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Trinity Episcopal Church
The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost –Sunday, August 9, 2026
Matthew 14:22-33

Lord of all life, help us to work together for that day when your kingdom comes and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth. Look with favor on your people, gather us in your loving arms, and bring us with all the saints to feast at your table in heaven. Amen.

We are living in turbulent and uncertain times. We are incessantly buffeted with dangers that threaten our social equanimity and cohesion, our economic sustainability, and our emotional wellbeing. In our current context with 24-hour news cycles and rage-bating internet culture, these threats demand our daily attention, leaving little energy for the delicate and subtle work of seeking the presence of God.

Fear is loud and all-consuming and, once triggered, it can drown out all other voices. When times are this reactive and volatile, it can be hard to maintain a faithful reliance on God. And we are left with little spiritual room to seek out and be receptive to the grace of God that soothes and softens our hearts, and transforms our fear into the faith that will heal the world.

While current times always feel exceptional, the sad truth is that human nature has always been sin-prone, conflictive, and volatile. And it is within a similar period of tumult and fear-based reactivity that the psalmist speaks these words to us this morning:

*8 I will listen to what the Lord God is saying, *
for he is speaking peace to his faithful people
and to those who turn their hearts to him.*

*9 Truly, his salvation is very near to those who fear him, *
that his glory may dwell in our land.*

*10 Mercy and truth have met together; *
righteousness and peace have kissed each other.*

In the midst of fearsome turmoil and uncertainty, the psalmist reminds us to listen for the quiet word of God speaking peace, that may always be heard by those who faithfully turn their hearts to him despite their fear. It is there that we may find the real presence of the living God and experience the blessed salvation in which “mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.”

Our Old Testament and Gospel lessons today provide important examples of seeking the peaceful presence of God amid a turbulent and frightening world. In our first lesson, the Old Testament prophet Elijah has been on the run. Queen Jezebel, who worshipped the fertility god Baal, has called for Elijah’s death. And the prophet has traveled for 40 days and 40 nights to Mount Horeb, where Moses had received the Ten Commandments, and is now hiding out in a cave there. In the dark of night, he anxiously awaits a word from God. When it comes, he is told to leave the safety of the cave wait, for the Lord is about to pass by.

A series of terrifying phenomena occur –a great wind strong enough to split mountains and break rocks, a terrible earthquake shaking the foundations of the earth, and a tremendous consuming fire –but Elijah does not find the Lord God in any of them. Only in the sound of sheer silence that follows these phenomena does Elijah discover the presence of God – or, as the Revised Standard Version translation puts it, the “still, small voice” of God. Despite the frightening things happening around him Elijah was faithful enough – or desperate enough – to stand still amidst the tumult and listen deeply for the presence of God. For his faithfulness in the face of fear, he is blessed with hearing the “still, small voice” of God.

Our Gospel lesson gives us yet another story of faith and fear. After the demonstration of Jesus’ divine authority with the feeding of the five thousand, Matthew’s narrative focus shifts from the

wilderness to the sea – from God’s provision in a remote and deserted landscape to God’s deliverance through the waters of chaos. After the crowds have eaten their fill, Jesus dismisses them and sends the disciples ahead to cross the Sea of Galilee while he retires alone up the mountain to pray in peace.

The situation on the sea, however, is perilous. It’s been a long and sleepless night with the disciples’ boat being battered by frightening winds and surging waves. Suddenly, they see Jesus calmly walking toward them on the sea and they are terrified, thinking they must be seeing a ghost. Startled by the vision, they cry out in fear, but Jesus assures them, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.” Ever the impetuous disciple, Peter recognizes his Lord and blurts out that he wants nothing more than to join him. “Come,” Jesus bids, and Peter boldly steps out of his comfort zone and the safety of the boat onto the impossible stage atop the waters. But then he takes his attention off Jesus and focuses instead on the turbulence around him – the wind, the buffeting waves, the craziness and drama of the moment. It is then that he begins to sink and cries out for salvation from the water, and Jesus reaches out to catch him.

Fear is the recurring theme in this story. The phrases “terrified,” “cried in fear,” “do not be afraid,” and “became frightened” all occur in just eleven verses – Matthew wants us to take note of the role of fear. The disciples are terrified of the vision of Jesus walking toward them on the water. This may be the fear of the unknown, or the fear that is present during the challenges of our lives. Fear, too, may have been a motivator, moving Peter to risk going toward Jesus with the desperation of seeking even improbable safety in the midst of the turbulent storm. We also see fear mingled with distraction as Peter’s attention is drawn from Jesus to the wind and waves that crash around him. When Peter notices the wind, fear of his situation overwhelms his faith. As one theologian writes, “So, when we fear Jesus moving toward us, or our fear moves us toward Jesus, or our fear distracts us, Jesus remains the constant enemy of all the faces of fear.” “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid,” he calls amid the tempest.

Focusing on the presence of God restores the proper balance so that faith is not engulfed by fear. As Elijah needed the courage to listen beyond the fearful turbulence of wind, earthquake, and fire to find the quiet steadfast presence of God, so too are the disciples called to see beyond the frightening wind and surging waters, to find their Lord walking toward them and calling them to step out. This listening and seeking for God amid the fearful distractions all around requires the courage of faith that allows us to act – not without fear but despite it.

God calls us to step out in faith, trusting that where God leads may be unknown to us, but the promise is sure that God will be present with us. My favorite part of our Gospel lesson is not that Peter courageously stepped forward in faith, rather what happened when doubt inevitably overcame his faith. Peter wanted to trust Jesus in an impossible thing, and he did – but he did so imperfectly... and Jesus saves him anyway. ***Imperfect trust is the kind of faith we all live with.***

Jesus calls not only to Peter, but to each one of us, “Come,” and he bids that we, too, step out of the perceived safety of our boats onto unknown and uncertain ground. And we can be assured that no matter the stormy waters and winds, if we step out in faith, our Lord is beside us and will catch us as we inevitably succumb to fear. We are fallible creatures and, thanks be to God, even the imperfect trust of our fragile and fickle faith is enough.

Even with faith the size of a mustard seed, we are carried beyond the limitations of our fear to journey the path of transformation. Reconciling our fear and faith, we are restored to wholeness, and, to our surprise, we become agents of transformation in the world. With this, we help to build the kingdom where God’s perfect love may be fully mirrored in the hearts of all people and where “mercy and truth [meet] together, and righteousness and peace [kiss] each other”.

Amen.