

**“ Walking With a Reverent Air, Everything is Holy Now”**

**Psalm 77: 11-20 John 6:15-20**

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Our story today from the Gospel of John offers us the familiar image of Jesus walking on the sea. This is an image with which most Sunday school children are familiar. It is also one referred to cynically and with humor to describe how exaggeratedly “good” or “righteous” another is believed to be, as in, “Yeah, they think that guy walks on water.” When we enter the Bible story, it is almost evening. The sky is growing dark and the sea choppy. The disciples get in a boat to set out for Capernaum without Jesus. After going some distance, they look up to see Jesus walking on the water toward them and they are frightened. Jesus replies, “It is I. Do not be afraid, “ but before they can take him into the boat, the boat reaches the shore.

This story is also found in the Gospel of Matthew and Mark. In John’s version, Jesus does not get into the boat, he simply identifies himself and as the boat reaches the other side, the story abruptly ends. John’s account, due to its brevity and lack of development is felt to be the oldest, with the other two Gospels adding additional details from other stories to make additional points they consider to be important. In Matthew, not only Jesus, but Peter, following Jesus’ lead, is also reported to have walked on the sea. In Mark, it is suggested that Jesus intends to pass by the disciples and meet them on the land. In both Matthew and Mark, the disciples think they are seeing a ghost when they see Jesus and these stories add that Jesus calmed the storm and then got into the boat.

But back to John’s version. There are two Greek words found here which hold a key to the story’s meaning for John, “ego eimi.” When the disciples see him walking on the water, they are terrified and Jesus addresses their fear with the words, “ego eimi,” which is translated, “It is I,” or, more simply, “I Am.” These two telling words

are more than a quick identification—they are a profound theological statement. Jesus walks on the water so that his disciples can experience who he is. In these two words he is saying, “Before you walks not a mere king, or a prophet or a miracle worker but one who bears the Divine name. “I Am.”

John contains many of these identifying phrases in his Gospel. These are referred to as the “I am” sayings of the Christ, “I am the bread of life, I am the light of the world, I am the true vine, I am the good shepherd, I am the resurrection and the light.” John proclaims, with the use of these simple phrases, that the same God who was at work revealing himself to the Israelites in the exodus from Egypt, is now again at work in human history revealing himself in Jesus who is the Christ. In Exodus 3, Moses asks God, “If I come to the Israelites and say to them, the God of your ancestors has sent me to you and they ask me, What is his name? What shall I say to them?” God replies, “I AM WHO I AM.” He continues, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, “I AM has sent me to you.”

This story of Jesus walking on the sea also calls to mind the crossing of the Red Sea in Exodus. Here, in the story of Israel’s dramatic liberation from Egypt, Yahweh, (whose name, in Hebrew, translates, “I Am”) holds back the rushing water so the Israelites can cross and then causes the water to flow back to cover the Egyptians. God says to Moses that by this deed, the... “Egyptians shall know that **I Am** the Lord.” Here this ancient story, like John’s story of Jesus’ walk upon the water, speaks the name of God through the direct experience of Godli-ness. I Am. Here, I Am. Our reading from Psalms, this morning, is a later poetic description of this Exodus, this crossing of the Sea, “Your way was through the Sea, your path the mighty waters. Yet, your footprints were unseen.”

Though looking carefully at the texts as they have been passed down to us, and exploring their historical and literary similarities and differences can yield good

information, we must resist the assumption that an entirely rational and scholarly approach is the only one worthy of us as 21<sup>st</sup> Century Christians. We must not allow ourselves to be herded into one of two opposing Christian camps: The rational scholars on the one hand or the faithful literalists on the other. Scholarly information-- historical and literary analysis--can enrich the meaning of scripture, but if taken as the source of all truth it can quickly dry up the spirit. It can turn living truth into dead hypotheses. On the other hand, dogged literalism which might seem to protect the Christian faith from the doubters and detractors of its power and authority, can drive one to a point of such absurdity that finally his or her belief can no longer be sustained and then the Christian faith really loses its influence over us both personally and as nation and a world.

