

Chris Murphy

August 30th, 2026

Scripture: John 6:16-21

Sermon: Trusting Jesus In the Storm

John 6: 16-21 – Lectio Divina Style, Read 3 times (word or phrase, feeling, God's invitation)

Jesus Walks on the Water

16 When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, 17 got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. 18 The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. 19 When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. 20 But he said to them, "It is I;[a] do not be afraid." 21 Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

Last Time (This is the Word of the Lord)

Prayer...

Introduction:

One of the reasons I enjoy reflecting on the Gospel of John is because I love the power of stories. Did you know that most of the Bible is story? Actually, 90% of Scripture centers on stories that help us understand God and God's heart for the world.

I imagine some of you in this room read from substack. Substack is a place where people put their stories and other reflections online.

One person I enjoy following these days is the Rev. Dr. Randy Woodley, a retired professor from Portland Seminary, who writes about church history from the perspective of a Native American scholar. He is recognized as a Cherokee descendent.

Randy Woodley reminds us in his essays and books that the way of Jesus often looks different than much of modern and historical Christianity. Randy writes,

But the way of Jesus persists, even when Christianity abandons it. It lives in communities that practice radical hospitality, in individuals who choose love over fear, in movements that prioritize the marginalized over the powerful. It thrives wherever people choose transformation over conformity, wherever justice matters more than theological correctness.

Perhaps what we need is not a reformed Christianity but a return to Jesus, not Jesus the religious figure, but Jesus the way-shower, the one who demonstrated what it means to be fully human in right relationship with God, with others, and with creation.

I agree with Dr. Randy Woodley that the heart of the stories of Jesus are less about creating doctrinal belief and more about telling the story of Jesus in a way that helps us fall in love with Christ and

ultimately enable us to act in the world with love, compassion, and justice.

I also like Randy's point that Christianity at its best reminds us to choose love over fear.

In our story today, as I did my own experience of Lectio Divina- a slow thoughtful reflection on this passage, I found myself drawn to the invitation that Jesus says, "Do not be afraid."

The context as we just read is that Jesus is walking on the water, the disciples are rowing across the lake and the waves are crashing around them. The story is scary and then they see what likely appears to be a ghost coming towards them and our story says they are terrified. Jesus then says some of the most powerful words we can hear as human beings. Jesus says, "It is I, do not be afraid."

Jesus enters the boat and the boat reaches the shores immediately.

In other stories in other Gospels, Jesus calms the storm.

The power of this story and similar stories in the other Gospels where Jesus walks on the water is that Jesus meets us in the storms of our lives and offers himself. “It is I. Do not be afraid.”

I imagine as you hear that invitation from Jesus, you might have two reactions. One reaction might be – Thank you Jesus for calming my fears and bringing me peace. I need to remember this gift of yourself you offer and find rest in you. Another reaction you might have is – That sounds so good, but there is a lot to fear in this world. All we have to do is turn on our computer or scroll through the latest news. From war and other forms of violence, to unexpected tragedies due to earthquakes, to the pain of health problems and other forms of suffering that are inflicted on all generations of human beings. Oh and we should remember as well the environmental concerns that impact all of nature. There is a lot to fear. Part of me wants to say to Jesus. I am afraid and I am not sure you are going to make things different.

Friends, the good news is in the power of this story. Jesus is not judging the disciples for being afraid. Instead, he meets them in the storm. His words do not be afraid come from a place of genuine compassion. John's Gospel includes this story, so that we remember Jesus is with us even when we are afraid. He comes to bring comfort and to care for us in the storms of life. Sometimes the storms pass quickly. At other times, we may feel like the disciples who are rowing for miles and getting tired waiting for Jesus. But Jesus comes in this story and Jesus can come to the stories for our lives.

And with fear, we do not find peace by ignoring our fears. Instead we acknowledge our fears, get in touch with them, and bring them before Jesus.

On a sort of lighter note, Karen and I just dropped off Cate at George Fox to start her freshman year. I think we are more excited for her

than fearful, but it feels like a moment to trust Jesus with our daughter.

