

AUGUST 9th

DIGITAL PRINT SERVICE: FIRST SACKVILLE PRESBYTERIAN

Call to Worship

Leader: Jesus, stand among us in your risen power;

People: let this time of worship be a hallowed hour.

Leader: Breathe the Holy Spirit into every heart;

People: bid the fears and sorrows from each soul depart.

Prayer of Adoration

Loving God, creator of us all, we come seeking your presence on this summer day. Like cool water or a gentle breeze, you renew us to serve you. In our moments of fear, speak to us words of reassurance. In our moments of doubt, reach out and hold us up. In our moments of turmoil, bring calm to our storms. We pray in the name of Jesus, our Redeemer and friend. Amen.

Hymn 326 Give to the winds thy fears

Prayer of Confession

God of all worlds, God of all weathers, God of all seasons, we confess that we often look and listen for you in the wrong place or with the wrong attitude. We are easily moved by the many voices of denial rather than by the lonely voice of truth, too readily awed by the big events and not by the quiet growth of faith. Forgive us for giving up so easily when the opposition grows too strong. Pardon the pride, the fear of failure, and the fear of death that prevent our full loyalty to the covenant you made with us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Mission Capsule – Building Healthy Communities. (International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples)

In Guatemala, 30 year old Marta Crisostomo didn't know what having a clean kitchen and a balanced diet had to do with her son's development and her family's health. But an unclean kitchen meant that Marta's family could be exposed to diseases such as diarrhea and intestinal infections. Presbyterian World Service & Development (PWS&D) – supported workshops are empowering indigenous communities like Marta's to improve their diets and health by sharing knowledge about cleanliness and how to prepare the nutritious food they are growing. The project has given Marta and the women in her community a sense of improved self-esteem. They now use the skills they have learned in their everyday lives, boosting their confidence and improving their families' overall health. **PWS&D empowers Indigenous communities.**

Hymn 307 God of the sparrow; God of the whale

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“Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence and energy, and love others as well as you love yourself.” Mark 12: 29-31

READINGS for August 9 – God speaks through the Scriptures

READING	VERSE	Minister's Message of Reflection
<i>Old Testament</i>	Genesis 37: 1-4, 12-28	Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers
<i>Psalms</i>	105: 1-6, 16-22, 45	Remembering Joseph
<i>Epistle</i>	Romans 10:5-15	The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart
<i>Gospel</i>	Matthew 14: 22-33	Jesus walks across the stormy waters

Hymn 749 Be still, my soul

SERMON: Why Did You Doubt?

There is a story in the Zen Buddhist tradition about three monks. The monks are sitting by a lake in deep meditation. One stands up and says, "I've forgotten my mat." Stepping on the water before him he walks across to the other side, where their small hut stood. When he returned, the second monk said. "I've just remembered, I haven't dried my washed clothes." He too, strode calmly across the water to the other bank and returned the same way. The third monk watched them intently. Figuring that this was a test of his own skills, he loudly declared, "So you think your abilities are superior to mine! Watch me!" The monk hurried to the edge of the water. No sooner did he put his feet on the water than he fell into deep water. Unfazed he tried again and again to no avail. After watching in silence, one of his fellow monks asked the other, "Do you suppose we should tell him where the stepping stones are?"

Today we heard another story about walking on water. In our gospel reading from Matthew Jesus walks on the stormy waters of the Sea of Galilee. The sea is hemmed in by mountains on east and west, and is almost 700 feet below sea level. In the summer months the sun beats upon the sea with almost intolerable fury. Without warning, however, cold air currents can breeze in from the west; when these collide with the superheated depression, sudden and powerful storms can arise without warning.

The disciples are directed by Jesus to get into a boat and cross the sea of Galilee while he dismisses the crowd that has been fed. Then Jesus goes to the mountain to pray. The disciples meanwhile are well out in the sea when they

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encounter one of those sudden storms, and they are being battered by the waves.

The disciples see Jesus walking on the sea and are terrified. Jesus says to them. **“Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”**

Peter then speaks up saying, **“ Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.”** Jesus then invites Peter to come and Peter begins to sink.