In his book, *Mystical Christianity: A Psychological Commentary on the Gospel of John*, author, John Sanford, says this,

Generally speaking, New Testament scholars appear to be bothered by the irrational. For instance, when it comes to the teachings of Jesus, a concerted effort is made by scholars to “trace” his teachings back to historical sources. The idea seems to be that what Jesus taught about the kingdom of God, his parables, his radical ethic, must have come from antecedent sources, such as the Essenes or the Old Testament. The idea that Jesus could have arrived at his message through his own process and via his own relationship to God seems to make rationally minded people uncomfortable. Psychologically, we know that gifted people arrive at new insights and knowledge via the unconscious. Jesus, as we have already noted, was a person who could read the unconscious directly...Jesus’ psychological insights were startlingly new.

Sanford has an equal skepticism toward the Biblical literalists’ approach describing how, in their effort to “hang onto biblical essentials,” the literalists find themselves in the position of having to deny all the exquisitely beautiful and profound understandings of modern science and of claiming that all perspectives which vary from their own are simply in error or even sinfully wrong. This stubborn stand gets in their way of broadening and deepening the faith and one’s experience of life.

Having trust in the possibility that Jesus', or any spiritual seeker's insights can be startlingly new and true is exciting and wonderful. It makes the world around us and within us seem like both a laboratory and a library for rich discovery—not the sterile, cold laboratory of the scientist, or the dusty, chaotic room full of the old books of the academic, but the rich wonderful world of human experience, of human community, of deepest soul and loftiest spirit, where true learning takes place. Laboratory, library and life, all three together can yield their secrets and lessons and blessings.

The Gospel of John contains seven stories, which he calls signs, in which Jesus comes to people *where* they are and *as* they are; broken, crippled, physically and emotionally blinded, hungry, frightened and adrift on choppy waters, and he heals them. He says, I AM, “ego eimi.” You, too, exist in this being of God. Know this with your bodies and your hearts and your minds. Jesus does not just want to evoke in us some sort of abstract commitment to our faith. Not, “Okay, okay, I get it, you are God, I believe” but, “Oh my God, I AM, I am whole, we are, together, whole and connected, we live in this great cosmic I AM of your being.” Our direct experience of this potency of the spirit, in which we **already** live, yields an understanding that is as startlingly new as it is profound. It has the potential to bring what is dead back to life. It holds the power to turn an upside down world right side up. And what is the path to this life changing depth of understanding? It is the humble path of our brokenness; our thirst (the wedding at Cana), our innocent yearning for love and guidance (the healing of the Nobleman's son), our crippled-ness (the healing of the paralytic), our hunger (the feeding of the five thousand), our fear (the walking on the water), our limited vision and perspective (the healing of the blind man), our dead spirits (the raising of Lazarus).

If at times we could practice the art of waking up our senses and allowing them their natural innocence, if we could temporarily release ourselves from our need for

controlling every situation we enter, if we could let ourselves just feel what we feel without our mental critic immediately correcting its worthiness or its danger, could we see Jesus walking on the water, or taste the new wedding wine? If we weren't so afraid to love and be loved, if the unknown inspired us rather than intimidated us, what visions might visit us with their life altering truth? Could we walk with new boldness and see with new insight? Could we find a way to feed our own emptiness or literally, to address the great needs of the people of this planet?

I read recently that there is Gaelic word for "to teach," that also means "to sing over." The Irish feel that we can learn deeply by hearing the song. Can stories teach us by somehow "singing over us?" I like that thought. "Jesus walking upon the Sea", "The Exodus and the Parting of the Red Sea," and "The Wedding in Cana" are all songs with much to teach us. Peter Mayer wrote a song called, "Holy Now," which my daughters have sung here at church in the past. In it, one man sings of his perspective on miracles. It goes something like this.

"When I was a boy each week, on Sunday we would go to church. Listen to the preacher speak. He would read the Holy Word. Consecrate the holy bread...everyone would kneel and bow, Today the only difference is everything is holy now.

When I was in Sunday school ,we would learn about the time, Moses split the sea in two....Jesus made the water wine, I remember feeling sad that miracles don't happen still, but now I can't keep track 'cause everything's a miracle.

Mayer sings over us and teaches us that a miracle is not an isolated bizarre suspension of the natural events of life. It is rather the passionate experience of awe toward all of life—of the awareness of living in the great "I AM."

There are, no doubt, many ways of knowing, that, when probed, will yield their secrets and lessons and blessings—secrets and lessons and blessings which are startlingly profound and radically new.