Jesus invites us to trust him in all the different stages of life. There is a tendency to maybe hold onto our fear and anxiety. Those emotions are natural and messengers that help us know we need support, but we are not to hold onto those feelings tightly.

Instead, we share our fears and anxieties with friends and family and ultimately with God. We can ask Jesus to meet us wherever we are at, whether the boat of life we are in feels like smooth sailing or rocky waves.

For me it is good to invite Jesus into the boat. He is already there, but I want to remember to ask him to join me and provide the rest I need.

We used this story of Jesus walking on the water at our August prayer retreat. I noticed that many people felt drawn to the words, “Do not be afraid.” It is a normal human experience to be afraid. And

I think this story invites us to look for Jesus. Look for Jesus in the midst of creation. Look for Jesus walking around you and invite him into your boat, so he can say to you, Do not be afraid.

Jesus loves us. Jesus knows what we are going through. Jesus is not angry with us or distant. Jesus is all love and compassion and wants to bring us the peace that passes understanding.

Jesus can show up in your time of prayer, in a worship song, in the beauty of nature. Jesus can also show up in the kindness of someone you meet or in the inspiration of an artist.

This last week we said goodbye for now to Dolly Parton. She passed away and entered heaven. All of us in this room grew up with Dolly Parton in some way. We remember her beautiful music, her humor and engaging personality, and her fashion style. Dolly was loved by pretty much everyone. She was non-partisan, but showed love to all.

One of her legacies was providing free Children's books to kids around the world through her program called The Imagination

Library. I enjoyed how Dolly seemed to never grow old. She found a way to relate to young people and young musical artists even near the end of her life.

Since I am a preacher, I hear Dolly reminding me today to mention her faith. This is what she said about her faith in Jesus.

“That faith I had when I was a child has helped me right through everything right now,” Dolly told AL.com in 2018. “My grandpa was a preacher, a Pentecostal preacher. My daddy’s people were Baptist. So I’ll have a little chapel in all my places. I have a place where I grew up, and I call it the Bapticostal chapel. I just believe that there’s a God. I believe that God helps me, leads me.

“I talk to Him everyday,” she continued. “I’d prefer to believe in God if there wasn’t one, I’d still believe in God, because I believe we need to believe in something bigger and better than ourselves. It gives us hope. It gives us strength. I know it does me. My faith is very

important. I do believe that through God all things are possible. I do believe that Jesus loves me. And I just use that. I'm never ashamed of my family. I'm never ashamed of my religion. I'm not trying to cram it down anyone else's throat. I just think that everybody's got to have something to believe in."

I appreciate these words from Dolly Parton. If she was with us this morning, she would encourage us to trust in Jesus especially during life's storms. She would remind us to have hope.

I wonder if you are getting the same message from the stories about Jesus in John's Gospel that I am getting. The heart of the stories is an invitation to get to know Jesus personally. Just like Dolly says, Jesus loves you. Jesus love me and that is a heart experience that goes beyond having all the doctrines and idea of the mind figured out. I have said this in the past about Jesus and I will say it again. Jesus is more spiritual than he is theological. Jesus was a rabbi, a teacher, but we need to know he was a mystical teacher and the stories

about him are to invite us into a mystical encounter with him. As we trust in Jesus, we will find that he makes himself real to us, not primarily by answering all of our intellectual curiosities about God or his life, but by meeting experientially with his presence.

Another brief story of Jesus showing up in my life. Last Wednesday, Ken Alborn interviewed me about the Newberg Peace Garden at Friendsview. I saw Jesus show up in Ken as he led the event. I saw Jesus show up in the forty or so people that arrived that day to learn about our Peace Garden. I consistently see Jesus make himself known to me even when I feel discouraged about life at times.

Jesus can do the same for you. He can enter the boat of your life and bring grace, and hope, and peace, and love. Jesus is here today and says trust in me. Do not be afraid. I am here and I love you. AMEN.