This story has been considered to be about faith. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian, said: **“Peter had to leave the ship and risk his life on the sea in order to learn both his own weakness and the almighty power of his Lord.”**

Peter takes his eyes off Jesus and begins to sink, and, unlike the two monks, he had no stepping stones to walk on. If Peter just had more faith than his fear of sinking may not have taken over.

There is a problem, however, and it appears in Peter’s call to Jesus from the boat. Peter says, **“Lord, if it is you...”** That statement by Peter comes after, not before, Jesus spoke to all the disciples in the boat saying, **“Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”**

It seems that Peter doubts that this is Jesus, and in a sense is asking for proof, by asking Jesus to command Peter to come to Jesus on the water. That question by Peter appears in other contexts in the gospel. When Jesus faces his temptations in the wilderness, the tempter says to Jesus: **“If you are the Son of God, then command these stones to become bread.”**

Why does Peter need to meet Jesus on the sea? After all, Jesus is close enough to the boat to speak to the disciples, and will soon be with them in the boat. Is Peter showing off in front of the other disciples who are terrified? Remember this same Peter was the one who said to Jesus in front of all the other disciples, **“Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you.”** Jesus responds, **“This night before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.”**

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Could it be that Peter is seeking special status, somehow looking for an exemption from the laws that bind other humans? If Peter can walk on the water, imagine where that would place him among his fellow disciples.

Might Peter be speaking for us? Who among us has never sought an exemption? God, we pray, answer my prayer this time and I will follow you. Who among us has never bargained with God? Like the tempter, we too, sometimes seek proof from Jesus for the claims he makes.

Jesus could well have said to Peter, "Stay in the boat, stay where you are and I will join you there." It would seem that Peter needs to learn something. He needs to cure his doubt and perhaps his sense of entitlement.

"Lord, save me." He cried as he began to sink and Jesus grabbed him, maybe throwing him in the boat, saying, **"You of little faith. Why did you doubt?"**

Jesus rebukes Peter for his doubt and maybe even for his attitude. This will not be the last time that Peter's doubt is in question. Yet here in this story Peter's statement, **"Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water,"** is the doubt question.

It is only Peter that Jesus speaks with here. The other disciples are not rebuked, for they apparently had faith enough to stay in the boat, rowing for all their worth. Peter is the one who left the boat, left the community, to carry out a solo effort.

Is this a story about the church's need for proof like Peter wanted? Is it a story about risking a life to prove Jesus is who he says he is? Maybe it's a story about eleven disciples, who never saw themselves as that heroic, who didn't want to put Jesus to the test, and who were willing to keep moving against the wind until Jesus joined them.

They were looking for the Lord to come into the boat. Again, as we read this story, it is when Jesus is in the boat that the miracle happens. The miracle did not occur out on the water, but when all were in the boat, and not before.

"When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, "Truly, you are the Son of God."

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Prayers:

O God of life and hope, we are grateful for every experience of your presence and your help. We bless you for the history of your people Israel, for the covenant you made with them, for the Psalms and the promises, and for the patience you have had with them and with us. We listen for you still, in the company of worshipping people and in the solitude of our lonely prayers, to discern your voice.

We pray, O God, for all people who are struggling with illness, grief or depression. May they know your peace and strength. O God, you come to us in the midst of trouble and invite us to stand for justice and work for truth. We pray for those seeking fair treatment, working against racism and discrimination, telling painful stories of their lives. Open closed minds to the truths they deny and show them new possibilities for relationships. Send your Spirit to work in our varied communities to create mutual respect and new ways to live as neighbors.

We pray for churches facing change and confusion. In those times that we are entering storms, help us to go forward despite the wind and driving rain. In this boat we name the church, lead us on in the name of Christ, the only king and head of the church.

O God, by the grace of Christ, your love, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, we are one with all your faithful people on earth and in heaven. We remember with love and thankfulness all who have lived the Christian life before us and are now resting from the struggle and the storm. As they wait with you, sustain us in our time that we may be found faithful to enter with them into your Holy Presence, serving you with all the saints, through Jesus Christ our Lord, in whose name we now pray, saying, Our Father...

Hymn 744 *Will your anchor hold?*

BENEDICTION / COMMISSIONING

Send us into your world, O God, determined to judge none but those for whom we pray, to pray only for those in whose behalf we labor, and always, to labor for the welfare of all those for whom Christ lived and died. Amen.

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