

Sermon – August 7, 2011

Beaver Memorial UMC and First Baptist Lewisburg
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A Walk on the Wild Side=Out of Control Christians
Matt. 14:22-33

The writer of the book of Matthew was writing 40 to 50 years after Jesus had died. He was writing to Christians under persecution—he was writing stories to call them to trust, even during persecution, trust the power of God through the sent one, Jesus Christ, who had **SOME KIND** of **Power** and **Authority!!** So the author of this book wrote one story after another to convince those early Christians to faith in Christ--no matter what circumstances they were in.

Obviously, from the sermon title that I am using this morning, I could have had at least two different titles for this scripture passage. Actually, I almost went with: *Who Was that Masked Man?* I realize that not everyone here grew up with *The Lone Ranger* as I did. It happened to be the only show that we got reception for when my family first bought a tv in the 50's. So, I believe I saw every episode. What was uniquely peculiar about *The Lone Ranger* that made him stand out, so to speak, from ordinary cowboys was that:

- *he wore a mask that he never took off,
- *he had an Indian as a sidekick,
- *he used silver bullets, and
- *he could rescue anyone, anywhere and save any situation. . .

And he did this over and over each week. And still, at the end of every show, someone would say, *Who Was That Masked Man?* as the Lone Ranger rode off into the sunset. And there would always be one astute person who caught on, usually a child, (did you ever notice that?), who would then say, *“Well, don’t you know, that was The Lone Ranger.”* And all who had gathered would still have that look on their faces as if to say, *“Naw. . .are you sure? . . .couldn’t be!”*

And you would be thinking, *No, how could they believe it was someone else who wore a mask all the time, had an Indian sidekick, silver bullets. Why could they never key into this and get it?*

This is what happens in Matthew’s Gospel. The author tells of the power of God through this Jesus, throughout the book, and at the end of each episode, or incident, everyone stands around completely astonished, especially the disciples, wondering who this man Jesus is. Matthew even has some of the miracles end with someone literally saying out loud, *“Who is this man?”*

Matthew is like that little child who repeatedly injects that this is the Messiah, the Son of God, but everyone still looks with furrowed brow at the end of the incident—wondering.

In the scripture today, after many such incidences, there is finally a declaration at the end, *“Truly you are the Son of God.”* Now in this same story but recorded in the book of Mark, they still don’t get it. And in the continuation of Matthew, even though his disciples make this statement in this 14th chapter,

they just don't seem to let go and really faith knowing that God is with them giving them the strength they need. . .until. . .until they witness the resurrection—then there is no doubt whatsoever and the disciples and followers of Jesus begin a ministry that swept the world.

We talk a lot about faith in the church. We come together every Sunday and recognize God with us—that if we accept that and realize that we are able to have strength beyond our own strength, courage beyond our own courage, hope beyond our own hope, we will be able to step out in faith and do what we need to do to be more complete people and live the life that was given to us to the fullest—and who doesn't want that?

I hope we can say to each other here, ***“I think you've got it!”*** (In the words of Henry Higgins from *My Fair Lady*).

But today's story in Matthew pushes us a bit more. Not only must we declare our “faith” on a daily basis, on a regular basis, in our routine living—but God, I believe calls us to ***“Walk on the Wild Side”*** with our faith.

In other words: To get in the churning waters, not to sit in the boat and hold on to the sides when waters are rough and say with clenched fists and closed eyes that we have faith, ***but*** to step out of the boat knowing that we have the power through God to risk, enormously, because—read your call to worship—we know that the hand of God is there to grasp ours.

And when won't it work? Well, look at Peter in today's scripture:

He, along with the other disciples in the boat were caught up in the wind storm, and they were terrified to see someone walking on the water, and thought it a ghost. But Jesus said, *Have no fear, IT IS I*—the same words used as a self-revelation of God in the Bible: the famous line to Moses: ***I AM, IT IS I.***

And Peter says, ***If it really is you, Lord, just tell me to walk to you and I will! You see, Lord, I have faith that you will keep me on top of the water.***

Jesus says: ***Come on then.***

And Peter walked on the water—he walked on the wild side, didn't hug the boat and wait until Jesus got to him—he walked out on his faith.

Faith no longer was a noun to Peter, no longer was a concept, but it became a verb, something he did, ***HE FAITHED.***

The story goes on to say that Peter had given control of his life to Jesus' power at that moment, and then he took back his control when he stopped focusing on Jesus, when he turned his eyes on the winds and the water, the chaos, when he diverted his attention to something besides the ***ONE*** who was able to keep him above the fierce wind that could shake any human being. And he lost it, he couldn't continue—He had regained ***his own*** control, and that caused him to began to sink. Peter cries out to Jesus, and Jesus grasps his hand and catches him. Jesus then says, ***O you of little faith,*** (which is translated, ***O you half believer,***) ***why did you doubt?”***

