

Faith and Doubt

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A couple of weeks ago, at our July session meeting, our 3 confirmands presented their faith statements, a faith symbol that meant something to them, and let me just tell you--it was a holy time. It is, of course, a wonderful moment when anyone joins our church. We have had so many great adults join our church this year--we're even hosting a virtual inquirer's class this morning! It's so wonderful when we add new folks to our Westminster family and formally accept them into membership. But there is an especially holy moment when our students finish up the confirmation program and are presented to the session. It means even more when we've watched them grow right before our eyes--suddenly the little girl who was in the Lamandola's preschool class 12 years ago is all grown up right in front of our eyes, proclaiming her faith as her own and taking on the journey of faith as a sister in Christ.

Our 3 confirmands (4 if you include our Lafayette youth who joined us this year) had a challenging and thrilling year. One of the biggest discussions of our confirmation class this year was just what Peter deals with in our story this morning: Faith and Doubts. We told our students that one of my favorite parts of being Presbyterian was that having doubts doesn't make you a "bad christian" or "faithless." In the PCUSA, having doubts, asking questions, wondering out loud in sunday school classes, worship, and fellowship activities means that you have an active faith. We don't believe having faith means blind trust. Faith, for us, is built on a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. And it is built the way that all relationships are built: Time. Trust. Getting through tough times. Tests. All relationships take time, so why do we think our relationship with Christ would be any different?

I'll be honest, I feel bad for Peter. He's often called the faithless. One of his worst moments of faith was written down for all the world to see. He's painted in a way that history remembers only the crying out, "Lord, save me!" And that statement itself is pointed out, by Jesus, to be a moment of doubt.

When, in truth, I see faith all over this story. Peter was faithful in even getting out of the boat. I don't think I would. I know how gravity works. I know that I'd be a sinking ship. Even if I saw Jesus out there, I'd probably be looking for the fishing line holding him up,

or the glass walkway under the water. I would try and make sense of how Jesus was walking on the water. I'd probably figure out some sort of scientific answer that would help me sleep at night. But one thing is for sure: I wouldn't get out of that boat. Even on a sunny day.

But let's put all that aside--all of my natural tendencies and let's say I did: I crawled out of the boat. And I notice how big the storm is. I hear the wind crashing up against the water--the water that I'm now hovering over somehow. And I get scared. And I begin to sink. And in that fear, I say--Lord, save me? I'd probably be saying something a little different. What I hear from Peter isn't doubt--but faith. Faith that Jesus could save him. Faith that Jesus was who he said he was and would come through with his promise even as I sink. Peter had faith as he was sinking to know who could save him. He didn't lean on his own swimming--like I would. He didn't look back at the boat full of people he was with to see if they were coming--he looked to Christ and cried out for help.

What a faithful response to a sinking ship. Sometimes the most faith we can muster is to throw our eyes towards Jesus and ask for help. Ask for saving. Ask for a helping hand.

There is so much going on in the world right now. Of course, the reality and longevity of covid-19 is one of the first things that come to mind. Something that, when it first hit, I thought we'd be back to worshipping together in 2 weeks has settled in and become our new norm. I miss hugs. I miss you. I miss our children. I miss our music.

And in the grand scheme of things, I realize how little these missing feelings are in the face of so much loss. Over 150,000 Americans, friends, family, mothers, daughters, fathers, sons, children, elderly. Their lives lost mean something. And of course, all of the things that are directly impacted because of covid-19, how we are likely to see a surge in people experiencing homelessness, how it affects communities of color even bigger. And then the other things: race relations being at an all time heightened awareness, which I'm grateful for more conversation about but deeply disappointed that at the stakes it takes to get to our news sources and consciousness.

We pray for Beirut and the unknown people there who lost their lives. It feels, at times, like we're in a pandemic within a pandemic within a pandemic and I feel an awful lot

like Peter, sinking slowly into the water, looking all around me at the swirling wind and sea, asking myself why I got out here into this mess.

And then I look to Jesus. Or, truthfully, our confirmands point me to his promises. I get an email from one of you or pictures of our students doing our recent church-in-a-box. I see our young adults get together to do yard work for some of our dear members. I hear how you all, the people of Westminster, have looked a pandemic in the face and relentlessly been the church to one another, calling and showing up (virtually, of course) anytime anyone has made the call.

So if you're feeling a little bit like Peter this week, you faithfully jumped out of the boat but watching the world around you sinking, have the faith to ask for help. And know that Jesus, himself or maybe working through the people around you will grab your hand, pick you up, and say, "oh child of God, why did you even doubt?" Have the kind of faith that will ask for help when you need it. And the kind of trust to get out of the boat in the first place. And know that God will meet you in the mess. Amen.