

This week I opened up Facebook and I saw a post from one of my professors from McCormick Theological Seminary. Dr. Reggie Williams said, "I don't recall another moment in my lifetime filled with so much uncertainty." The thing is, I don't think he is alone. It seems like every day is beset by some kind of uncertainty. We are in the midst of a flood of information that comes from all sides and from every angle telling us to be terrified, telling us to be brave. Telling us there's nothing to worry about, telling us it will never be the same. Telling us to wear mask, telling us to scoff at those wearing masks. Telling us to listen to the CDC, telling us to don't worry about them they don't know what they're talking about. All of that is just on our news, in our media, and on our social feeds.

Then there's the uncertainty of when it will be safe to go out. Will I still have a vacation? Will my kids get to go to summer camp? Will I be able to hold on financially? Will my business close? Will my school continue? Will the church still be open? Will I be able to see my friends? Will I have a job? Will I or anyone I know get sick? Will anyone I know die?

These questions and others like it run through my mind and through the minds of many that I talk to most days.

In this morning's scripture we find ourselves in the middle of a story. Jesus has gone off to pray after feeding the 5000, after learning about his cousin, John the Baptist, being beheaded. Jesus goes by himself to pray and sends his disciples off on a boat in the sea of Galilee. The wind and waves have been battering them and they didn't get very far and Jesus begins to walk across the sea of Galilee. He walks towards them, they think "Oh my Gosh! That is a ghost!" Because what else would you think, you're on a boat that's being ravaged by wind and waves and you see someone walking or something walking on the water. Your first thought is probably not, "That's my friend, Jesus." At least it wouldn't be my first thought. Jesus says "Take courage. It is I. Do not be afraid." Peter reacts, "'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.'" Peter is a reactor and he is often reckless in his response. Throughout his ministry Jesus has to pull Peter back, to change his course, to temper his reaction. Jesus responds to Peter, "Come." Peter being Peter steps out and he walks on the water, which frankly is pretty cool and then he realizes what's happening, HE'S WALKING ON WATER, he falls and Jesus comes to him Jesus moves towards him, Jesus reaches for him, Jesus lifts him up, Jesus brings him back to the boat to the amazement and awe of the disciples.

The thing that I want you to think about, the thing that I've been thinking about is who I am in this story, today. There are times when I have embodied, have identified with every character in this story.

I've been willing to go first, I've been frozen with fear, I've been in awe, I've even on rare occasions been the one moving towards others to help, but most of all I feel like I'm the one saying, "Lord save me." I'm willing to bet that at some point in your life, most, if not all of you, could identify with different characters in this story.

I always love the stories that give me a glimpse of who I am. John Calvin begins his Institutes of the Christian Religion with the idea that the more I know God, the more I know myself and the more I know myself, the more I know God. So when these stories about the God we know through the person of Jesus, when they tell us about ourselves and we can see ourselves in the stories those are the stories that help us remember who we are and who's we are.

Now oftentimes, I feel like I and other preachers read the Bible and tell the story of who you should be rather than who you are. Lutheran Pastor and author, Rev. Nadia Bolz Weber says it like this "Yet, a lot of what I've heard in the church both with this story and with so many others is not who I am but who I should be. I should be the one with enough faith to walk on water. I should be the one whose eyes are always, always on Jesus. I should be the one who makes my way to Jesus.

But all these characters in the walking on water story – the cautious ones in the boat, the brave one who walked for a time on water, the same one who is afraid and sinks and calls for help, and the ones who saw it all and confessed that Jesus is the son of God they are all actually equal in their relationship to God because...all of these and you have one thing in common: they are those whom Jesus draws near saying “it is I, do not be afraid”. The glamorous part of this story is that Peter walked on water. Which I admit is pretty cool. And maybe he almost had enough faith to make his way to Jesus. But what happens on either side of his short little water walk? Jesus comes toward HIM. In the storm Jesus is walking toward the boat, when Peter sinks Jesus is reaching toward Peter then he comes so much toward them all that finally he just gets in the boat. That’s about as with them as he can be. Yet we seem to always focus on Peter walking toward Jesus when the whole story is about how much Jesus walks toward them reaches toward them and then even gets in the boat with them.

I see and hear fear gripping us in this time of uncertainty. Fear of the unknown, fear of the breakdown of the economy, fear of the breakdown of our civilization, fear of death over 60,000 in the last six weeks from COVID-19. All of this fear, all of this nervousness and trepidation, in all of it Jesus is moving towards us, Jesus is in the boat with us .

For the next few weeks our worship services will be focused on the theme called “Unraveled: Seeking God When Our Plans Fall Apart” and it is easy to see that the plans of the disciples in this story continued to fall apart. They planned to be with Jesus and Jesus sent them away. They planned crosses sea of Galilee, but they were battered by water. Peter planned to walk on water. They were uncertain of their future, they were uncertain of their next steps and yet Jesus continued to move towards them. As our plans unravel, as our expectations are changed, as our hope is lifted and dashed, as we seek to reform ourselves into a post pandemic society. It feels like it is up in the air sometimes. It feels as if we are sinking under the water sometimes. It feels as if we were frozen in fear sometimes. It feels like we just need to tell the story, but in all of it, in all the uncertainty, in all of the confusion, Jesus draws near to us. Jesus who loves us, Jesus who calls us beloved, Jesus who is in the boat with us helping us to put back, to reframe, to reset our expectations knowing that no matter what we do, no matter where we go, no matter how faithful or not we are, Jesus “Emmanuel, God is with us  
Maybe it be so and Amen