

Sunday, August 9, 2020
Pentecost 10
Grace Lutheran Church
Somers Point, NJ 08244
Interim Pastor: Rev. Kevin Hilgendorf
“Faith Overcomes Fear”



From "Don't Forget to Sing in the Lifeboats" a collection of the insight and wit that helped many of those who came before us- as well as a few of our living poets and scholars, singers and statesmen- make it to the other side of difficulty by Kathryn and Ross Petras. The insight I chose is "The first step towards getting somewhere is to decide that you are not going to stay where you are" by J. R. Morgan (financier).

Early one winter day there was a freeze overnight. I invited two young nephews to join me in walking the dog. The grounds were crunchy as we stepped toward a frozen shallow pond. I had the younger nephew and the dog in hand walking around the pond. The other nephew decided to walk across the pond. At the center he stopped and felt sure it was safe. So he tested the ice by stomping his feet. Down he went through the ice into the cold water. He yelled in a panic and somewhat relieved he was only stuck up to his knees. I encouraged him to relax, breath, and slowly step toward us at the shore. I was relieved, so was the older nephew; however, the younger one was laughing his head off!

"The first step toward getting somewhere is to decide that you are not going to stay where you are." Today's Gospel begins with the disciples in a boat, "a few miles offshore...being tossed about by the waves." When the men in the boat catch sight of a figure walking on the water toward them, they become even more frightened. Instead of being overjoyed at the sight of their salvation, the disciples were terrified thinking this is a ghost. Jesus immediately tells them, "Take courage, it is I, Do not be afraid." As a way of testing the identity of this being, Peter asks to be commanded to come out on the water in the same way. Jesus complies. While Peter keeps focus on Jesus, he, too, walks on water, but as soon as he becomes aware of the strength of the wind, he flounders and begins to sink. He calls out in distress, "Lord, Save me!" "First step toward getting somewhere is to decide you are not going to stay where you are."

When our gaze is focused on Jesus, we also find the strength and resources to do things that frighten us. Faith in Christ overcomes fear. Even when our focus drifts and we become overwhelmed, we need

not fear. The Lord is always ready to reach out a hand to stop us from sinking. I remember that courage was not the absence of fear, it was the ability to continue in the face of it. To decide you are not going to stay where you are is the ability to continue. The refrain of Psalm 23 is my prayer to continue in the midst of my fears, "Shepherd me O God beyond my wants beyond my fears from death into life." Mark Twain said something similar, "Courage is not the absence of fear it is the master of fear." David, the shepherd boy chosen by God to be the King of Israel, experienced many fears in life with prayer asking God to save him. The 23rd Psalm is by some experts written as a summary of David's life. "...Yea though I walk through valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil, for thou art with me..."

Peter had little faith that made him to step out of the safety of the boat to walk on water to Jesus and when in trouble, called out, "Save me! Jesus." Peter's faith in Christ grew bigger that moment.

John Hus, a Czech priest and well known preacher in Prague, called for reforms in the church prior to the start of the Reformation. He prayed for faith and courage, "O loving Christ, draw me, weak as I am, to your side, for if you do not draw me, I can never follow you. Give me a brave spirit, so that it may always stand ready and strong. And when my flesh is weak, let your grace go before me, come beside me, and follow after me, for without you, I can do nothing-least of all suffer pain or death. Grant me a fearless heart, a true faith, a firm hope and a perfect love, so that for your sake I may lay down my life with patience and joy. Amen." (Prayers of the Reformers by Thomas McPherson)