

The background of the entire page is a photograph of ocean waves, showing a mix of dark blue and teal tones with white foam from the breaking waves. The text is overlaid on this background.

**THE HAND**

**THAT SAVES**

REV. SIMON PARK

# Scripture Passage

Matthew 14:22-33

Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him,

saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"  
When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And  
those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you  
are the Son of God."

NRSV

# Sermon

## The Hand That Saves

### The Life of Faith

Today's passage has become a beloved one for people of the church because it really captures our life of faith. We see disciples alone, being battered by waves. We see Peter walking on water in a moment of faith, and we see him sinking when fear leads to doubt. Our life has high moments when anything seems possible, and moments of tremendous challenge and difficulty when we are afraid and feel all alone. In the midst of their fear, the disciples could not recognize Jesus walking on the water toward them. In our greatest moments of despair and fear, we often do not recognize God coming to us.

I admire Peter's raw, naive, passionate faith. When he heard Jesus' voice saying "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid", he makes a bold request, asking Jesus to command him to walk on water toward Jesus. We remember the sinking part, but the remarkable thing is, *he actually began walking on the water toward Jesus.*

Our lives have these breakthrough moments. Moments of elevation, euphoria, insight and mountaintop experiences. We have moments of walking on water toward divine reality. But just like Peter, we see the storms around us and quickly become frightened. We lose faith and begin sinking once again, sinking away from God and away from faith.

## God Will Save Us

The gift that Peter left us is his response: as soon as he began to sink, he cried out, **“Lord, save me!”** Lord, save me. The fact is that he cried out to Jesus to save him. When we start sinking in our lives, do we really turn to God and ask God to save us? Or do we turn to ourselves or other things? When Peter cried out, Jesus reached out his hand and caught Peter. Yes, he chastised Peter, saying “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”, but the fact is he caught him and saved him. When we turn to God, God is faithful. God reaches out his hand and saves us. Do we believe this?

In the beginning of the faith journey, when God comes to us like Jesus did, we don't see God. Just as the disciples thought they saw a ghost, we see a fearful situation instead of the presence of God. But as we

keep crying out to God, and as God continually reaches out his hand to us, we will begin to see God more and more clearly through troubled waters. That is the pattern and journey of faith, to see God more clearly as we keep turning to God. So the important thing is to continually turn to God. We will sink, we will doubt, we will not always see God, but as we keep turning to God, we will begin to see and recognize God's saving hand among us.

That is what happened to Peter. This is the early Peter in this story. He was impulsive, brash, and lacking faith. When push came to shove, he even denied Jesus. But Peter would become the pillar of the church, the rock. Tradition says, when he died, he too was crucified, but he didn't think he was worthy to be crucified in the same way as Jesus, so he requested that he be crucified upside down. That is the kind of faith that Peter would eventually come to develop. So let us keep turning to God in all of our circumstances, and we will come to see more clearly the hand that saves us.

## **The Strong Winds of Today**

I'm finally taking a break since the pandemic began. I'll be off for two weeks, and I'm looking forward to getting

some rest and doing a lot of reflecting, as there is a lot to reflect on. We are in quite uncertain times. With this invisible and insidious virus, we just don't know how things will shape up. We had a Zoom meeting for some of the parents the other day. For parents with children, there is a lot of concern, uncertainty and anxiety. Sending kids back to school is like shooting in the dark. In church, a lot of us want to resume community life, but there is a lot of fear, uncertainty and hesitation, even among the staff and elders. The last thing we want is to become a place where an outbreak begins. But the longer this goes on, what will become of us as a community? Will the church survive? Can the church be a place to provide comfort and a prophetic voice for a world that is shaken and in turmoil? We are definitely in the midst of strong winds. But my experience until now gives me reassurance to turn to God. To ask God: "Lord, save us!"

## **Walking On Water**

It's been one year since I got ordained as a minister of this church. Time flew by! On the day of my ordination, I remember preaching that Sunday and I shared my life's journey to that point. Of the many moments of

doubt, sinking and storms I went through especially in my younger years. My ordination day was a walking on water moment for me. I broke down hard during the ordination service, because I was so overwhelmed by God's love and grace for me over the years. That whole summer was like a walking on water time. I wrapped up three years of youth ministry with our Hi-C with an emotional end to our summer retreat, when they played a video tribute they had made for me. I was pretty composed up to then but that was it. I truly felt God's presence as I walked on the water.

But the storms would soon come and test my faith too. The reality of ministry is very different. All these youth grew up and I began to see changes that people go through when they're thrust into new environments and away from the safe confines of our little community. I would feel powerlessness to do anything about it. I could see the irrelevance that faith and God often has on the lives of many people around us, especially the young adults too.

