

# FAITH & DOUBT

WEEK 2: JAN 15-21, 2023

God of our sometimes mixed and confused thoughts and feelings, thank you for your companionship in all circumstances.

Help us to trust in you for clarity. Guide us, we pray, to use our doubts for growth that honors You.

Amen

## TITLE: RELIGION'S HIDDEN NEED

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 14:22-33

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

## GETTING STARTED

- Welcome each other.
- Inquire as to anyone who is missing. Is follow-up needed?
- If you wish, share any thoughts, questions, or reactions from the sermon last week. If you recall them, what were your takeaways?

## SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Be prepared for multiple uses of symbolism in this sermon, that is, concrete events also have abstract meanings. For example, Pastor Rob translates his story of being physically locked in a church to the spiritual and emotional experience of being "locked" in a church. Have you ever felt confined in a church by ideas, beliefs, prejudices, or values? What happened?
- The Scripture story of Jesus walking on water also uses symbolism to help us examine faith, doubt, and the church. Pastor Rob suggests we can apply the feelings associated with being on a boat in stormy waters to our spiritual lives within the church. Though geography may limit our actual experiences with boats on significant bodies of water, if possible, what personal memories come to mind that help you to resonate with the feelings of the disciples? What do you remember? Have the meanings of what happened changed over time?
- Is a boat as symbol of the church new to you? Pastor Rob details examples of how pervasive this symbol is. Did any stand out for you?
- What details from the Scripture story about the boat on a stormy sea symbolize the church? How do details such as being out in a boat at night alone inform our thinking about the church? In what ways is the contemporary church going through "stormy seas"?
- Pastor Rob contrasts current issues in the church in terms of bad news and good news. How does symbolism in the story of Jesus walking on water inform our thinking about the church today in terms of bad news and good news?
- He also suggests this story includes a consequential event supporting the symbolism of the boat. Do you recall what it is?
- Though perhaps not often openly discussed, doubt plays a significant role in both the Scripture story and in the narratives of our lives. Pastor Rob poses these questions for thought--
  - When did doubt first appear in the Scripture story?
  - Have you ever felt that to get closer to Jesus you will have to leave the church?
  - Have you ever felt like the church is a boat and if you don't leave it your faith will die?
- React to Pastor Rob's assertion that "faith must always be bigger than the community where faith is formed." Think symbolically: What are signs that "the boat has sprung a leak"? What would you say are signs that "the boat is in good condition"?
- Clarifying the distinction between doubt and complaint is important because it has implications for taking actions to grow in faith. Give some examples of each and what Pastor Rob suggests we do. This might be viewed as the first step in a short algorithm or decision tree--a help during what can be a confusing and stressful situation.
- The next step might be considering the examples of doubt in the story and their symbolic meaning for us--
  - Peter has doubts about staying in the boat./Should I stay in a church or leave?
  - Peter doubts if Jesus is real, so he tests it by leaving the boat./If WE can control the storms, we don't need a Savior who does.
  - Peter doubts himself when he starts to sink and cries, "Lord, save me."/ We are dependent on a Lord who comes to us.
- According to Professor Craddock, what is the main point of this Bible story? Why is it vitally important? What is the temptation?
- Brian McLaren talked about how the church kept him from leaving the church. How was this?
- If you were listening carefully, you may have caught Pastor Rob's explanation of the sermon title "Religion's Hidden Need." What is the need? What happens when it evolves? Why does it matter?
- On this day that honors Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birth, Pastor Rob points out that King was a bigger doubter than most people realize. What happened to his uncertainties?
- The conclusion of the sermon offers a big takeaway about personal doubts. What is it?

## PRAYER REQUESTS

