

The Rev. Dr. David K. McIntosh  
August 9, 2020- 10th Sunday after Pentecost-14 A  
Given at St. Mark's Church, Bridgewater, CT

**Gen 37.1-4, 12-28; Psalm 105; Romans 10.5-15; Matt 14.22-33**

**"You of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Mt 14.31) †**

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Why do you doubt? Jesus essentially is asking Peter, "what got into you?" Doubt... It has been said that Faith and Doubt are two sides of the same coin.\* I am inclined to agree. As intelligent Christians, our faith requires us to ask questions, to engage with what we experience, to ask why? And true faith always includes periods of doubt. It's not a sin to have doubts, there's nothing wrong with questioning. It's when doubt becomes associated with fear that it can be costly. With fear, comes the potential to react foolishly. This past week, for my Birthday, Dan gave me this present, which says it all "Faith over Fear." And still, St James said: 'the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind' (Jam 1.6).

It makes me feel better to know that even the apostles experienced doubt. We're in pretty good company, considering that St Peter, the head of Jesus' disciples, had doubt; it's a natural human response to experiencing the divine. The scriptures appointed for today speak to us about faith and doubt, and the importance of trusting in God.

I love the story of Jesus walking on the water... its important to remember that it takes place right after the miracle feeding of over 5000 people from a child's lunch bag. Something so impressive, you'd think the disciples would get it, yet how quickly doubt and fear take hold. We have a human need to understand and grasp everything, so much so that we tend to understand or grasp very little. As Peter's trust in Jesus falters, Jesus reply "why did you doubt?" What happened to your faith? A reminder to Peter, and to all of us, to trust... to remain focused and centered on God.

Today's epistle from Romans, is perhaps one of Paul's greatest theological efforts, Throughout this work, Paul stresses faith and the simplicity of what God is asking of all people—whether Jew or Gentile. The Greek word he uses to stress the 'ease' of what God requires of us (*engys ; engyzo*) means something more like 'nearness.' God eases us... is near to us, even when we don't see or believe it. Paul explains that humans have understood salvation as something we acquire, requiring we 'do' something. According to the Law (that is, the old Jewish covenant) we need to perform in certain ways and keep the letter of the Law to be considered righteous and receive salvation. It all requires 'doing.' Paul claims that such a task is beyond our human capacity, and doomed to lead to frustration (just ask any lawyer about legal fine print). Instead, Paul argues that

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\* Robert Boyle

righteousness, that is salvation, by faith is superior, and only requires a simple submission to what God has already done for us. Its not about human action, but divine action!

We don't need to go to heaven to see God, to know God; God has come to us, in the form of Jesus Christ. Christ is 'near' to us, as near as he was to his disciples, if we'll only look around us, here and now... so near, as close as our hearts and mouths. Because of Christ we are free from the Law, life is simpler, we need only believe in our hearts and confess with our lips that Jesus is Lord and that God raised him from the dead in order to lead all of us to eternal life.

Simple, yet sophisticated.... Uncomplicated, yet often unclear. It's not so easy, with all due respect to Paul. For faith and doubt are two sides of the same coin. We should not feel guilty about our doubt; it is part of who we are. It takes prayer, listening to and struggling with God's Word, until we are able to embrace it in our hearts and proclaim it on our lips. Hardly simple! It's only through faith that we experience Jesus Christ in our lives today... and that's hard when we encounter so much that seems not to be of God. The world seems filled with conflict and our society seems so divided. The COVID 19 pandemic seems to be getting worse in some places, and we're all getting tired of wearing masks and avoiding contact with others, especially those we love. And now, we get a great storm that disrupts what seemed to be a 'new normal'... Days of no power, no water, no communication! Sometimes we get caught up in all these things, which St James says are 'like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind.' So often, like Peter, we allow things to scare us, to distract us... and we start to sink. I've been asking myself, where is this Jesus who shows us Gods love, who makes present God's love in our lives together?

And yet there are times, when I witness or hear about so many who are doing good things, helping their neighbors, helping strangers who are in need, taking risks for others. I would submit that although in the long run what we are asked to do is 'simple' per Paul, faith still requires work and risk... taking that 'leap of faith.' When I was studying to be a novice at a Benedictine monastery in Rhode Island long ago, when I was fresh out of college, the abbot would often chide me and say: 'Are you somebody who always has to see first before you decide, or are you someone who can decide first, and then come to see? Sometimes you've just got to jump; sometimes you've got to walk across the rough water, or you'll never know if its really Jesus in front of you.'

Faith and doubt are two sides of the same coin, it's hard to experience faith without doubt, and even Jesus' apostles had doubts. The message is that all of us today— Jew, Greek, Gentile... man, woman, child... black, brown, white... young or old... for all of us who are participating in Christ's mission of love and reconciliation in this world— we will experience troubled waters... And yet Jesus never abandons us! He comes to us, as he came to the disciples, just when we need him most! Paul stresses the nearness of God, the ease of what he is asking... We need only embrace the One who came into our lives to show us God's love... For it is written, 'the Word is near to you, on your lips and in your heart.' I pray this will be the case, for all of us, now and always.

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