

Intro: "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Call to Worship:

God says: I will call you from a place of comfort into a place of growth; and I will be with you:
"Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

God says: I will call you from faith into action; from truth to Truth and Justice; and I will be
with you: "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

God says: I will call you from relative safety into relative danger and you will trust in me.
And I will be with you: "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Responsive Prayer:

Gracious God, have we been too safe in our faith? If so, lead us out into open pathways.
Gracious God, have we been too cautious in our actions? If so, help us to take brave steps.
Gracious God, have we become too set in our Christian ways?
If so, O Lord-God, reshape us so that we may better worship and serve you!

Lord of all -we come to Worship You!

Receive our songs, our prayers, our offerings and meditations and teach us Your ways anew.

Prayer of Confession

Lord, we come before you knowing that you love us and that because you love us that you are
concerned with our living. Your concern for our wellbeing is deep and extensive. You including
our hearts and minds and souls

You have given your commandments to us and Jesus himself affirmed their summary in the
profession of the one who said: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your
soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'"

Yet we confess, we find this kind of devotion of love compromises our personal power. We
confess we do not know what this will fully mean in terms of discipleship and obedience. We
confess that sometimes we would rather follow you to feel empowered over others, instead of
loving others that they may be empowered to find you.

Help us O God, to put our trust in you, instead of whatever personal power we may cling to.

For you alone are the beginning and end of power. All the elements, all the storms obey you, O
Lord, so help us, to join everything in Creation, in full devotion of heart, soul, strength and
mind confess you as Lord, for ever and ever. Amen.

Assurance of Forgiveness

Lord Jesus, you gently chided a sinking Peter for a lack of faith, but only after reaching out your hand to him in order to save him. We are reminded that your hands, in addition to being always open -and reaching out to grasp us in your salvation, also bear the wounds of forgiveness. Help us to trust in your power to redeem us. Now and always, Amen.

Hymn

1. I know not why such wondrous grace
to me God has made known;
nor why, unworthy as I am,
Christ claimed me for his own,

Refrain:

***but I know whom I have believed
and am persuaded that Christ is able
to keep that which I've committed
unto him against that day.***

2. I know not why this saving faith
to me God did impart,
nor how believing in the word brought
peace into my heart, **Refrain**

3. I know not how the Spirit moves,
convincing me of sin,
revealing Jesus through the word,
creating faith in him: **Refrain**

Scripture: 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."

Message

I'm going to start my message with questions. Ready?

Do you think of life as a quiet ocean, marked by occasional storms?
Or do you think of life as a storm, marked by sometimes quiet waters?

I think this is an important perspective to understand in ourselves. For me, my North American, middle class formation and perspective would try to convince me that life is indeed a quiet ocean, marked with storms and that we should look out for storms and steer well wide of them, whenever possible. That is the comfort of my perspective.

But if I had been born and raised in Palestine, perhaps, or Guatemala, or South Sudan or Sri Lanka, maybe my formation and perspective would be that the world is actually the latter, a near constant storm, marked only rarely with calm waters - and continuing to apply the navigation metaphor further, those calm waters or harbours from the storm are the places to which we try and set our course.

The metaphor of the storm is all about power. Think again of your own experience. Do you feel as if things are mostly within your control? Or do you feel as if things are mostly outside your control?

I believe power and control are the keys to the account of Jesus and Peter walking on the water. Questions that should come to mind as we approach the story are:

Who is in control? Who wants to be in control?

As we talk about power and control, it is so important to note the refrain that Jesus so often comes back to in these stories we have shared over the last number of months ... Take heart. It is I; Do not be afraid. These are the words of someone in control. Do not be afraid.

As we again prepare to enter the text, I want you to think about these words of Jesus: Take heart. It's going to be ok. Don't be afraid. I'm here. These are familiar words from Jesus.

But outside scripture, where else have you heard or spoken those words?

Maybe when you were a child awakened from a bad dream?
Maybe your child was wakened from a bad dream?

