

## Those Faithful Walker-Walkers

[Text - Matthew 14:22-43]

Pastor Dave Shackle  
August 13, 2017

There is an old story about a man hiking alone at the rim of the Grand Canyon, loses his balance and falls. Fortunately, he catches hold of a large tree-root sticking out from the edge and stops his descent. Unfortunately, he doesn't have the strength to pull himself up; so he cries out, "Help! Is anyone up there? Someone please help me!" Suddenly from above, a voice answers, "Don't be afraid! I'm here; I am *God*, and I'll save you! But you must have faith. Now let go, and you'll be O.K." The man looks down at the rocks below, then looks up and yells, "Is there anyone *else* up there who can save me?"

There are people who claim that if you have enough *faith*, God will keep you safe from harm; and if you have the right *kind* of faith, your life will be smooth sailing. Of course that raises two basic questions, "How much faith is *enough*; and what exactly constitutes the *right kind* of faith?" Most of us have met people who are absolutely certain about the abundance of their faith, and the correctness of their theology. It's as if they have it all figured out; and those who don't agree with *their* understanding of who God is and how God works, are hopelessly lost. Yet this view is out of sync with the kind of faith that Jesus exemplifies and inspires. For Jesus, a genuine *faith* is one that leads us beyond the boundaries of our own limitations, and opens our hearts and minds to the expansive possibilities of the Divine.

The faith that Jesus displays and declares, doesn't insist that we close our eyes to the world around us; or try really hard to make ourselves believe things that are really hard to believe! That's not faith, that's merely mental manipulation. *Faith*, according to Jesus, means that you and I *trust* in the goodness of the Divine

Source of Life - even in the midst of Life's most difficult trials and tribulations. And Jesus declares that we *can* trust in the Holy One, because the Holy One is completely *trust-worthy*! Therefore, wherever we go, we realize that there is nothing that can ever separate us from our Divine Source of Life and Love.

This morning's Scripture readings contain some fascinating stories about how faith in the Holy One can sustain and secure us throughout our Life's journey. Abram and Sarai, at the ages of 75 and 64, left their lifelong surroundings to go to a new place where the Holy One offers them a new beginning. While that is an impressive journey of faith, we don't have to go back to the ancient Middle East to find such inspiring stories. In the Spring of 2014, Jill Black, at the age of 87, came from North Carolina to Brecksville Ohio. Unlike relatively young Abram and Sarai who brought their nephew Lot, other household members, and all their possessions with them, Jill left behind years of accumulated possessions and keepsakes, friends and relationships. That would be hard at any age - to let-go of our lives as we've known them, and basically begin anew in an unfamiliar place. I dare say that many of us might bring along a certain sense of resistance or resentment, or at least a smidgen of good-old-fashioned self-pity. But not Jill. She came among us with a wonderful warmth and smile, openness and joy! She soon joined the church, joined the choir, and developed genuine connections with her new-found Family of Faith.

Jesus and Peter may have looked pretty impressive walking on water centuries ago; but today I am equally impressed with our faithful members who walk on walkers. Unlike young strong Peter, who panicked when he saw the threatening conditions churning around him, 98 year old Betty Gifford continues to keep her cool. She told me that as she lay on the floor for a day and a half, with her left leg broken in three places, that she actually wasn't afraid. "I knew someone would eventually find me," she said. "I'm just

glad that my cats didn't try to eat my face!" And with that wonderful sense of humor and grace, Betty continues each day to faithfully work at her recovery.

In this morning's Continuing Testament Christopher Burkett writes, "Faith doesn't save us from trials and tribulations. What it does is give us strength to face them. The person who has faith has a source of strength and inspiration, especially when trouble strikes." I would add, that the person who has faith *IS* a source of strength and inspiration! You and I are extremely fortunate to have among us members in their 80's and 90's who lived through the Great Depression, WW II, a Japanese Internment Camp, the 1<sup>st</sup> nuclear missile crisis. and so much more. They have handled, and continue to handle Life's ups and downs with a strength, courage, and grace that can inspire and encourage us all.

None of us knows - from year to year, or even from day to day - what Life might bring us. Sometimes we sail along with the gentle wind and bright sunshine at our backs. Then there are times when we find ourselves beaten and battered, and ready to sink into a sea of darkness and despair. So perhaps one of the most important things for us to keep in mind, is that even though Life's conditions and circumstances will inevitably change, the reality of Divine love and grace will always remain constant. And from the depth of that love and grace, you and I can find the inspiration and courage to get back up and continue forward. The good news, is that we don't have to do it alone.

You and I are part of the Living, Loving Body of Christ - a Community of people who stand with us in the good times and the bad. A family of Faith who put their trust in the Holy One - One who doesn't call us to believe the impossible, but to achieve the possible. To rely on that abundant Love which surrounds us, cast-out our fear, and sustains us throughout our lives. An abundant

love that you and I can freely share with one another, and with everyone else we encounter on this awesome Journey of Life.