

**This is August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020...the 10<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**

I am Pastor Mary Jo Laabs. On behalf of our family of faith here at Community United Church of Christ in Medford, WI, welcome to this time of Worship!

It is our mission here to serve, to pray, to love, and to hold true to these words:  
“No matter who you are or where you are on your life’s journey, you are welcome here.”

**Community Needs:** Just so you know: Also, Indianhead has a client that is in need of a used riding lawnmower. If you know of anyone who has a lawnmower that works to give away...or sell, please let me know.

We will begin with this **Call to Worship:**

Over the wind and waves, Christ comes to us. Do not fear to meet Christ here.

We have heard the invitation. Our hopes have brought us together.

The storms of life do not have the last word. It is our faith that keeps us from sinking.

Our doubts lead to greater faith. Our losses open us to greater possibilities.

Let us call on God’s name, give thanks for God’s wonderful works!

**Today’s scripture** is from the Gospel of **Matthew 14:22-33** from The Message interpretation of the Bible. As you listen, what words stand out to you?

The story is entitled, “Walking on the Water”

<sup>22-23</sup> As soon as the meal was finished, (feeding the 5000, that is) Jesus insisted that the disciples get in the boat and go on ahead to the other side while he dismissed the people. With the crowd dispersed, he climbed the mountain so that he could be by himself and pray. He stayed there alone, late into the night.

<sup>24-26</sup> Meanwhile, the boat was far out to sea when the wind came up against them and they were battered by the waves. At about four o’clock in the morning, Jesus came toward them walking on the water. They were scared out of their wits.



“A ghost!” they said, crying out in terror. <sup>27</sup> But Jesus was quick to comfort them.

“Courage, it’s me. Don’t be afraid.”

<sup>28</sup> Peter, suddenly bold, said, “Master, if it’s really you, call me to come to you on the water.”

<sup>29-30</sup> He said, “Come ahead.”

Jumping out of the boat, Peter walked on the water to Jesus. But when he looked down at the waves churning beneath his feet, he lost his nerve and started to sink. He cried, “Master, save me!”

<sup>31</sup> Jesus didn’t hesitate. He reached down and grabbed his hand.

Then he said, “Faint-heart, what got into you?”

<sup>32-33</sup> The two of them climbed into the boat, and the wind died down. The disciples in the boat, having watched the whole thing, worshiped Jesus, saying, “This is it! You are God’s Son for sure!”

**The title of my message today is:** “*Don’t Look Down*”

Pray with me: Dear Jesus, someone once said, “If you want to walk on water, you have to get out of the boat.” That’s right, isn’t it? We are still having a little trouble with that. Please calm the waves of our fears and let us continue to be surrounded, if even only by means of phone lines and internet...by enough prayer and facetime with you, enough friends and family and essential oils to help us keep calm. Let us not be fearful in the face of the challenges that swirl around us. Let us know well that you are for us and with us, balancing and leading us to look ahead with hope. Amen.

Every week, when I first read next Sunday’s scripture, I am amazed. THIS ONE is truly for us!

And I said it again, out loud, in my kitchen-office a few days ago: “This is it, this one!”

At a licensed Pastors’ retreat a few years ago, we each received a small 6” paper origami boat that Rev. Linda Kuhn, the retreat leader, had made for each of us. I still have it. During the retreat, we were each

instructed to write words on the boat, that reflected what we had heard in the same scripture passage that you have read or are hearing today. My little boat holds these words: **“Don’t you care?”**

**“Remember who you are.” “Jesus isn’t sleeping.” “Don’t you trust?” “God is with us.”**

I keep it on the windowsill as a constant reminder.

What did you hear in the story about Jesus walking on water? A story of faith? A story of fears conquered? What would you write on your boat?

In last week’s scripture Jesus was feeding a crowd of over 5000 people. With his generosity and miraculous multiplying, the people received way more than they ever expected that day: miracles and dinner! We were reminded of God’s extravagant generosity to us, and we were perhaps nudged to be generous toward one another in much the same way.

Today’s story follows that miracle story. Jesus was finally able to get away from it all. Scripture tells us that he went up the mountain to pray.

Imagine that you have followed Jesus up that mountain. “Jesus, just let us spend a few moments with you. We promise we won’t require anything of you...no healing, no type of miracle. We just want to be with you.” And, of course, he agreed. Jesus never really takes a vacation. He’s always on call. As we sit there, we breathe in the fresh air, and feel the night breeze picking up. We think of our day, too: where we have been and who we have spoken with. We think of the good things we have done today and the difficult ones. Somehow, we feel safe and content with Jesus by our side, don’t we?

And, then, all of a sudden, Jesus gets up and runs down the mountain. We can feel a storm brewing. In a crack of lightning, it appears as though Jesus is going into the water! No, he is walking on the water! And out there are the disciples in a little boat as it rocks back and forth in the waves. We can’t hear the conversation, but the cries for help roll between the thunders. We squint to see that someone else is walking on the waves now, and he slips and begins to go down into the water. And then, it is still. Not a breeze. The lake is as clear as glass. The full moon is shining. We keep our eyes on Jesus out there, who is now sitting in the boat.

