

Matthew 14

August 13, 2023

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
Be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.

When Mary first emailed about leading the service this morning, I answered her like Joseph answered Israel, “Here I am”. Then I took pause, who am I to lead the service or write a sermon? I lost my focus on Jesus, on the one who prompted me to say, “Here I am”, in the first place. the one who truly leads the service, the one who gave me the ideas to write these words.

When I met with Mary, she said, “write about whatever in the readings seem important to you”. So, it began... the reading and re-reading the scripture passages, the praying and more praying. What I took away from the Gospel reading sounds simple Keep focused on Jesus. Peter was able to walk on the water as long as he was focused on Jesus. Loose focus, become distracted and we loose sight of where we are headed. We loose sight of Jesus.

Again, it sounds simple... keep focused on Jesus. But we all know that it is often not as easy as it sounds. We all live in the real world with real distractions Distractions that take our focus off Jesus.

Last year my world was turned upside down. As an emergency medical responder, I am accustomed to being the rescuer, not having to be rescued. When I called 911 for myself, I knew I had to focus on Jesus. It was hard... the chest and abdominal pain, the embarrassment of having my co-workers take charge of my care, my dog left at home alone (thank goodness for my brother) and the list goes on. After many deep breaths and realizing that everything was out of my control, I knew there was only Christ that could help. Once I stopped focusing on the things I couldn't control and began focusing on Jesus, I knew I would be alright. I'm not sure those around me were as confident about that as I was, but their focus was on all the distractions. There were plenty of times my focus slipped from Jesus to those things I couldn't control, I focused on the emergency surgery, the 14 days in the hospital (5 of those in ICU), and a long recovery at home. I cried, I wallowed in self-pity, I prayed.

Again, I am used to being the rescuer and am pretty self-reliant. I always think I can solve my problems on my own and that includes saying prayers for myself. This time was different... I was too weak, too tired, and in too much discomfort to pray for myself. It took courage for Peter to step out of the boat and walk toward Jesus but in the end no harm came to Peter, even when he lost his focus. It was hard for me to ask for help, to ask for prayers, hard to have my name on the prayer list but those prayers were truly lifesaving. Just as Peter lost his focus while walking on the water and needed the strong hand of Jesus to keep him safe and return his focus to what is truly important, it was with your prayers that I felt able to reach for Jesus and allow him to lift me up when I couldn't lift myself.

Being focused on Jesus from the time I entered the emergency room brought me an uncanny calm. I heard and understood all the doctors were telling me... emergency abdominal surgery, blood transfusion, sepsis, nearing kidney failure, and the list goes on. I also heard a "quiet whisper" that was louder and clearer than anything else, saying "Have faith, I am here." Because of my faith in Christ and focusing on Him, I was able to be calm while others were distressed. I knew I was going to be ok... maybe not that moment but in the end, all would work out. It wasn't until well after I got home and read all the diagnoses that I knew how really sick I was. Jesus calmed the storm for me just as he calmed it for the disciples on the boat. The prayers that were said for me were heard and answered. They were like the strong arms of Christ holding, healing and supporting me during a medical storm that only He could calm.

We all walk through storms and have distractions every day. We are human. Focusing on Jesus during these trying times is often difficult. It takes faith in God, the One who is in charge. It takes praying and having the courage to ask for prayers from the whole fellowship of Christians to help keep us focused on Christ, the One who is going to the calm the storm and ultimately bring us to safety.

I pray that you have faith and can focus on Christ when storms arise in your lives.
Amen