

The Green Hill Presbyterian Church
Sunday, August 9, 2026 – Table Copy

SILENT PREPARATION: Central to St. Augustine's interpretation of today's Gospel was his notion that the ship represented the Church. The apostles are those who are in the Church and who are being carried along and sheltered by the Church. In the image we are given today, the ship – that is, the Church – is being battered and shaken so badly that it is in danger of sinking. But, St. Augustine also assures us that it is better to be in the ship, even in a storm, than to be drowning in the waves.

PRAYER OF INVOCATION (*Unison*)

Holy God, we seek your presence. Break through all our pretenses, that we might both sense your vibrant energy – which embraces the whole universe – and feel your love for each one of us, as an individual. In this hour, we pray that our faith may be enlivened, our trust deepened, and our commitment expanded, to meet the challenges of our times; for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Most gracious God, in Jesus Christ you still the wind and the waves, and reach out to save us when we are sinking. Reach out to us now through the reading and hearing of Holy Scripture, that we might not only be saved, but also reach out in service to others – for the sake of Jesus Christ. It is in his most holy name that we pray. Amen.

FIRST SCRIPTURE READING Romans 10:1-17

Our first Scripture Reading comes from Paul's letter to the Church in Rome. In Chapter's 9 through 11, Paul states his most sincere concern that his Israelite brothers and sisters might come to understand that salvation comes by grace – through faith – and not by performing the works of the Law. Here – in Chapter 10 – Paul explains the rationale for this Gospel of Grace....

Brothers and sisters,

my heart's desire – and prayer to God for them – is that they may be saved. I can testify that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened.

For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God,
and seeking to establish their own,
they have not submitted to God's righteousness.

For Christ is the end of the law,

so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law,
that 'the person who does these things will live by them.'

But the righteousness that comes from faith says,
 ‘Do not say in your heart, “Who will ascend into heaven?” ’
 (that is, to bring Christ down)
 ‘or “Who will descend into the abyss?” ’
 (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).
But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart’
 (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim);
 because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord,
 and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead,
 you will be saved.
For one believes with the heart and so is justified,
 and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.
The scripture says, ‘No one who believes in him will be put to shame.’
For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek;
 the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him.
 For, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’
But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed?
 And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard?
 And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?
 And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?
As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’
 But not all have obeyed the good news;
 for Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed our message?’
So faith comes from what is heard,
 and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.

SECOND SCRIPTURE READING Matthew 14:22-33

*In the 14th chapter of Matthew’s Gospel, we learn of the death of John the Baptist.
And – when the disciples inform Jesus –
 he gets in a boat, and withdraws to a deserted place, by himself.
But – when the crowds hear of it, they follow Jesus –
 resulting in what we know as “the feeding of the five thousand.”
Today’s reading directly follows that miraculous event....*

Immediately, he – that is, Jesus – made the disciples get into the boat,
 and go on ahead to the other side – while he dismissed the crowds.
And – after he had dismissed the crowds –
 he went up the mountain – by himself – to pray.
When evening came, he was there alone,
 but – by this time, the boat – battered by the waves, was far from the land –
 for the wind was against them.
And – early in the morning – he came walking toward them, on the sea.

But – when the disciples saw him walking on the sea – they were terrified,
saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear.
But – immediately – Jesus spoke to them,
and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."
Peter answered him,
"Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."
He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water,
and came toward Jesus.
But – when he noticed the strong wind – he became frightened,
and – beginning to sink – he cried out, "Lord, save me!"
Jesus immediately reached out his hand – and caught him –
saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"
When they got into the boat, the wind ceased.
And those in the boat worshiped him,
saying, "Truly, you are the Son of God."

SERMON "Faith for the Future: Christ Comes to Us!"

As we noted, today's **Scripture reading** is from the **Gospel of Matthew** –
as we continue in **Year A**, of the **Lectionary Cycle**.

