

Sermon: Your Guy, Jesus of Nazareth

Year A, Proper 14

[Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28; Psalm 105:1-6, 16-22, 45b; Romans 10:5-15; Matthew 14:22-33](#)

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So let's say you were one of Jesus' disciples. Today you've just learned that John the Baptist was beheaded by Herod. John the Baptist. Who said that he came to prepare the way for your guy, Jesus of Nazareth. John the Baptist who hung out on the very edges of Israel, getting as far away from the seat of power as it is possible to get. John the Baptist was murdered, clearly for political reasons, and your guy, Jesus of Nazareth, keeps heading into towns and villages where trouble seems to follow him, stirring up all the political trouble he can find.

Just today, you heard about John the Baptist, and Jesus wanted to have some quiet time to think and to grieve, so he headed over to the other side of the Lake. But all these people ended up seeing where he was going and they follow him. So you had to follow him. And he has compassion for them (he always has compassion for the most rag tag group of people) and he heals them. And he tells you to heal them. So you do.

But then you're the practical ones so you tell him to send everyone home when it gets towards supper time. You have nothing to feed them with. The five loaves and two fishes you have for the dinner won't be enough for the 13 of you. But he tells you to feed them. So you do and somehow there's enough for 5,000 men plus the women plus the kids plus a bunch of baskets left over.

And before they go, the crowds start talking Messiah. Seriously. John the Baptist gets his head cut off and they're starting to talk about Messiah. The guy whose going to take on the Romans and their army, and all the fat cats at the Temple in Jerusalem. And he's got the 12 of you and a thing for feeding people. And it's not even fancy food. It's peasant fare all the way.¹ And the crowd is saying Messiah. They're going to get him killed and they don't even know it.²

But he knows it. Your guy. Jesus of Nazareth. And you know it, because this isn't your first rodeo. So he gets the crowds moving, gets them headed back home and kind of knocks down this talk of Messiah. And he finally gets to what he's been trying to do all day. He's been trying to be alone so he can pray. It's night really. You and the rest of the disciples weren't going to bother him. You were just going to lay down in the green grass and sleep for a while. But he orders you into the boat. Which is no big deal for you. You've fished all your life on this Lake. But the guy that used to be tax collector and some of the other disciples aren't loving it. And to be honest, even though you'd never say this to any of the others, you don't usually go out at night. Usually it's more of a during the day kind of thing. So it's a little spooky. And a little weird. And it's been a long and tense and weird day.

¹ Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew*, in *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1993), 166.

² George Arthur Buttrick, "The Gospel According to St. Matthew: Exposition," vol. 7 in *The Interpreter's Bible: The Holy Bible in the King James and Revised Standard Versions with General Articles and Introduction, Exegesis, Exposition for Each Book of the Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1951), 432.

Which means it shouldn't be surprising that a storm comes up. They pop up all the time on this Lake. You and the other fisherman guys are handling the storm and the boat. Not well. It's a heck of a storm. Some say it's battering the boat (Matthew 14:24). But you know the right word. The storm's torturing the boat.³ You can hear it screaming. It's not your boat and you're beginning to wonder just how well put together it is and just how long it's going to stay together.

The storm is just a bad storm and the boat's not taking it well. But that's not really frightening. But that thing, coming across the water. Now that's terrifying. Because God, the God of Abraham, the God you follow, the God your guy, Jesus of Nazareth, calls Father, the God of Creation, is always opposed by the water.⁴ You never know how deep the water is. You never know what creatures live down there. You never know what power is unleashed by the water. When God created this world, God subdued the water. So it's generally not good when something walks across the surface of the water. Because you never know whose side it's on. You never know if it's something that God is giving power to. Or if it's something that God's going to have to rally a whole lot of power against.

Maybe because it's late and you've been up all night and it's been a weird day anyway. And all that talk of Messiah, especially coming on the heels of hearing that John the Baptist had been killed and in such a gruesome manner. Maybe because of all that, and how you caught sight of him out of the corner of your eye, amidst the waves and the wind gone crazy. That just for a second you wonder. You wonder if your guy, Jesus of Nazareth, is really the Son of God or maybe something a lot more evil, something that draws on the power of the deep. It's the first time you've even thought that. But now that you've thought that, you can't unthink it, you can't go back to a world where that isn't a possibility. And that's terrifying. Because that means you've thrown your life away to follow something unclean and unholy.

And then Peter. That flipping Peter. Who never, ever, thinks before he acts.⁵ Who never thinks anything through. Who says anything, who just dives into every situation, and drags the rest of you into huge messes. He just steps off the side of the boat.

You know your guy, Jesus of Nazareth, always talks about the price you pay as a disciple.⁶ About how it's hard and everyone doesn't like you and you never have enough of anything useful like money or food or a place to lie down. And the first fifty times you heard him say that, you kinda thought, "well, but there's some really cool benefits too." But recently, you've been thinking that maybe Jesus is kind of soft pedaling it a little. Maybe he should explain about how you end up in the middle of a lake in the middle of a storm in a boat that frankly doesn't seem to well taken care of. And it wasn't even your idea to begin with. You were perfectly happy to wrap up in your cloak and catch a few hours sleep. Well not perfectly happy. But not terrified like you are now. Because this boat thing. That was Jesus' idea. You were just following his directions.⁷

And then, as if you didn't have enough on your plate already, there goes Peter. Jesus calls Peter his rock, and behind their backs, the rest of the disciples joke that it's because Peter has rocks between his ears. There goes Peter. Not thinking. Not seeming to pay attention to pay any price

³ Hare, 169.

⁴ Hare, 167.

⁵ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*. Vol. 2. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), 106.

⁶ Barclay, 107.

⁷ Buttrick, 433.

for his decision. Off he goes. And for a moment it looks like he's walking on the waves as well. Which is crazy. Because if God were going to lend power to someone,⁸ it would not be Peter. Heck. He probably wasn't walking on the water anyway. Just a trick of the eye. Something else weird on this weird night.

Jesus grabs him and they get in the boat and the storm begins to die down. While you're bailing you think about what one of the other guys said, yesterday maybe or maybe the day before. Everyone was complaining about Peter, about how he's constantly screwing up. And one of the other guys, one of the quiet ones who does look before he leaps, who does think things through, who knows perfectly well how high the price is to follow your guy, Jesus of Nazareth, he said something you're still thinking about. He said that at the very minute Peter is failing at something, that's the moment he reaches out for Jesus.⁹ The other guy pointed out that Peter fails all the time, but he keeps going and he keeps relying on Jesus, win, lose or draw.

Maybe there's something in what Peter does. After all, he's the only one who got out of the boat¹⁰.

⁸ Hare, 169.

⁹ Barclay, 107.

¹⁰ Dock Hollingsworth, "Proper 14, Homiletical Perspective, Matthew 14:22-33" in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year A, Volume 3*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011], 337.