share God’s love and acceptance for everyone.

Try to speak to someone you don’t know with a smile and genuine interest in who they are and what they dream. That’s what our St. Mark’s summer of conversation is all about.

Try to acknowledge the person on the street who makes you feel uncomfortable.

Try to volunteer for an organization that does good works – perhaps somewhere you know little about or where the work you do might be difficult or put you in uncomfortable situations.

Try to make a phone call to someone you haven’t seen in a while.

Try to get a politician elected who will do good things for people who have no power.

Try to be more understanding, more generous, more loving, more accepting.

Try to remember that we are all God’s children and all worthy of the exact same amount of love.

In his meditations, “Four Quartets”, T.S. Eliot writes, “For us there is only the trying – the rest is not our business.” Eliot is telling us we must always try to achieve more than we have before...we must always strive to be more and better than we are today. But what happens after we try, we cannot always control. We might fail. But we must try.

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But Jesus calls us to try.

Try.

Get out of the boat. Get out of your comfortable pew and try to walk on the water.

Try the impossible. Try the unthinkable. Give it a try.