## **COVID-19**

The ultimate tests of faith would begin to come as COVID-19 hit us with full force in March. When I think



back, I'm dumbfounded. We could never have imagined all of the changes and challenges we would face. Never in my lifetime were church services cancelled. Especially a Korean church, that's just unheard of. I saw the devastating impacts that COVID-19 had on so many people. So much death, so much disparity in its effects. I remember, I truly feared what would become of our community, whether it would survive and remain intact. How can you be a community when you can't even see each other and be with each other? It was truly new and unprecedented terrain. And I don't know how I got through those first few months, it's really a blur for me; looking after the kids during the day while my wife worked, then spending evenings focused on church and endless, endless Zoom meetings. I was a zombie, constantly exhausted, not getting sleep because of things on my mind. I use to journal quite regularly, almost every day, but when I look back, from March to April there is not one entry. It was just one rapid blur. Also when you're stressed out, it brings out sides of you that are not the prettiest. It revealed a lot more about my weaknesses and vulnerabilities. And all the while there was a deep mourning and shock as I processed the loss of life as we knew it.

## God's Saving Hand

But here, we turned to God. And as we did, I think we could see God's saving hand at work saving us and guiding us. I was sustained by my family that remained healthy and happy. My wife, Deb, did her best to give me space to immerse myself in ministry as best I could. One of the greatest blessings for our church was to start a Daily Prayer. Every day for the first few months, around 10-15 of us would come together on Zoom to pray. To share what's on our hearts, share prayer requests, and desperately seek God's hand. This spiritual and collective discipline was the lifeline to everything else.

I'm thankful for our staff. The ministers and pastors who really stepped up and came together like never before - I am so grateful for my colleagues in ministry. We adapted quickly to figure out how to do things like pre-record services and upload them, but not without so many glitches. Remember one Sunday I couldn't get things uploaded! People were just fiddling around and waiting! It was really stressful just figuring things out on the fly. But then we began to connect in fellowship and Bible studies via Zoom. We then ventured into the unknown terrain of a Zoom service for Easter. That is a

service I will never forget. That experience was so moving that we decided to go to Zoom every week. And the rest is history and we've kept adding elements to it.

We've been touched by moving reflections from our members throughout the pandemic. We've seen our kids growing before our eyes when they show up in special Mother's and Father's Day videos. Our Elders stepped up in a huge way. They came together by Zoom every week to share, discuss and pray together. They visited all the members of our congregation with care packages. Olivia and the choir ventured into the unknown world of technology. These are not tech savvy people but they figured out a way to record themselves and send it and become a virtual choir. Remember the first time they played an anthem? When "How Great Thou Art" first blasted through our computers, people were moved and in tears.

Our summer interns have been such a blessing. At first, we didn't know what to do with them, or if we should even proceed, since all our summer programs were cancelled. But in fact they've turned out to be the greatest blessing for us this summer. They allow us to

do all these things.

Your hearts opened up along with our wallets: we raised over \$5000 for Evangel Hall and \$16000 for South Africa, while donating much food for the Daily Break Food Bank. Not only were our hearts opened, our hearts challenged and minds were challenged in an enormous way as we saw the Black Lives Matter movement spring alive in public consciousness. It challenged us and made us think but also led us to form new relationships we would never have envisioned, most concretely in our new connection with Rev. Paulette Brown and her congregation of St. Andrew's Humber Heights, and how we are actually worshipping together here as one. I know that God has kept the people of St. Andrew's Humber Heights during this time, and we are here together worshipping our one and awesome God. Is all of this not testimony and witness to how God's hand has saved us and led us? Our God is so faithful. Our God saves us. And God will continue to do so. And that is the same for your own life too. God is faithful and God will save you continuously. Our faith may be weak, just like Peter's was at first, but also like Peter, God is faithful and increases our faith as we turn to God. So let us always

do that, turn to God, no matter how little our faith or how great our doubt.

## Turn to God

Today is Graduation Sunday. We are blessed with young people in our midst. Jesus always blessed the precious children, and we do so today as well. To the graduates, you are entering into a new, unknown journey. In addition to the new stage of life itself, there are so many other uncertainties around how COVID-19 will impact you and your experiences. I really feel for you. In these uncertain times, listen for the voice of God saying ***"Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."*** When you are struggling, learn to cry out to God, ***"Lord, save me!"*** Instead of running away or trying to figure things out for yourself, force yourself to keep turning to God - even when you doubt whether God is real, just do it. I am convinced that if you do so, God is faithful, and God will hear your cries.

For all of us, how has God been faithful to you through all the challenges of this time and in your life? Let us always turn to God. With gratitude in our hearts, let us see how God has led us and been faithful to us. And let us have faith in God's faithfulness for whatever is to

come.

## *Prayer*

Dear God, you are a faithful God. As we look back on the last few months, this past year in fact, we have experienced so many tremendous changes. Each of us have been challenged and affected in our own ways. We have seen loved ones grow ill or pass from the earth. We have struggled to juggle different demands. Our routines and lifestyles have been upended. And we have witnessed tremendous suffering in the world, particularly among those most vulnerable and marginalized. Cries have arisen for justice and dignity. Yet as we look back, we see your faithful hand that has reached out to us and saved us.

When the storms of life hit us, our faith is often weak like Peter's was. But we pray that we may keep turning to you, and that as we do so, our faith in you may grow. We thank you for your steadfast love and faithfulness. We love you, Lord. May you hear our confession now as we sing together.

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.