**“Don’t you care, Jesus? You left me up here alone on the mountain!”**

Have you ever been so afraid that you were almost paralyzed? So nightmarish that words were stuck in your throat...or you wanted to scream, but, couldn’t? Maybe you feel that way watching the evening news. I have recently heard people say that they have stopped watching the news on...but, you know you really should be aware of what’s going on! Watch it at least a couple times a week. Things are changing much too fast to ignore the storm around us. Being afraid to hear the news is much worse than actually hearing it. **“Remember who you are.”** Remember that you are a person of faith. Remember that Jesus is with you always, through the news, even the local news that you are a part of.

Jesus never said, “Follow me, and I’ll make sure you don’t have nightmares. I’ll make sure that you don’t feel claustrophobic in an elevator.” Jesus did say, “Follow me and you’ll know a God who walks through the darkest valley with you.” I don’t know about you, but, the scripture reading today is a great comfort to me...and as it often happens, God has placed the reading in our hands just when we need it. In it, there is a glimpse of hope.

We come together today, you in your homes, me, here, looking out into an almost empty church. Each time I am here in this sanctuary, I can picture each one of you in your place in the pews or in your place in the hospital or in assisted living homes; in your living rooms or on your decks...and there, next to you is Jesus. Keep your eyes focused on him! He is also with me here. Jesus never abandons us. **“Jesus isn’t sleeping,”** even when we are trying again.

The disciples experienced fear...they are not in the midst of a pandemic, nor are they experiencing unemployment. We do not know if their families have ever been homeless or without food. They have thus far not experienced an angry crowd in the streets. They are just ordinary people in a small fishing boat on the Sea of Galilee. It’s getting dark and a storm has come up...the boat is being tossed about in the waves

and wind. Fear has overtaken them. Then, something quite extraordinary happens; something terrifying. They see Jesus coming out to them, walking on the water. "It's a ghost," they cry. Jesus speaks to them, "Take courage, it is I. Do not be afraid." These are people who lived alongside Jesus, knew him closely, had seen the results of his mercy and compassion, had witnessed great miracles, had heard his words. They, too, faltered in their faith in him. He turns and says to us, **"Don't you trust?"**

Friends, the words of Jesus are for you and for me today, just as much as they were for the disciples in the storm, fearing for their lives. "Take heart, it is I. Have no fear." We would have absolutely no trouble spending all day listing our fears. I don't want to get you started but, do you fear that you will never get to see your family again? Do you fear that we may never get to worship in the sanctuary? Do you fear that you will get the virus and not live through it? Do you fear incurable diseases, claustrophobia, snakes, heights, the dark...being alone? (I know...thanks a lot!)

There is a saying, "Life is fragile, handle with prayer." Some of us have been reminded of that more recently than others. When life is seemingly calm. Pray. When the storms of this life beat you down. Pray. When a baby is born; when the lawnmower starts; when your spouse or partner gets sick, has surgery or passes away...Pray. When you have best tested for COVID. Pray. When you sit down to eat a meal. Pray. When something totally amazing happens. Pray. When you are feeling fearful or discouraged. Pray. When you turn on the evening news tonight. Pray. First thing in the morning. Pray.

I pray that THIS ONE scripture has given you a boost of hope and has perhaps offered you a few moments that have lessened your stresses. Maybe you should draw a little boat or make a paper boat...write these same words on it. **"Don't you care?" "Remember who you are." "Jesus isn't sleeping." "Don't you trust?" "God is with us."**

Carrie Newcomer has written this wonderful poem: "A Speed of Soul Poem - When I Most Want To Rush"

When I most want to rush  
it's time to slow down.  
I am not saying I give up or stop.  
It means living This, and then That,  
Breathing into one true thing, and then the next.  
  
I can drink from a firehose  
That keeps drenching me down  
Without quenching my thirst,  
Or I can taste one drop of honey  
Let it rest on my tongue  
With singular pleasure, closing my eyes, until it is gone.  
  
What might happen,  
If I stopped pressing the forward button,  
Trying to get to the epilogue,  
Before I sit with the middle chapters,  
Even though  
The middle parts can be hard  
Filled with what ifs and what thens, and I don't know why.  
  
Maybe I'm ready to be right where I am  
Breathe where I am,  
But mostly love what I find there,  
Or I've simply lost interest in runaway trains.  
Either way what I notice  
is when I most want to rush, it's time to slow down.

My friends, let these words stand out to you today: don't look down...keep your eyes on Jesus! Amen.

Let us spend a few moments in silence looking back in our minds at the days of this past week.