And – *perhaps for the first time* – we have some **defensible speculation**,
about *what might have been unique* about its **author**.

For "***inquiring minds***," that speculation comes to us – with thanks –
from the *video series*, **The Chosen** – which premiered in late 2017.

And, while the series presents some backstory of Jesus' ministry –
details that go beyond what the four gospels explicitly tell us –
nothing appears to contradict the overall story of Jesus,
as related in the New Testament.

Indeed – if nothing else –
the series makes Jesus more accessible to today's audiences
than any, previous, on-screen portrayal of him.

For their part, the **Gospels** *do not give us a lot of information* about **Matthew** –
except that he was a **tax collector**,
who *got up and immediately left his employment* –
when **Jesus** called him.

But the writers of **The Chosen** – however – decided to depict **Matthew** –
played by actor **Paras Patel** – as somewhere on the *autism spectrum*.

That is, he has some of the *tics...*, *anxieties...*,
and *difficulties reading social cues* –
sometimes seen in **persons with autism**.

But – nevertheless – he is *quite able to function* in **society**.

He is *exceptionally good* with **figures**, has an **excellent memory**,
and is **very attentive to details**.

Now – here – we should note the writers’ *apparent rationale*:

- * The gospel – attributed to Matthew –
is longer, and more detailed than Mark’s,
and contains minutia – such as genealogies.

 - * His gospel includes more of what Jesus taught –
including the Sermon on the Mount – than does Mark –
which scholars believe was the first of the four gospels
to be written.
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In any event, there is a *post-ascension scene* – in one episode of **The Chosen** –
that shows the **apostle John** *preparing to write his gospel*.

John *is quizzing* each of his **disciple colleagues** –
about *their memories of their time* with **Jesus** – and *taking notes*.

He has been asking them to tell *when they first saw Jesus*.

And – when he *puts that question* to **Matthew** – the former tax collector says,
“It was the fourth morning of the third week of the month of Adar,
sometime during the second hour.”

John responds, “*It doesn’t have to be precise.*”

“*Why wouldn’t it need to be precise?*” — **Matthew** says.

And then – *apparently referring to his answer,*
or perhaps – even – *to the gospel account he himself is writing –*
Matthew adds, “*Mine will be precise.*”

For a case in point, let’s look at **our reading for today** –
about **Jesus**, *walking on the Sea of Galilee*.

It is clear that **Matthew** has **Mark’s** *record of this same incident* before him –
the **vocabulary is similar**, in **both accounts**.

But, *according to those who have studied town locations –*
in the **Palestine of Jesus’ day** –
it becomes obvious that **Mark’s account**
has what might be a *geography error* –
regarding *where* the **boat was headed**.

The *upshot* is that – when **meticulous Matthew** wrote *his* version –
he *corrected* that **error**.

And – as *further evidence* of **Matthew’s precision** –
consider *his preceding account* – of the **feeding of the 5,000**.

While *all four gospels tell* of **Jesus feeding 5,000**,
it is only **meticulous Matthew** –
who adds the “*besides women and children*” –
to the *number being fed*.

And – *concerning our passage* –
Mark and **John** *also narrate* the **walking-on-water event**.

But, it is only **Matthew** –
who adds the part about **Peter** *getting out of the boat,*
and *attempting to walk* to **Jesus**.

And – *then* – of **Jesus** saving **Peter**, when **Peter** *starts to sink*.

In *adding this* to *his* account,

Matthew moves it from a “**Wow! Jesus can walk on water**” amazement,
to a *story about faith and trust*.

And, *only* **Matthew** includes the **statement**
that the *waves were battering the boat*.

That’s a clue that there is a *deeper story* behind the *surface one*.

One of the **most common symbols** for the **early church** was a **boat** –
or a **ship** – *on the water*.

And, it was *often pictured* – *not* on **calm water** – *but* on **rough seas**.

In fact, the word “**nave**,” which – *architecturally* –
refers to the **main portion** of a **church sanctuary**,
comes from the **Latin** word *navis* – which means “**ship**.”

