

Gospel and Sermon Transcript - 11th Sunday After Pentecost - August 9, 2026

00:14

this season of Pentecost, there are scenes from the lives of the disciples

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and from the life of Jesus that we can look through the lens of what does this

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teach the church. And today is another one of those days. I'm going to ask you to

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ponder a question. Now don't worry, you don't have to get up and give an answer,

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you don't have to turn to your neighbor and report anything. This is just your

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question for you to ponder today and maybe a little bit past, but here's your

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question. What is one of the most important life lessons that you've

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learned? And you might think about how it was that you learned that lesson. I'll

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give you a bit of justification over why I'm asking you that question without

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without trying to give you the whole sermon.

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And that would be that the disciples end up

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receiving one of the most difficult of the lessons

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that Jesus has to teach them.

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So, I'll leave that there,

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and we'll talk about it in a few more minutes.

02:17

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the 14th chapter.

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Glory to you, oh Lord.

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Jesus made the disciples get into a boat and go on ahead to the other side of the Sea of Galilee,

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while he dismissed the crowds.

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And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up to the Mount by himself to pray.

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When evening came, he was there alone.

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But by this time, the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them.

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And early in the morning, Jesus came walking toward them on the sea.

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But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!"

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And they cried out in fear.

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But immediately, Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I.

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Do not be afraid."

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Peter answered, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."

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Jesus said, "Come."

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So Peter got out of the boat and started walking on the water and came toward Jesus.

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But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened and beginning to sink.

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He cried out, "Lord, save me!"

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And Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You have

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little faith.

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Why did you doubt?"

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And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

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And those in the boat worshiped Him, saying, "Truly, you are the Son of God, the gospel

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of our Lord."

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Won't you be seated?

The Sermon

04:29

and peace to you. Have you ever noticed that many church buildings are designed to look

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like ships, kind of upside down? Anybody ever notice that? There might be a reason for that

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And it certainly teaches us something.

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And what about the life lesson?

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The one that I've asked you to think about.

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Again, don't worry, I'm not going to ask you to get up and report your findings.

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I'm not going to ask you to turn to your neighbour.

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But hold on to that life's lesson.

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What circumstances presented the lesson?

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is a consultant for aging in Washington DC who is also a pastor, the Reverend

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Dr. Zaina Jacques. She frequently presents at the Chautauqua Institute and she

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works with older adults and she has asked this question time and again and

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she has paid attention over many years to the responses and she's discovered

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that in less than 5% of the responses that the life lesson learned happened in good times.

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In 95+% of the occurrences, the lesson was learned with a diploma from the School of

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hard knocks, or as a pastor friend of mine likes to say, "right after you got the 2x4 shampoo."

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The lesson the disciples learn, and that we learn, I think is one of the hardest of all

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today. Matthew uses some language to tip his hand a bit to suggest what the

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stakes are besides the physical in this lesson the disciples learn. For example,

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the word about buffeting the boat, the same word often used by historians to

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described the way ruthless emperors would torture people. The boat itself

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tortured the people inside afraid.

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The disciples tried everything. They rode with all of their might until their

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strength failed, they applied their considerable knowledge of sailing and it

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failed. All they could do was hunker down and let the waves torment. And it's in

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that fourth watch were early in the morning, that fourth watch that Jesus arrives.

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The timing of that is similar to that where the children of Israel get the word that it's

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time to evacuate to freedom.

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It's about that same time on the third day when an angel rolls a stone away from the

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tomb that holds the crucified Jesus. In this fourth watch, Jesus walks on the

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sea, and there's another word to unpack. Not just the water, but the sea, which

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was thought to be almost a living thing. In fact, it was thought to be governed

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by the spiritual influences, these chaotic forces like the Chaos Monster known as Mot or Tiamat in

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some languages, Neptune, or as somebody reminded me today, if you like the movie The Pirates of the

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Caribbean, that whole series, you remember the Kraken? The Kraken controls the sea as many of

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of these other personages do, meaning harm to people. It's all about the chaos.