Gracious God, we confess that we are dreamers, more intent upon our own importance than on your vision for us. We like our favored position on this earth, and we are jealous of those who have even more than we do. We want to walk on water before we have even learned to stand upright on the land. We want to rise above others rather than reaching out with helping hands, that all might be uplifted by you. We pray for pardon, for greater insight, for one more chance to live and serve faithfully as disciples of Jesus Christ right where we are. Let's spend a few moments asking forgiveness, with every good intention to do better. **Breathe in courage. Breathe out fears.**

Take heart and do not be afraid. God is always ready to hear us and to forgive us.  
Friends, believe the good news: in Jesus Christ, we are forgiven! Thanks be to God.

Gracious God, we trust that you are near to those whose lives have been changed due to natural disasters and those that have been caused by human hands. We trust that you will keep safe those who serve our country in faraway lands and that you will guide the leaders of our world so that they may be just and merciful in all that they do. We trust that you are near to you those who are hurting and in need of healing, those who have been diagnosed with the COVID virus, those awaiting surgery and those recovering...those awaiting the results of tests and those who struggle with mental illness. We ask your blessings on those who have lost loved ones, especially the family of John Slack.

We give thanks for unexpected joys experienced and blessings sent our way... for good news and good friends, the love of family and the concern and care of those around us.

Now, if you have a face mask handy, pick it up as we pray, Rev Mary Luti's **Blessing for a Face Mask:**  
God of health and wholeness, of neighbor love and kindness, bless this mask, my slight shield against great ills: Bless the fabric that repels the drops, the ties that go behind my ears, the wire that fits snug against my nose, the folds that cup my chin. Make me grateful for my mask even when it makes me hot, even when I look funny in it, even when I'm dying to take it off. Bless me also, and everyone who for their own and other's sakes put on this holy inconvenience every day, our minds made up to love. from [Emerge: Blessings & Rituals for Unsheltering](https://www.pilgrimpress.com), [thepilgrimpress.com](https://www.pilgrimpress.com)

Let's pray now in the name and in the words of Jesus: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever. Amen.

**Offering** I invite you now to consider what gift you will give this week...to our General Fund to help pay the bills or to our mission efforts on behalf of Community Mission with Jesus. Will you give food to fill our Blessing Box? Will you bring a meal to someone who is recovering from surgery? In the name of the Generous One, we know that our gifts, no matter the size or shape... will make a difference. We each, as members and friends of this church family, are called to minister to one another and to the world around us. Thank you, to all of you whose various gifts have enabled Community United Church of Christ to faithfully serve.

God of mercy and of kindness, help us to be good stewards of all that we have and all that we are.  
We dedicate our offerings of time, talents and treasure as we take part in the grace of sharing,  
through Jesus Christ. Amen

**Benediction:** **Go now and follow the words of the great prophet Micah:**  
"Do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God" ...even if it be on water.

This time of worship has ended, let our service continue.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yF2pSvB-ztI>

Today's special music is "Step by Step" sung by Rich Mullins  
Oh God, You are my God and I will ever praise you. I will seek You in the morning and I will learn to walk in Your ways. And step by step you'll lead me and I will follow you all of my days  
Words and Music c 1991 BMG Songs and Kid Brothers of St Frank Publishing

Some time, please post this, too.

“You’ll Be Back”

[https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2020/07/27/priests-viral-hamilton-video-reminds-parishioners-youll-be-back/?fbclid=IwAR1KXrPLfNTdsIILOIa3So5y4WgPx\\_pFHf\\_mlwtSqLNK\\_ZRXgGb0RyYZrlk](https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2020/07/27/priests-viral-hamilton-video-reminds-parishioners-youll-be-back/?fbclid=IwAR1KXrPLfNTdsIILOIa3So5y4WgPx_pFHf_mlwtSqLNK_ZRXgGb0RyYZrlk)

[Episcopal News Service] The Rev. Lonnie Lacy, rector of St. Anne’s Episcopal Church in Tifton, Georgia, had been looking forward to seeing “Hamilton” in Atlanta with his daughter for months. But then the COVID-19 pandemic hit and the performance they had tickets for was postponed until next year. So when a recording of the Broadway musical started streaming on Disney+ earlier this month, they watched it together. When King George III started singing “You’ll Be Back” in his flowing robes, Lacy got an idea. “I thought, ‘You know what? I have a cope that looks just like that,’” he told Episcopal News Service, referring to the cape-like vestment priests sometimes wear for special occasions.

He decided to rewrite the song – in which King George orders the American colonies to stop rebelling, or else – to remind his parishioners that their church will be waiting for them when the pandemic ends.

I think that during this time of uncertainty, this time of fear, some laughter is good...and some faith is good, too. Every week, members and friends of our church family are expressing a common yearning to get back together inside of our church building. Today’s scripture reminds us to not fear...we will be back...do not fear, have faith and do all the right things to keep one another safe right now, so that will be possible sooner than we are imagining.