Why do parents say these words? Isn't it to give the impression of control? In truth, what parent really has the authority to say ... don't be afraid ... it will be alright? Does a parent really **know** that ... can a parent really promise that?

Still, we want to hear those words. We want to believe them. We want to say them *and believe in them* ... when we say them.

The disciples are indeed caught in a real life nightmare.

It is early in the morning but that likely means that there was some daylight. Anyway it is light enough for the disciples to fully be aware of their powerlessness in the face of the storm and also they see something that terrifies them ... like out of a horror movie.

Something coming toward them in the storm. They think they see a ghost. Many of us have heard this story before, we are not afraid but the disciples have never seen this before ... they are afraid.

Someone is coming across the water toward them.

I don't know if the disciples had seen a ghost before or only heard about them in stories, but that is all they can make of what it is that is approaching them. Something is coming toward them ... with power and the disciples think it is worse than the storm.

They are haunted by what they can only just make out.

Their state of their powerlessness is magnified. And they cried out in fear. Then the familiar words in the familiar voice are called out:

"Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Suddenly they are haunted no more. This could have been the end of the story. So thank God for Peter who keeps it interesting. Peter is tired of being in the storm, he wants to have Jesus' power over the storm. And this is where the quest for power and control really comes into focus.

His response is wonderful: "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."

And we know what happens next:

Peter jumps out of boat.

Peter feels goooooood and in control ... until he realizes he isn't ...

Starts to sink ... calls out to Jesus ... Jesus grabs his hand ... ye of little of faith ... etc. etc.

A lot of preaching I have heard focusses on Jesus' address to Peter. However, did you notice that Jesus' original address is to the disciples and not the storm?

"Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

No ... he is so focussed on the disciples he doesn't even give the storm the time of day.

"Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

And Peter sees where the power lies.

Peter recognizes that the storm has no authority over Jesus and he wants that same power:

'command me to come to you on the water.'

Peter does not want to have power to overcome the storm, he wants to be lord and untouched by the storm.

Why do I mention this?

Because the other disciples are still in the boat, in the storm.

Power is a funny thing. We want to believe that if we had power to stop the storms that everybody would benefit and things would be better for everyone. We would cancel the storms for everyone.

But look how fast power affects Peter.

When tempted by power and control ... he immediately forgets the boat and all his friends in it.

He immediately forgets the others and says: Jesus, let me too have power like you.

Control and power.

Peter, Saint Peter ... wants it and we get it . We understand ... Every time we have been confronted by storm and said or heard the words ... it's going to be alright ... I'm here ... aren't we too saying we want to be lord of the storms?

But who is the only one in the story who really fit to say:

"Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Jesus, of course.

And why? He has the heart of God, who he calls Father ... and God is like every parent who wants to comfort the children who are caught in the nightmarish storm:

"Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

So two things:

First, I want to be clear, I am not suggesting to any parent or parent-figure should say to any child who awakens from a nightmare: I'm sorry child ... life is just a series of nightmarish storms. Get used to it. Maybe tomorrow will be calmer seas ... but don't count on it ... want a lollipop?

No, we should continue to offer peace and assurance.

Which brings me to my second point:

When ... as a parent or grandparent or caregiver you have said the words:

Don't worry, I'm here, it's going to be ok.

You are not just blindly hoping that things will be better. You are actually making a statement of faith; a profession of faith, that you believe God is working everything out for the best. What you are actually saying or hearing ... is the echo of Jesus' words:

"Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

When parents, grandparents guardians, caregivers ... all say:

Don't worry, I'm here, it's going to be ok.

You are invoking the voice of Jesus who said:

"Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

So be of great faith and proclaim ...

Don't worry, I'm here, it's going to be ok.

I believe that when we echo the words of Jesus ... like Jesus we should not imagine that we are cancelling the storm ... but rather entering into the storm ... getting onboard with the nightmare ... as it were ...

