

11th Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 14, Year A

A Sermon Preached by Fr Ian M Delinger

on August 9, 2026

Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28 / Psalm 105:1-6, 16-22, 45b / Romans 10:5-15 / Matthew 14:22-33

*Let us listen to what the Lord God is saying,
for God is speaking peace to us faithful people
and to those who turn their hearts to the Lord.*

Between the story of Joseph and his brothers in Genesis, and the story of Peter and Jesus walking on Water in Matthew's Gospel, we are confronted with the opposite ends of the spectrum of trust. Joseph is at the very far end of the trust spectrum, having no reason whatsoever not to trust his brothers. Then, in the greatest betrayal anyone could experience, Joseph's brothers sell him to a band of traders. Peter is on the other end of the spectrum where, despite following Jesus' command to get out of the boat, he has no trust that Jesus will keep him from sinking and therefore begins to sink. And we're left here to figure out how this influences our spiritual journeys.

Faith and trust are necessary aspects of human life. Without either, we would live very troubled lives. For example, we have to have faith that tomorrow will come, and we have to trust that the conditions for us to live to see tomorrow will persist into tomorrow. We have to believe that our system of traffic laws is established to protect as many people as possible, including us. And we have to trust that everyone will follow the traffic laws so that all will be safe.

But it's more difficult with people.

- Are you or someone you know the kind of person to not believe that any particular system will benefit anyone? Society is too individualistic that you need to look out only for yourself?
- Are you or someone you know the type of person who doesn't trust anyone? It could have been because you have experienced too much

betrayal in your own life, or it could be that you have a deep-seeded belief that you are the only one whom you will ever truly be able to trust.

- Are you or someone you know like Peter, whose faith is firm, but whose trust gives in to doubt quite easily?

If any of those sound like you, then you're not odd or unique. You are in the company of many people in this world.

And sometimes – oftentimes – it's more difficult with God. You first have to believe that God exists, believe that God cares about you, and believe that God has the power to change your life. That's what faith is. Then you have to go that step further and *trust* that God *will* actually express love to you and help you change your life. I think Joseph trusted God so deeply that he could withstand immense betrayal, and I think Peter, in this story and all the way to the Crucifixion, was riddled with trust issues.

If you read the Gospel story carefully, you will see that it is *the appearance of Jesus* that frightens the disciples, not the storm.

*When they saw Jesus walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying,
“It is a ghost!”*

Why were they terrified of their friend and leader? Not one of them skipped a beat when Jesus commanded, “Follow me”. So, why are they afraid now? Because they might get wet and drown? Or because they didn't actually trust Jesus in that moment and feared humiliation? Along our own journeys, are we afraid of the challenge, or are we afraid that we might disappoint Jesus? Are we afraid that we will disappoint ourselves, or that we will disappoint someone else? It's often easier to do nothing than to risk failure. On that note: notice that Peter was the only one who got out of the boat, the only one who took any risk at all.

Nowhere in the Genesis story does Joseph express any fear. It may be a casual omission, but for a comparison and contrast of faith and trust from today's

readings, it seems significant and relevant. Never mind being thrown down a dried-up well, being sold off to traveling traders would be frightening! Why didn't the author acknowledge that? Are we to assume that Joseph's faith in God was so strong that he trusted that he would be OK? The omitted part of Genesis 37 is Joseph's dreams that the sheaves of wheat, the sun, the moon and the stars bowed down to him, which made his brothers hate him even more. Maybe he didn't recognize what his brothers did as betrayal, but as a new opportunity or challenge to be tackled. Maybe Joseph knew deep within himself that God was already working in him more than he could ask or imagine, so being sold off to traders must just be part of God's plan!

I once was in a conversation about problem solving. There are those types of people who come up with a plan and follow it. If it needs tweaked along the way, they make slight modifications. If the desired outcome is achieved, great! Job done! If the desired outcome isn't achieved, they go back to the point at which the plan failed and modify the plan, learning from their prior mistakes. What's more, the "mistakes" might be seen as learning opportunities, moments of gathering data and information that inform the new direction to be taken. That is a scientist's way of approaching problem solving. It's actually a descriptive definition of the scientific method.

There are others who approach problem solving with a *series* of plans, scrutinized at all angles before step 1 is even attempted. Is there a Plan B, Plan C and Plan D? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each plan? They need to be assured that there will be no surprises, no failure. Mistakes are deemed failure. These are engineers.

When taken in context, *both* approaches to problem solving, both *personalities* are needed. From an engineer's perspective, and rightly so, the plane has to fly on the first attempt! *And* the repeated testing temperament of the scientist is needed to know at what temperature and windspeed and bird flock size the windshield is going to withstand.

But we cannot engineer the flaws out of our faith journey. We don't know when we're going to be thrown down a well, sold to traders, or be asked to walk on water. What we have to do is trust that we will eventually reach the outcome we are looking for even if we have a few doubts and make a few mistakes along the way. Can we have blind trust like Joseph but have just enough doubt to not get hurt along the way? Can we start our journey full of doubt, like Peter, but have enough trust to stay on the journey? Can we trust that God will work with us to discover the outcome that is best for us? And ultimately, can we trust that the Kingdom is at the end of the journey?

What both stories tell us is that Jesus often calls us into stormy waters, and if we accept the invitation or heed the command, we have to trust that Jesus will not let us drown. When we fall in to doubt and begin to sink, we have to be confident enough to shout, "*Lord, save me*" and trust that Jesus will reach out his hand.

Last week – in the context of the story of the Feeding of the 5,000 – I posited that it is together that the crowd made the miracle, and that whatever miracles we want to accomplish as the St Stephen's Family, we can only accomplish them if we all pitch in. The miracles we want to accomplish are truly a call from Jesus to step out of the boat, then we have to have faith that God is already working in us more than we can ask or imagine and trust that, when we begin to sink, and we will, Jesus will reach out His hand if we call out, "*Lord, save me*". And the same is true of your own personal spiritual journey. You need to step out of the boat once in a while to test your faith, and trust.

We, too, need to step out of the boat and discover the limitations of our faith, and trust. Otherwise, we are passively meandering along a path that we call our spiritual journey, one that has never been tested because we've never had the courage to step out of the boat. When we hear Jesus say, "Come", we take it as an *invitation* that we politely decline instead of the *command* that it actually is. Our fear of failure prevents us from deepening our relationship with God through what Jesus has to offer us.

And faith and trust involve prayer. Faith that God is everything we say God is, and trust that God will do everything with think God will do require prayer. But we have to remember what CS Lewis told us, and that is that we don't pray in order to change God; we pray so that God will change us! In other words, we are not passive voyeurs of our own spiritual journeys. We are active participants in our relationship with God. By following Jesus' command to get out of the boat, Peter learned the limitations of his faith and trust. *And* he learned that Jesus' power goes beyond the limitations of the world as we understand it. He risked his life, he risked drowning in order to follow Jesus and came to truly believe.

From the perspective of trust, Joseph's story is an exceptional model for our faith. We will hear more about his story in the coming weeks, which today's Psalm succinctly summarized. What we will discover as soon as next week is that his brothers' betrayal did not destroy his trust or his faith. However extraordinary Joseph's faith was, we should be inspired by it.

Paul reminds us that:

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

But he also reminds us that we are to have faith in Jesus' power in the first place when he asks:

How are they to call on one in whom they have not believed?

So, we look to Peter, who is a model for those of us whose faith is not as unwavering as Joseph's. But we have to remember that when we are terrified by what Jesus is asking of us, we will probably have to step out of the boat to truly see the Son of God.