A Walk on the Wild Side—a risking in order to really step out in the churning waters in our lives individually or as a church, **EQUALS is the same thing as being** *Out of Control Christians*—which should be a goal for all of us. Not HALF-BELIEVERS: *Ok, God, I'll trust you, but I still want to control this part of my life. Hey, I'm comfortable here. . .you can take over sometimes, but I can handle my life, don't want to take too many risks—let the ones really committed to you do that. I believe, but I'm certainly not going to push the limits in my faithing. I'm not going to walk on the wild side, I want some control.*

Dr. Maya Angelou, the author, poet, professor, talks about the faith of her grandmother. Being a black, single, mother in the South during the depression tending to a son and two grandchildren, caused Maya's grandmother to have to step out in faith, a lot. She protected them all against the Ku Klux Klan, she ran a grocery store, educated her children, and saw to their being raised understanding that everyone is precious in God's sight. And Maya describes her recollection of her grandmother this way:

I can still see a tall cinnamon-colored woman with a deep, soft voice, standing thousands of feet up in the air on nothing visible. That incredible vision was a result of what my imagination would do each time grandma drew herself up to her full six feet, clasped her hands behind her back, looked up into the distant sky, and said, "I will step out on the Word of God." She would look up as if she could will herself into the heavens, and tell her family in particular and the world in general, "I will step out on the Word of God. I will step out on the Word of God." Immediately I could see her flung into space, moons at her feet and stars at her head, comets swirling around her. Naturally, since Grandma stood out on the Word of God, and she was a big lady over six feet tall, relying on God to catch her, it wasn't difficult for me to have faith. I grew up knowing that the Word of God must be awfully powerful to keep my grandma up!

In the OT:

*Abraham faithed, walked on the wild side, gave up his own control when God called him to leave his home, his comfort zone, to go to a foreign land where the Hebrew nation began!

*Sarah faithed, walked on the wild side, gave up her own control when she accepted the power from God to conceive the next leader of the Hebrews.

*Moses faithed, walked on the wild side, gave up his own control when he led the Israelites from Egypt.

*The people of God, the Israelites, faithed, walked on the wild side, gave up their own control when they crossed the Red Sea onto dry land.

*And Mariam and Gideon and Debra and Samson and David faithed, walked on the wild side, gave up their own control when they enforced justice, faced the hungry of lions, quenched raging fires, became mighty for their God. . .

In the NT:

After the resurrection of Christ, the disciples all faithed, walked on the wild side, finally gave up their own control and became out of control to the extent that Christianity was taken by them to the known world at that time, and they let go and risked all—and the Church lives today because of their faithing.

What would happen if we did walk on the wild side, got out of the safe boat, gave up our control and let God be God in our lives. What would our lives look like? What would Lewisburg, PA like. . if we ventured out on the water in the midst of great winds?

Listen to what one Christian wrote as the Magna Carta for Out of Control Christians:

I once was a control junkie, but now I am an Out of Control Disciple. I've given up my control to God. I trust and obey the Spirit. I've jumped into the water, I've gotten off the boat, I've stepped over the line, I've pulled out all the stops. I'm holding nothing back. There's no turning back, looking around, slowing down, backing away, letting up, or shutting up. It's life against the odds, outside the box, over the wall, the game of life played without goal lines other than "Thy will be done. . ."

I can't be bought by any personalities or perks, positions or prizes. I won't give up, though I will give in. . .to openness of heart, openness of mind, and generosity of spirit. When short-handed and hard pressed, I will never again just hang in there. I will stand in there, I will run in there, I will pray in there, I will sacrifice in there, I will do everything in there but just hang around. My face is upward, my feet are forward, my eyes are focused, my way in uncertain, my knees are worn, my heart burdened, my spirit light, my road narrow, my mission wide.

I won't back down, slow down, shut down or let down until I'm preached out, taught out, healed out or hauled out of God's mission in this world entrusted to members of the Church of the Out of Control—to unbind the confined, whether they're the downtrodden or the upscale, the overlooked or the under-represented.

And then when we walk on the wild side, we can all hear from the Lord: ***Well done, thou good and faithful out of control disciple!***

We all have the opportunity to walk on the wild side, to faith—in many ways. To step out of the boat and let God hold us, lead us, direct us. But we have to keep focused, and we are here, our congregations, to help each other remember that we will not sink if we look to our Lord who is out in the storm with us.

We offer ourselves with these, our gifts, confident that you have, O Lord, have a purpose for them and for us. Help us to embrace new possibilities right here in Sunbury and may our offerings reach beyond the barriers of our former thinking and doing. In the Spirit of Christ, we would pray and live. Amen.

Benediction: Call to Worship!

Prayer time:

Mentor – old, wise minister who told me that he went to England after WWII and went to a hospital for children. HE was taken around the different wards and a nurse said to him, we call these wounded little ones *bent winged angels*, because they, even though they are precious, they have something wrong with them. And my friend’s reply was, “My dear, we are all bent winged angels then!” That’s how we come—none of us perfect—some hurting, wounded right now more than others—but recognizing our woundedness and that each of us needs prayer.

Insert in bulletin.

Tragedies that continue to occur in Iraq.

Tragedies all over the world, and right here in our part of the world, where relationships end up being an excuse for abuse and even death, where families are fractured, and where healing needs to occur.
Are there other specific needs.