

“Time to do great things for God”  
For Sunday August 9, 2020, Proper14a  
St. Martin’s Episcopal Church, Lebanon OR

Matthew 14:22-33

I heard a wonderful story this week about a kindergarten class that decided to perform the story of Cinderella remotely on Zoom. There are lots of roles in Cinderella, but still casting was a chore. All the girls wanted to be Cinderella. Finally, all the children were assigned roles except one – a little guy by the name of Trevor. The teacher asked, “Trevor, what are you going to be?” “Well,” said Trevor, “I think I will be the pig.” The teacher said, “Trevor, there is no pig in the story of Cinderella.” And Trevor said, “There is now.” The teacher could see tell that it would be senseless to argue, so she left it to Trevor to decide what role a pig played in the Cinderella story.

As it turned out, the pig showed up every time Cinderella was on screen and did whatever Cinderella did. Trevor had nothing to say, but Trevor’s face reflected the action of the drama. When things were serious, he was serious. When things looked worrisome, he looked worried. When things were in doubt, he looked anxious. He began to fill the Zoom square with his presence and his responses. And at the end of the performance when the princess ran off to live happily ever after, Trevor stood on his hind legs and barked. This was troublesome to Trevor’s teacher. But you’ll never guess what happened when the parents tuned in to performance. There was wild acclaim at the end for the pig. The chat was full of it. Trevor, the barking pig, was, as it turns out, the Cinderella in the story after all. Word got around. Other people contacted the teacher and said, “We hear you did this fabulous Cinderella thing. What’s so special about it?” “Well.” She says, “There is a pig in it – actually, a barking pig.” And the people respond, “But, there is no barking pig in Cinderella.” And the teacher says with great conviction, “Well, there is now.”

I think Jesus would like Trevor and his barking pig. Trevor was a little guy who wouldn’t let other people set boundaries around his imagination. He was going to be what he was going to be – no matter how foolish he might seem to others.

Jesus’ disciple Simon Peter was kind of like that.

When Peter saw Jesus walking out to them on the water,  
he jumped overboard to try to walk out to meet him.  
That was Peter's personality  
He was enthusiastic, impulsive. He often talked without thinking  
and acted without pondering the consequences.  
I know people like this, don't you?  
They're more apt to think with their heart than with their brain;  
more apt to be out front than linger behind where it is safer.  
When people like that refine their enthusiasm and  
rightly channel their impulsiveness, they can become good leaders.

Jesus loved Simon Peter.  
With all his impulsiveness, all his bravado, all his unbridled enthusiasm. Jesus loved Simon  
Peter.  
Even though he kept putting his foot in his mouth,  
even though he nearly drowned in this occasion, Jesus loved him.  
He saw beyond Peter's impulsive nature to the leader he could be.

Peter was the exact opposite of a man I read about  
in Ripley's Believe it or not. My boys used to love that book.  
This book lists some of the strangest achievements, hobbies, stunts, and customs from  
around the world.  
If you want to know who has traveled the farthest distance  
around the world on a pogo stick, you can find it in this book.  
If you want to see pictures of giant vegetables the size of Volkswagens, this is the place to  
look.  
But there one entry in the book I remember the best.  
Because it was so strange.  
It was the listing for a man named Roy Robert Smith of Denver, Colorado, and the list of all  
the things Mr. Smith has never achieved,  
at least at the writing of the book.  
Here is just a small sampling of the things  
that 36-year-old Roy Robert Smith had never tried:  
never tasted an ice cream soda or a Coca-Cola or a ginger ale;  
never gone hunting, swimming, fishing, hiking, or ice-skating;  
never driven a car, or ridden a motorcycle or a horse or a bicycle;  
never had a surgical operation;  
never joined a church, club, lodge, or organization;  
never studied a foreign language; never been outside the United States; and he had never  
kissed a girl. 36 years old.  
Is Mr. Smith's life all that remarkable?  
Why would a book dedicated to the strangest achievements on earth include an entry of  
one life without any noticeable achievements?  
I can promise you one thing, unless he gets on the ball  
Roy Robert Smith will never be listed in any other book.  
There are many unhealthy things that a person should not do,

but if your only claim to fame is that you didn't do anything,  
you're in trouble.

I believe Jesus wants people to be doers.  
People like Trevor the barking pig and Simon Peter,  
floundering there in the water, about to drown  
because he impulsively jumped into the water to meet his Lord.  
Jesus has followers all over the globe who just talk about what's going on,  
and that's about it.  
But that's not what good discipleship is all about.

The good Samaritan didn't become good by playing it safe  
and never doing anything impulsive. He won Jesus' praise by taking  
the risk of stopping to help a man who had been attacked by robbers.  
He could have offered up all kinds of rationalizations  
why it would be more prudent to pass this man by on the other side,  
but he saw a need and he plunged right in.

Simon Peter could have stayed safely in the boat.  
But then we wouldn't be reading about him this morning.

There is a place for caution in living a Christian life.  
By praising Simon Peter I'm not endorsing letting go of common sense  
and embracing reckless, foolish behavior.  
There are risks we should not take.  
Anything that endangers our relationship with God,  
anything that endangers our relationships with those we love,  
anything that endangers our emotional, physical, and spiritual health  
must be handled with greatest care.  
Still, that is not the problem for most followers of Christ.  
Most of us are like those other disciples with Peter that night –  
we're content to hold on to the safety of the boat.

But there are times when we all have to take the risk and step out of the boat and try  
something new and different. That time is now.  
God places many blessings outside of our comfort zones,  
then invites us to come and get them.  
If we ever want to receive some things we've never had before,  
we've got to do some things we've never done before.  
We have to take some chances.

It's curious to think about Simon Peter climbing out of the boat  
trying to imitate Jesus by walking on the water.  
Then he makes the mistake of looking around.  
"What in the world am I doing?" he asked himself  
and suddenly he begins to sink.

How often that happens in life.

People are charting a successful course in their job, in their marriage, in their relationship with Christ, and then they begin to listen to their fears.

“What if I fail? What if the market tanks? What if my faith is misplaced?” and they begin slowly to sink.

It is then that our Lord reaches out to us.

“Immediately,” it says in our gospel today, immediately, Jesus reached out his hand and caught him.

“You of little faith,” Jesus said, “why did you doubt?”

Doubt is our enemy. Fear is our greatest adversary.

Jesus wants us to be believers; people who dream great dreams, who still believe that all things are possible to those who believe in him, and are willing to step out in faith to try to do great things.

St. Martin’s church was built by believers. It was built by doers.

It was built by people who knew in their hearts that God could do great things through them.

And now God has planted new dreams in your heart, St. Martin’s.

Some great things you could do for God and for your community.

All of you are invited to be a part of acting on them.

It would be such a loss if your only contribution was to hold on to the boat.

You have dreams for your church and what you could yet become.

Let others cry out for a safe shore. This is a time for barking pigs!

This is a time for people who believe

to step out of the boat and do great things for God.