And – as *people facing persecution*, because *they were part of the church* –
Matthew’s readers understood that *their ship* – the *church* –
was *being battered, quite severely*.

Indeed, the **original Greek** reads that the **boat**
was “**being tortured**” – by the **waves**!

Then – *after* **Jesus** and **Peter** *get into the boat*, and the *wind ceases* –
Matthew says that the *disciples worshiped Jesus*,
and said to him, “**Truly, you are the son of God**.”

That reaction – *however* – is *quite different* than what **Mark** – and **John** – report.

In **Mark** – *far from declaring Jesus’ divine identity, and worshiping him –*
the **disciples** are described as *being astounded,*
and *having their hearts “hardened.”*

That probably meant that their *full understanding* of the **meaning** –
of what they had just witnessed, **Jesus** walking on water –
was *blocked*.

John’s version merely says that *they reached the land –*
toward which they had been aiming.

Now, to be fair – as we read the **span of the gospels** –
it is uncertain *whether the disciples recognized Jesus’ identity –*
as the **Messiah** – *this early*.

So, *it is possible* that **Matthew** –
in reporting the **disciples** *worshiping Jesus*, as the **Son of God** –
was drawing *something that happened – later on –*
back, into *this – earlier – incident*.

It is as if **meticulous Matthew** – with the **20/20 vision** of **hindsight** –
is saying to his readers:

“That Jesus is the Son of God is what we should have realized –
after seeing him walk on water –
and so that is how I am narrating the story, now.”

And – *in so doing* – **Matthew** *transforms the incident:*
from *simply a slice of Jesus’ biography,*
into a *story meant to encourage persecuted Christians.*

That is, to cling to Jesus – as Lord – despite whatever hardships they are facing.

And if *that is – in fact – the case*, it *does not* make **Matthew** a **bad historian**;
rather, it makes him a **good preacher**:

Matthew's *ultimate objective* – his *overall purpose* in writing –
was *not* to be a **biographer of Jesus**,
or a **historian of Christianity**,
but *an evangelist* – *for Jesus, and the gospel*.

Well – since **Matthew** *has* given us a **more meticulous account** –
let's *look more closely at these two*,
who *walked on water*, that early morning.

There were the **disciples** – *out to sea*, in *more ways than one* –
with the **wind** *blowing against them*, and the **waves** *battering the boat*.

And – *at this point* – **Matthew** *says nothing* about them *being afraid*.

In fact, some of them – *perhaps four* – were **seasoned fishermen**.
And so, being out on **rough water** – in **strong wind** –
was actually *par for the course*.

That is – as long as they *stayed in the boat*,
and *worked together* with the **sails**, and the **rudder**, and the **oars** –
they had a *reasonable chance of coming through the storm* –
and *that*, without *too much damage*.

Rather – what *scares the wits* out of them –
is seeing *someone walking toward them* – on the **water**.

And – so – their **first thought** is that they are **seeing a ghost!**

But – then – **Jesus** speaks to them:
“Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”

Here, **all three** of the **gospel writers** – *who record this incident* – *agree*:

What **Jesus** said *is translated* into **English** as ***“It is I.”***

In the **Greek**, however, what **Jesus** said is *ego eimi*, which is ***“I AM.”***

So, what he actually said was: ***“Take heart, I AM; do not be afraid.”***

“**I AM**” – of course – is the name **God** *self-revealed*, when –
from the **burning bush** –
God called **Moses**, to lead the **people of Israel** out of **Egypt**.

On *that occasion*, **Moses** had asked **God** *how to identify* the **One** –
the **One** who *was sending him* –
to lead the **Children of Israel** *out of bondage*. (Exodus 3:14)

So – *here* – **Jesus** is using the **Divine Name** to announce *his* presence.

I AM is here, *trampling victoriously* over the **waves**.

