

Sermon: Walking on Water and Other Possibilities**Scripture: Matthew 14:22-33****Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans****Date: August 7, 2011**

Last week we talked about Jesus' miracle when he multiplied the loaves and fish and we approached the story not as a metaphor but as literally a miracle with the help of CS Lewis.* With many of Jesus' miracles in the New Testament, he does on a small and intensified scale what God does in and through the natural world all the time, which makes sense given the central Christian claim that Jesus is God in human form. So Jesus doesn't turn stone into bread, which would be contrary to the laws of nature, but he makes a little bread into much bread and few fish into many fish just as God through the processes of the natural world makes a little seed into much grain and our rivers and streams to be teeming with an abundance of fish.

This week's miracle story though, that Beth just read for us, is of a different order. Unlike the miracles of healing, and increasing the bread and fish and the changing of water to wine, Jesus walks on the water, which C.S. Lewis refers to not as the miracles of the old creation but miracles of the new creation which are the miracle stories that are show the mind or spirit's transcendence over the natural world. We know that mind already has some transcendence over the natural world, right, such that I can wish for that book right there on the side of the pulpit to not be there but to be over there on that side of the pulpit and, watch, nature must obey because I have a certain transcendence over her. Let me demonstrate.... C.S. Lewis asks then, why is it so far out of the realm of possibility that there would come a human being who had an even greater transcendence of mind over matter, spirit over material, such that he could say I want to walk out there across the water itself and do so. Or better yet why couldn't he have such transcendence to have power over death itself and reverse, in a moment's time, this winding down and dissipation that all the natural world has been doing since the moment of the big bang in order to reclaim that original wholeness that the winding down has apparently descended from. Or in other words, why couldn't there be a physical resurrected state of being as a precursor of the new creation to come.

* C.S. Lewis, Miracles, Harper One: New York, NY, 1947.

And isn't that what we are reaching for all the time; straining, stretching, growing, and learning as a species how to have greater and greater transcendence over the natural world, whether that is in our amazing and at times desperate efforts towards health and longevity of life, which has worked by the way, to our transcendence over physical pain that we have achieved through medications, to our capacity to move more quickly across the earth and beyond it, both virtually and physically, such things would never ever have been imagined, to our splitting of the very atom itself which has given us quite a bit of terrifyingly destructive capacity over the natural world; it's all been the human stretching for this very transcendence that is actually pre-figured in the life, miracles, death and resurrection of Jesus. What are we reaching and straining for, what do we know but can't quite grasp and get our hands around? It's nothing less than heaven. It's this transcendent state of being at peace and whole and in bliss forever and ever amen and how would we know to even strain and strive for it if it did not exist, if it was not possible?

And it is nothing less than this that Peter is stepping out towards when he climbs out of the boat to walk to Jesus on the water and for one quiet, exquisite, calm and transcendent moment Peter does it. He realized it was possible and put all his intention and longing and belief in that possibility, made real by the very presence of Jesus out there, and he walked among the waves. He walks on the water itself... until fear re-entered the equation, fear and doubt, and then the struggle and the strain rushed back into the moment along with noise of intense wind and the lapping waves, and he begins to sink with a cry.

And we can say "I don't believe it", or we can be honest and admit that maybe we don't quite know what is possible between the human being and the natural world as the people long before us would never ever have believed that the things we can do now would ever have been possible. The impossible is happening all the time in the natural world of which we are a part and the impossible happens in the human experience as well and often the impossible happens because of one human being who is crazy enough to believe that the impossible is possible.

We know the Genesis story of the fall on some level is true because we all have this innate sense that the ways in which we humans are divided, rivalrous and violent with one another and in our relationship to the earth is not the way it is suppose to be, that

we fell from a time back when and could rise to a time at some point in the future when we will live harmoniously with one another and our earth again. We light the Christ Candle of Peace to attest to this belief that we can live in peace and without warfare. It's impossible, but that is our job in here to hope for the impossible cause if not us then who else is going to hope for it and if we hope for it honestly then maybe also we will find ourselves contributing to it and working for it as well. There have been a lot of impossible situations of human conflict; like in South Africa and the East-West divide in Germany and slavery in the American south and the Protestant-Catholic divide in Ireland, impossible situations of human conflict and division that resolved, because, maybe enough people didn't buy that the impossible could be over-ridden by will and spirit and mind and the wall crumbles. And then we say – "oh, well of course it was possible and actually quite logical that it happened", we say after-the-fact. But prior to it, most believed it was impossible.

What about Israel and Palestine? Impossible. And yet one Jewish woman will not accept that and sets up a tent in the middle of Rothschilds Boulevard and others join her and suddenly in Israel right now there are tent cities springing up all over the place, inspired by the Arab Spring, not protesting the Israeli policy towards Palestine but inequities within Israel between those getting extremely rich off of the privatizing of Israeli society and the fact that most others are being left in the dust. But the Israeli and Palestinian issue, while not overtly being addressed at this point, is certainly on the table as the expense of the settlement project in occupied territories is enormous and because 1/6 of the government budget goes to defense because of what many believe is an untenable policy of Israel towards the Palestinians. Therefore there are those who believe that this one woman's tent protest could end up shifting some significant things in the current situation, a shift arising not from the Palestinians but within Israeli society herself. "Impossible!" "Ridiculous," others say. It won't change a thing. There'll never be peace in that land where Jesus impossibly walked on the water and grabbed hold of Peter who was sinking beneath the waves saying "oh ye, of little faith, why did you doubt, why did you doubt?"