But don't forget the final images of the story ... just as Jesus and Peter enter the boat together ... to be with the other disciples ... that is where the storm ends ... and peace begins.

Peace comes when power is left with Jesus and he enters the community as the one who is Lord of all. He forgets no one and is not afraid.

If we do not believe this ... then we risk seeing Jesus only at a distance ... only as a spectre or ghost ... and we will fail to hear his words of comfort and lose the opportunity to be grasped in his grace ... and to truly come out of the storm.

Whether you live with the ability to avoid most storms ... or whether storms are almost almost impossible to avoid ... we will never have control over them ... we can only be subject to them ... or subject to the One who... untouched by their power ... speaks these words over the storm ...

"Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

And will be the calm we seek ...

Amen.

Offering

O Lord, thank you that we have enough to share and the faith to share generously. Receive these gifts we pray, Amen.

Doxology

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayers of the People

*Reprinted with permission from **The Worship Sourcebook**© 2004, CRC Publications, p.409-10.*

We thank you, God, for this amazing day;
for the true dream of a calm Presence in the storm,
For the cool embrace of a comforting breeze,
For everything that is natural, living and breathing as part of your dynamic Creation.

We thank you, God, for the gift of this life.
We experience this life as both joy and struggle, as birth and death, success and failures.
We rejoice when we find others who will share their lives with us;
We feel exhilaration of success in sports, in the arts, in business ventures and true charity;
We feel challenged in political and theological debates which cause to stretch and grow;
We feel blessed knowing that you have Created all things that are, help us to find the Good in each one.

Lord, we need you when the world scares us;
When we feel confusion or disappointment when others let us down;
We feel anxiety in illness and disease, in loss and uncertainty;
We feel the sinking doubt when a loved one dies.

We acknowledge the complex rhythms that make life different for each one of us;
Yet we are grateful that we are brought comfort in the togetherness of our community of faith;
And together we are weaved into a sail that carries our community on the winds of the Spirit,
bound only for good works and common blessing ... through storm and doldrums ... as our
common concerns are met in word and deed.

We give thanks for the spirit of humanity.
In all we do and experience, O God,
Teach us first to love, for love is most precious.
Love knows no limits to its endurance,
No end to its trust, no fading in its hope.
It outlasts everything, and it stands when all else has fallen.

When we love it is easier to listen;
 When we love it easier to play;
 When we love it is easier to work;
 When we love it is easier to cry and it is easier to laugh.

Remind us that love is the truest of all seasons;
 Give us the desire and willingness to share its beauty.
 Teach us that of all the music of the earth,
 That which reaches into heaven is carried by the beat of a loving heart.

Now O god, we pray for a reawakening of our senses this day.
 Open our minds to all that is ours in You-
 To imagination, to understanding to a sense of peace and constant singing.
 And when the day is done give us hope for tomorrow,
 That we may experience your enduring love once more.

For all that we are, this is our prayer. Amen.

Hymn: *Fix Your Eyes on Jesus*

Words and music by Elise Kennedy

Chorus

Fix your eyes on Jesus. Take the love He gives us.
 He's the One Who saves us. Fix your eyes on Jesus.
 Fix your eyes on Jesus. Give the love He gives us.
 Thank the One Who saves us. Fix your eyes on Jesus.

Verse 1

When our focus starts to stray. Evil thoughts begin to sway.
 And we just can't seem to pray, This is how we find our way. **Chorus**

Verse 2

Sometimes days can seem so long. Everything is going wrong.
 Feeling lost and can't go on. Be encouraged by this song. **Chorus**

Verse 3

Come to Jesus with your need. To His Father He will plead.
 Jesus helps us to succeed, When we let His Spirit lead. **Chorus**

Blessing:

*Reprinted with permission from **The Worship Sourcebook** © 2004, CRC Publications, p.420*

The God who Created the waters of the world,
 Christ the Living Water,
 The Spirit of cleansing Water be with you, now and always. Amen.