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And here's Jesus walking on the very spine of chaos. And so the disciples can

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be forgiven for a minute for thinking that they see a ghost, because these

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tempestuous seas are all about spiritual sorts of struggle, as well as the actual

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physical sorts of struggle. And as Jesus arrives, he has already done a God thing

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and he will do another. He uses the words that God uses when he presents

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himself to Moses, "I am." "It is I," Jesus says.

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Returning to that image of Jesus walking through and upon chaos, you might think

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of the original stories from those poems in Genesis about how God created it all.

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That in the very beginning there was nothing but chaos. And that God

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intervenes by stepping into it. And from silence comes the speech where God

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determines that the chaos will become order, harmony, and beauty. And with each

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iteration of the poem you might remember those words, "And God said that it was

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good." That's not just, "Eh, it's not bad for government work." But God exulting in the beauty

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and the wonder of creation at every step. And so as Jesus arrives to be with the

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disciples, there's a bit of a reprise of creation at work there.

11:04

And what is the response from the people in the swamped boat? Matthew likes to

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tell us that the disciples are often like a stand-in for the church, for the rest of

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us. And Simon Peter is the stand-in for all the disciples, so he says what we maybe are

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thinking, and he does the thing that maybe we hesitate to do. But he really wants

to

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know who he's dealing with. And so he asks if it is you, Jesus. "Let me pitch myself

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over the side of the boat." Parenthetically, no self-respecting sailor would do this ever.

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It's surely death. And so the risk is bold for Simon Peter. It's an act of faith just

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for him to ask let alone hop over the gunnels into the water. And for a second it looks

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like it just might work. Until he sinks and he can barely gurgle out, "Lord save me."

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And immediately Jesus of course hauls him up and chucks him back in the boat kind of

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like a stunned mullet and asks him, "Why did you doubt?"

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Well, I think the answer is obvious to us. It's not...

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Who wouldn't?

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Father Richard Rohrer talks about the nature of faith.

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It's not necessarily being the opposite of doubt,

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but more the opposite of control.

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Simon Peter, I think, wanted to control the terms of the experiment, and it failed.

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There was no control, and that is the difficult life lesson for the church, for Simon Peter, for the community of Matthew's time, and for Jesus' small disciple community.

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We would like to control things that we just can't.

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And so what's the lesson?

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Well, we can rule out a couple and let's do that.

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Try harder.

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No. The disciples tried everything.

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How about, well, just focus your faith?

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I've preached a couple of sermons like this before.

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I think I would walk them back and offer a retraction.

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Because focusing the faith is still about us, right?

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And there are times when there just isn't anything left in the tank.

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And so the lesson really is crystallized for us in the words that the sea-soaked Simon Peter

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Sputters when he says, "Save me, save me."

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That is the call to faith.

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That is the call that when control fails, which it will inevitably, that is our cry.

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Here we have a preview of again the most painful lesson that we all have to learn.

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It is a lesson that involves death and resurrection.

15:00

We certainly can't control death.

15:04

And we don't control resurrection either.

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These things all fall into God's purview, not ours.

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[music]

15:21

And so the lesson for the church is there are going to be times it is inevitable

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when we give our all and it just isn't going to work.

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And so, it's really a matter of the one who lifts us up.

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The one who, and this is part of the lesson, who draws alongside us at such times,
who

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walks with us, who saves us.

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And so the faithful response of the church, as we pray, a prayer that Jesus taught
is

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to echo with maybe even the same sense of urgency that soggy Simon Peter shouts to Jesus

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when he shouts, "Save us," or as we pray, "Deliver us from evil."

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And these days we like to punctuate that with the assurance at the end of that prayer, for

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yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory.

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Amen.

16:49

[Music]

17:09

♪ My highm

17:39

♪ How can I be part of you ♪

17:47

♪ Oh, what a wonderful story ♪

17:51

♪ When I heard the noise of you ♪

17:56

♪ And I know what you've seen ♪

18:00

♪ And I know I've been through ♪

18:05

♪ O star, can you see by my throne ♠

19:02

[Music]

