

What Kind of Faith Do You Mean?

[Text - Matthew 14:22-43]

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What a friend we have in Jesus, Lord Almighty what a pal!
He is greater than the Buddha, or that Hindu sacred cow.
None on earth can match his glory, he is truly at the top.
There are only two his equal: the Holy Ghost and God, his Pop!

What a friend we have in Jesus, he's our buddy through and through;
Made sweet wine right out of water, strolled across the lake, it's true!
Threw a picnic for five thousand, with two fish and five small loaves.
Three days after they had killed him, from the tomb our Jesus rose!

Now he lives above in glory, still he is our faithful friend.
Says he always will stand with us, our amigo to the end.
The only folk who make him angry, think that they are super-swell.
Claim they won't share heaven with sinners, say they'd rather roast in hell!

For some people, *faith* is about having that inside track to their good friend, God: knowing what God is really like; knowing who God really *doesn't* like; and having a special, accurate understanding the Sacred Scriptures. For them, faith can become the equivalent of believing in the literal truth of the Bible's miraculous events - such as Noah and the Ark, Moses parting the Red Sea, or Jesus walking on the water. Personally, I think that insisting on the historical accuracy of those fantastic episodes has little to do with a person's genuine faith in God, or in Jesus Christ. Defending the factual nature of Biblical stories - many which were meant to be larger-than-life tales - is to miss the point. To me, trusting that Christ's Compassionate Spirit is still among us, across 2,000 years, is far more significant than insisting that he could walk across 2,000 yards of water.

Sometimes, the opposite of faith is doubt. Yet more often, the opposite of faith is *absolute certainty*. I imagine many of us have met people who are so absolutely convinced about the correctness of their theology, and the rightness of their cause, that there's little room in their lives for Divine Mystery or Grace. It's as if they've got God completely figured out; and those who don't agree with their understanding of who God is and how God works, are completely lost and headed straight to hell! However, the kind

of faith Jesus encourages, is a faith that leads us beyond the boundaries of our own limited thinking - and opens our minds, and our hearts, to the marvelous possibilities of Divine Mystery and Overwhelming Graciousness

The faith that Jesus declares isn't about closing our eyes to the rational world around us, or trying really hard to make ourselves believe things that are really hard to believe! That's not faith; that's merely mental manipulation. The faith that Jesus displays is about trusting in Divine goodness and compassion, in the midst of Life's trials and tribulations. And Jesus says that we can trust in God, because God is truly trust-worthy. The Divine Source Life - Who creates and connects us all - really does have a vested interest in bringing order out of chaos, wholeness out of brokenness, life and peace out of destruction and death. And when you and I can align our lives with our Originating Sacred Source, then instead of being overwhelmed by Life's struggles and storms, we can face them with a spirit of calm and peace. A peace which, like Christ's own calming and peaceful Spirit, can radiate outward to other people. That's what it means to live a faithful life: that we trust that the Holy One really does care about us all *and* about this entire Creation; and that nothing can ever separate us from our Divine Source of Life and Love.

Throughout our lives, storms will rage around us and within us, often causing us to feel afraid. Fear is a natural reaction to those difficult and dangerous circumstances which can besiege our lives. However, Jesus comes to remind us that - whatever happens - God is with us; God is for us; and God's love will ultimately keep us safe and secure.

We never know - from year to year, or even from day to day - what Life may bring our way. Sometimes we just cruise along with the gentle wind and bright sun at our backs. Then there are other times when we feel beaten and battered, and ready to sink into the darkness of despair. So perhaps one crucial thing to keep in mind, is that even though Life's conditions and circumstances *will* change, the reality of Divine love and grace will always remain constant. And from the depth of that love and grace, you and I can find the inspiration and the courage to get back up and to continue forward on the journey.

I think that's one of the key things we can learn from this story of Peter's attempt to walk on water. He begins with the goal of going to be with Jesus; but he soon loses sight of that goal. The howling wind and crashing waves quickly become his focal point, and he starts to falter and fall. Fortunately, he remembers that Jesus isn't far from him; and he lets out a hasty, yet heartfelt prayer. It's a prayer that many of us may express in our own times of danger or desperation: "Lord, save me!"

"Lord, save me!" That's a really simple prayer; yet it reveals a deeply profound truth: that there comes a time in all our lives when we need a power greater than ourselves to raise us up and rescue us. In our story, that's exactly what Jesus does: he reaches out his hand to lift-up his frightened and falling friend. And though our text doesn't describe how Peter and Jesus get back to the boat, I like to picture them walking back together, hand-in-hand. The wind is still howling, the sea is still surging, but the calming presence of his friend, Jesus Christ, gives Peter a sense of unshakable peace and well-being. It's not that Peter will never again falter or fail or fall - we know that he does, just like all of us. However, it doesn't take suspending of the Law of Gravity - it takes trusting in the Love of God - to put Peter, and us, back on track.

Anytime people make the miraculous aspect of this story, or any Biblical story, the focus of their attention, they - like Peter - lose sight of what truly matters: that Jesus Christ is with us all; offering us a gracious, uplifting hand as we walk through Life's inevitable storms. In order to take hold of that hand, you and I must be willing to let go of those false securities that this world has to offer - be it wealth, or power, or even the temptation to believe that we have figured out precisely how the Divine Mystery can or cannot work. After all, it's not about the supernatural. It's about the super, *natural* love that a parent - or a Creative Heavenly Parent - has for his or her children.

As Amy Hunter's says in our Continuing Testament, "God does not demand that we step out of airplanes....But like Peter, you and I *can* step forward, even if the ground beneath us is no more substantial than water. What matters is that we are walking toward Jesus, whose hand is held toward us, stretched out in invitation, stretched out to grasp us should we fall." Now I realize it would take a miracle for Jesus to literally reach across the Centuries to take our hand. However, I am completely content that - in Christ' Compassionate Name - you and I can take one another's hands.

Because reaching-out to others, welcoming-in the stranger, raising-up the oppressed, and offering care and comfort those who are struggling or hurting, is really quite miraculous itself!