In these brief – but charged **words**,
and in the **awesome vision** that *unfolds before* the **disciples**,
Jesus is identifying himself *with* – and *as* – **God**,
the **liberator** and **redeemer of Israel**,
who *is* – at the *same time* – the **Creator of the World**,
and the **Victor over Chaos**.

So – in quoting what **Jesus** said to the **disciples** –
all three gospel writers were *acknowledging something*
about **Jesus’ divinity**.

Only in **Matthew’s version** – however – do the **disciples** seem *to pick up on it*,
worshiping him as the **Son of God**.

But – *now* – we turn to *the other water-walker*: **Peter**.

In **Matthew**, it *is not* **Jesus** who *introduces the idea* of **Peter** walking on water.

Rather, it is **Peter**, who says,
“**Lord**, *if it is you*, *command me to come to you on the water.*”

And – *in response* – **Jesus** says, “***Come***” –
giving **Peter** *permission*, but *not pushing him* to try it.

That’s an important difference:

While *there is some* **faith** involved –
in **Peter’s** attempt – to *treat water like solid ground* –
there is also a *good bit of* **skepticism**.

Peter is saying – in effect –
“***IF IT REALLY IS YOU, Jesus, make me able to walk on water.***
Prove that you truly are Jesus.”

In other words, if **Peter’s faith** were stronger,
he’d have *stayed in the boat* –
and believed that it was **Jesus** *who was coming* to him.

Well, what about us – when we are out to sea?

If *we* want to discover any **message** – *for ourselves* – in **this story**, *what is it?*

To be sure, *it is not*:
“***If we have enough faith,***
we will be able to do things as miraculous as Jesus did.”

Rather, it is believing that – *despite the battering* our **own lives** take,
and *how much deep water* we **find ourselves in** –
Christ comes to us in *our daily lives*.

Don’t we – *sometimes* – feel as if we are **living in a storm**:
where **navigation** – read: *decision-making* – is **risky**,
and **trouble** seems to *come in waves*?

In such times, the *last thing* we may *expect is to see* is **Jesus** coming *toward us*.

And – even *if we do sense* what might be **his presence** –
we may, like **Peter**, *want to ask him*:

“If it really is you, let us – miraculously – walk away from our problems.”

*Seldom – however – do we get that **kind of solution**.*

And – so – **Matthew the meticulous** might tell us
that *it is better to ask **Christ** to join us* in our **shaky crafts**,
on the **stormy sea of life**.

That is – *if we trust **Jesus** to sail with us –*
*and show us how to deal with the **waves that batter our ships** –*
*we will enjoy **Jesus’ presence now**.*

*And, we will – ultimately – land safely, on **heaven’s shore**.*

Thanks be to God! Amen.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH (*Unison*)

Adapted from the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647)

The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself, which he through the eternal Spirit once offered up unto God, has fully satisfied the justice of his Father; and purchased not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father has given to him.

To all those for whom Christ has purchased redemption, he does certainly communicate the same, making intercession for them, and revealing to them – in and by the Word – the mysteries of salvation. He persuades them by his Spirit to believe and obey, and governs their hearts by his Word and Spirit, overcoming all their enemies by his mighty power and wisdom, as befits God’s gracious will toward them through him. Thanks be to God! Amen.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION (*Unison*)

Gracious God, we cannot deceive you with the appearance of generosity; you know how we manage the wealth entrusted to our care. Help us to know the joy of sharing from the abundance you provide. And, help us to trust you – even when we feel that we do not have enough. May what we offer here provide a helpful ministry to many. And, may what we offer to our families, friends, and co-laborers tomorrow also be blessed as part of our ministry. Amen.

CHARGE AND BENEDICTION

Friends, just as God came to us – in the incarnation – to save us....

And Jesus came to the aid of the disciples –
on that night of raging winds, and turbulent seas....

Jesus is ready – and willing – to come us!

We just have to recognize him as “our Lord and our God!”

Let us receive the Lord’s benediction....