

“Here’s My Heart”
Matthew 14:22-34

In July of this year, five of our youth and three of our adults travelled to Indiana for a youth conference that is held every three years. The theme of “Here’s My Heart” was a phrase taken from the hymn, “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing.” The theme was about opening one’s heart to God’s love and transformation. We know from our own experience that this is easier said than done. We are born with open hearts to God, to life, to ourselves, and to others. Yet, somewhere along the path of growing up we learn to close our hearts because of hurts and fears that come our way. We close our hearts to protect them, but the result is that we become unable to fully appreciate and live life as God intends for us to live. We live out of our fears, misplaced attachments, insecurities, or frustrated longings. The challenges of life keep reinforcing our patterns of coping. We may have a period of time when things are going well and we start to trust life again, but then something bad happens or we perceive/experience a threat, and we are right back where we started. That is why we need faith to help us open our hearts once more, but this time not with innocence that everything is going to be okay, but with intentional trust that God will be with us in all of life.

Today we look at a few pieces to help us reclaim this openness of heart for our lives and for our world. The first piece is from our Bible story for the day from Matthew 14 with Peter’s attempt to walk on water with Jesus. This was a time of fear and uncertainty for Jesus, his disciples, and all his followers. In the beginning of this chapter the writer had recounted how Herod Antipas beheaded John the Baptist and had his head presented on a platter. John’s disciples came and told Jesus about the execution. John the Baptist was the one who preached and prepared for the ministry of Jesus. He was his colleague in ministry, a prophet and a teacher. John the Baptist was killed because he denounced Herod Antipas’ marriage to his brother Philip’s wife when Philip was still alive (a violation of Jewish law). So Jesus went to a lonely spot as a direct response to John’s execution. Maybe Jesus saw the writing on the wall for him. He could be next. The world was closing in on them! The dream of the Kingdom of God becoming a reality in their lifetime seemed so unlikely under the political circumstances of their day. The disciples, like us, respond out of a sense of fear and scarcity. (First Service -Read Matthew 14:22-34)

Narrator (Tom): ²² Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on to the other side of the sea while he dismissed the crowd. ²³ Then, after the crowd had gone, Jesus went up to a mountaintop alone (*as he had intended from the start*). As evening descended, He stood alone on the mountain, praying. ²⁴ The boat was in the water, some distance from land, buffeted and pushed around by waves and wind. ²⁵ Deep in the night, *when he had concluded his prayers*, Jesus walked out on the water to his disciples *in their boat*. ²⁶ The disciples saw a figure moving toward them and were terrified.

Disciple (Bekah): It’s a ghost!

Another Disciple (Emily): A ghost? *What will we do?*

Jesus (Ella): ²⁷ Be still. It is I. You have nothing to fear.

Peter (Zach): ²⁸ Lord, if it is really You, then command me to meet You on the water.

Jesus: ²⁹ *Indeed, come.*

Narrator: Peter stepped out of the boat onto the water and began walking toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he remembered how strong the wind was, his courage caught in his throat and he began to sink.

Peter: Master, save me!

Narrator: ³¹ Immediately Jesus reached for Peter and caught him.

Jesus: O you of little faith. Why did you doubt *and dance back and forth between following Me and heeding fear?*

Narrator: ³² Then Jesus and Peter climbed in the boat together, and the wind became still. ³³ And the disciples worshiped Him.

Disciples (Bekah and Emily): Truly You are the Son of God.

Narrator:³⁴ All together, Jesus and the disciples crossed *to the other side of the sea*. They landed at Gennesaret, *an area famous for its princely gardens*.

The disciples were in the boat filled with fear because of the storm that was battling their boat. They first think that Jesus was a ghost. Then when Peter joined Jesus in walking on water, that only lasted a few seconds because of his fear. We all love Peter for his enthusiasm. He is the one who often responds and ventures out of the comfort of what is known. Peter is often impatient yet passionate. Peter is full of faith and doubt at the same time. He is the one who swears he would never deny Jesus but is the one who ends up abandoning Jesus at the hour of his greatest need. Peter is the one who wants to be with Jesus walking on the sea. He is the one who longs to walk in the footsteps of Jesus to conquer the fears of the world and to not falter. His excitement about joining Jesus on this risky adventure carries him through, but not for long! He makes it for a few seconds, but once he becomes aware of the raging dangers around him once more, he begins to sink! This pattern continued for Peter. Whenever he was afraid, he would let his fears derail him from following the way of Jesus. He wanted his heart to be open, and yet fear dominated and closed it.

We will reflect on the patterns of open and closed hearts in this story in the hope of connecting them to our lives and how we are invited to reopen our hearts. These are the lessons our youth and adults pondered during the week of Triennium.

1. (Emily) Accepting Yourself: Peter struggled with thoughts of doubt. At first, he was able to do what Jesus did but then started to sink when thoughts of doubt about

himself came to his mind and he believed them. You can imagine how relevant this is to young people. The world puts so much pressure on us to fit in and to be accepted. The fear of walking the hallways of a high school and being judged by others is very real. Even as adults, we know this struggle all too well. We judge ourselves and our mistakes. We compare ourselves to others. We even reject parts of ourselves or hide them from others. (Emily to share one thing from Triennium about opening our hearts to accepting ourselves)

Verse from Reckless Love

2. (Zach) Accepting your neighbors and those around you & Accepting your Community: Jesus accepted Peter and did not reject him because he failed. The disciples accepted Peter along the way. They did not give up on him or on each other. In fact, witnessing the transformation that took place in Peter's life transformed them. (Zach to share about how he got to meet many different people with different backgrounds and how those connections made a difference for him in opening his heart to others)

One verse from Reckless Love

3. (Bekah) Accepting God and the invitation to go out and share the good news of God with others through love and service: Peter offered his heart to God and to continue the mission of Jesus in the world. He became the rock upon which Jesus built his church. When his heart became open, he offered it up to God to be used. When we offer our lives to God, we are transformed. (Bekah to share about how God invites us to go out beyond our comfort zones)

4.

Ben (first service): One of the Triennium preachers used a video clip song from the Lego Movie 2. This is when all the Lego toys were in the dark in a box and felt like giving up. One of them reminded them of hope: <https://youtu.be/ZlisFWaKLqA>

Tom to challenge us to go out into the world to share the good news of love and to bring hope to the world.... Amen. (If not speak about Gennesaret)