

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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Today feels a little bit like Lent. Of course, it is not the Lenten season. After all, Charlotte was baptized, we sang the Alleluia, and we're decked out in green. And yet, today's gospel *feels* like Lent because it reveals something about living in-between—about leaving one place without yet arriving at another, and about moving through uncertainty without rushing toward resolution. And maybe that "in between" is fitting during this Time after Pentecost because, in today's gospel, the disciples were quite literally in-between.

We heard that Jesus had sent them across the water. They had left one shore, but they had not reached the other. They were far from land. The wind was against them. The waves battered the boat. And Jesus was nowhere in sight. And when someone finally appeared, walking toward them across the water, they did not recognize Jesus. Instead, they were terrified and cried, "It's a ghost." And there is something deeply human about their experience. After all, when the familiar shore is behind us and the next one cannot yet be seen, even something holy can look frightening.

And we know something about living between the shores. Earlier, Charlotte was baptized into a life none of us can fully imagine for her. Summer is almost over, but fall is not yet here. And today we give thanks for more than

ten years of ministry with Dr. Jordan while wondering what comes next. / We know *this* shore, but the next has not yet come clearly into view.

Back in today's reading, it was into that "in between" space that Jesus said: "Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid." And notice what did not happen. The wind did not stop. The waves did not disappear. The disciples were not transported to the safe shore. Literally, nothing about their circumstances changed. Except that Christ was now there. Now, Lutherans sometimes call this experience the "theology of the cross"—that is, that God is often revealed not in strength, clarity, or success, but precisely where we feel vulnerable and uncertain. You see, *before* a solution or a new shore was visible, Jesus gave them his presence.

But today's gospel did not simply end with Jesus simply being present in the storm. Yes, Jesus offered presence, and Jesus also offered an invitation. Once Peter realized it was Jesus, he said, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you." And Jesus said one word: "Come." And I wonder if Jesus saw something in Peter that Peter could not yet see in himself. For, Peter stepped out. And for a moment, he actually walked...on water. And sometimes grace does that. It does not give us the whole plan or certainty about the other shore. But it gives enough courage for one next faithful step.

And then Peter became afraid. He began to sink and cried out, "Lord, save me." And Matthew told us that Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him.

And maybe that is what Charlotte's baptism proclaimed to us this morning. After all, she did not claim herself, but instead she was held. Water was

poured as a promise was spoken over her before she could understand it, earn it, or know where her life will lead. For grace came first, and grace remains. That is a promise that holds us, too.

In our lives, we may step forward with courage. We may hesitate. We may misjudge. We may need help. But Christ does not disappear when our footing fails. And that is what Matthew's gospel has been teaching us about Jesus these last few weeks. When there did not seem to be enough food, Jesus fed the crowd. When the disciples were stranded between shores, Jesus came toward them. And when Peter began to sink, Jesus reached out his hand. Christ's presence does not depend upon our certainty, our success, or even our ability to stay above water. And that is good news.

So today, as we give thanks for Dr. Jordan's ministry and bless his next chapter, and as we remember the promise spoke over Charlotte this morning, Matthew reminds us that we do not need to see the other shore just yet. For it is in the in-between that we have Christ's presence, Christ's call, and the promise that Christ will not let us go. Amen.