

The Rev. Kate Byrd  
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## Overcoming Fear

Have you ever been in a situation where fear got the better of you? In the 3rd grade, my parents enrolled me in flute lessons at a local music school. One of the requirements was that the students participate in a recital series. And let me tell you, to this day I still vividly remember walking up on that stage for the first time, my knees wobbling, my hands sweating, my stomach churning, my heart beating, as I placed my music on the stand, my flute to my lips, looked out into the crowd, and... nothing. I could literally do nothing. Except, that is, to sink down off that stage (as quickly and as stealthily as my little legs would allow), and back into the perceived safety of my mothers shelter. Who actually was already by the stage, insisting I go back up and finish what I had started. “But, I don’t know what I’m doing?” I pleaded with her. “Everyone already saw me leave!” “It will be no good, I am too nervous, and it is all too embarrassing.” To no avail, she insisted that I go back up there. And, she encouraged me, whispering in my ear, “I am right here, just keep your eyes on me, I am proud of you no matter what.”

Today, we find our disciples, most particularly Peter, struck by fear and all the ways it can play tricks on our minds, moving us away from our goals and ourselves. As Matthew, our Gospel author, paints the picture of Jesus’ followers out at sea, caught in the torment of a storm, huddled down in the “false” safety of their boat. Only to be greeted by an unidentified being approaching them in the middle of the lake, in the midst of a storm, as if he was out for an early morning stroll. Leaving the disciples (I would assume) confused, afraid, and understandably freaked out. Except for one that is, as Peter musters up enough faith to ask Jesus’ permission to get out of that boat, to leave the perceived comfort of his huddle, and to walk on the stormy water towards his teacher, his Lord, his Savior. As we hear Peter say, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you.” To which Jesus says, “Come.”

I have to tell you that I am not only thankful, but even more so, especially now as a mother myself, I am proud of my mom for making me get back up on that stage. She could easily have let me sit back down, and sink deep into the comfort of her shelter and the embrace of her arm around my shoulder. But, she knew better. She knew that neither her shelter nor her embrace would support my growth or protect my Spirit. She knew it would be painful, for both her and I, and everyone really who had to sit through the agony of my screeching out breathy unsure notes, between gasps of air, trembling fingers, and a long forgotten tempo. Honestly, I can’t imagine it was an enjoyable experience for anyone. But, she also knew it would make me stronger, more empowered, better prepared for the next moment when fear would creep in like a thief in the night, looking to break down my Spirit and snuff out my courage. And, she was right. Because, without that moment, I would not have this one, here in this pulpit. Her insistence to face my

fears and her continued encouragement to get back up there and keep doing it is what allowed me to overcome or at least tamper down my performance anxiety. And, today it is what allows me to get up here every (or almost every) Sunday. So, thank you mom!

For Peter to step out of the boat was impressive and courageous, but that's not what stands out to me about this story. When Peter feels the wind, remembers his fears, and begins to realize what he has done, and more so what he is doing, naturally he begins to doubt, to falter, and to sink. In that moment he cries out to Jesus, "Lord save me." Immediately feeling the warmth and life saving power of Jesus' hand, as he reaches down and pulls him back up. Not a moment later hearing Jesus exclaim, "oh, you of little faith." And this is what stands out, because that is all it took, just that little faith, for Peter to defy the natural laws of our world, to step out of the boat and into the arms of Christ. To show the other disciples not only what Jesus is capable of, but what we too are capable of when we look to Christ. When we take a step beyond what we imagined possible, as we hear the Divine calling us to "come." Allowing not only Peter but the whole boat to cry out in that moment of belief and amazement, "Truly you are the Son of God."

I could take credit for my ability to stand up here today and speak to all of you, but that would be to deny all of the people, including my dear mother, who got me up here. Like the disciples in the boat, and Jesus on the water, we need each other to move away from the fears that keep us from walkign towards our God and God's calling. Even more, to make it through the stormy weather, and navigate the unsteady seas. This is not to say that fear is a bad thing, I mean it's what keeps us alive, evolutionarily, and often literally. But, fear can also hold us back or worse bring us down, which is why we need our loved ones, we need our communities, we need our God so that we can know when to listen to fear and when to push through it. What Peter did was miraculous, not simply because he walked on water, but because he trusted Jesus, he had faith to believe in someone who appeared a stranger, or worse a ghost. He had faith to believe that the Divine would continue to uphold him. And, he had the support of his friends behind him in the boat should he falter. Do you have the desire to step out of the boat? Do you hear Jesus calling you to "Come"? If so, go. The boat is not as safe as we often think it is anyways. Go, go in faith that you may fall or at least slip (we all do), but God is there, and so is your community, this one right here. What are you waiting for, make that first step and see what miraculous things you can do with God, with this community, with yourself!