



July 2024

Theme: Courage to Dream Anew

Scripture Passage: Matthew 14:22-33 NRSV

Don't you love the dreamers -- those people who dare to look through or past what we see as barriers or limits, to what seems impossible? I do!

I love the story I've heard of Walt Disney bringing a new idea to his Board of Directors. If they responded by affirming, "We can certainly do that!", he would throw out the idea. If they responded by saying, "It is impossible," he would know that it was a dream they should pursue.

I have always appreciated the rhythm of appointment season in our United Methodist tradition. Whether it is beginning ministry in a new place or with a new pastoral leader, or it is beginning the new appointment year in the same community with the same pastoral leader, it seems a perfect opportunity to be newly alert to what God is about to do next. It's not that this is our only opportunity. We might be reminded of this at the start of a new season, a new school year, the start of the new Christian year or calendar year. But, to many of us, the start of a new year in ministry together, expectant for what God is about to reveal to us and invite us into, is energizing, urging us to transformation!

Though we have come through some challenging times that we might never have expected in our age – pandemic, disaffiliations, and deep divisiveness in our nation, and even in our communities – we know God's renewing and transformative work in and through us! And this isn't the first time that God's grace and creative movement have been experienced. We have examples from Jesus' own life and teaching.

One of the powerful series of episodes is found in Matthew 14. The chapter begins by telling us of the horrible murderous death of John the Baptist, one who shared the ministry of declaring God's presence and power. Then, deeply moved by this news of John's death, Jesus withdraws for some time apart. But the crowds met him, and he responded by offering healing. And he fed them, body and soul, thousands of them, with what seemed like almost nothing.

That would be enough to be contained in one chapter, but it goes on to tell us that:

"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.'" (Matthew 14:22-33 NRSV)

I feel like, in our good times, we're like Peter -- fully believing, courageous, willing to step out of the boat, trusting that our dream of faithfully responding to Jesus' call will allow us to actually be like Jesus in the world. But, then, we're often like Peter, taking our eyes off of Jesus, and allowing the fears of the world interrupt our following.

I believe that one of the reasons that we have this story is to give us the courage to dream anew that we will actually faithfully keep our focus on Jesus. As we move forward in this time, let us remember, and live into, some of Jesus' last words to those closest to him, that begin with the phrase "Very truly I tell you" -- a "believe you me" phrase: "Very truly I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father." (John 14:12 NRSV)

Let's believe Jesus! Let's dare to dream anew! Let's pray with open minds, hearts, and souls, so that God can break through with a dream that can only be realized with God's help! Let's be the people who live into God's desire for a perfectly loving world!

What is the dream that God has placed in your soul? Go ahead and speak it out loud, boldly, loudly! You may be surprised by others who have the same dream. You may inspire those who are not yet dreaming. Let's move forward together.

Prayer for the Month

God of all that is life-giving, thank you for the reminders of your faithfulness! Because of the absolute trust we can have in you, we are able to dream anew with confidence and boldness. Please help us to keep our eyes on you, so that our vision is your vision, and our dream, your dream. Please give us both the courage and the resolve to dare to both dream, and to realize the dream come become reality with your guidance and miraculous presence! We pray this in Jesus' name, because we know it can be done! Amen.

Prayer Queues or Breath Prayers for the Month

- **July 7** - Open me, God, all of me, to the guidance and nudge of your Holy Spirit.
- **July 14** - Dream-maker God, develop a God-sized dream in me.
- **July 21** - Fill your dream in me with your loving Spirit!
- **July 28** - Please help me boldly invite others to join in living into your dream in us.

