

Sermon Draft

Text: Matthew 14:22–33

Sermon: “Jesus Changes Our Reality”

The last couple of weeks we’ve seen Jesus “changing” a lot of things. He changes hearts and minds and changes nature’s natural responses. E He changes our reality. Water is not supposed to hold people walking. A little lunch is not supposed to feed thousands. In addition to Jesus changing our minds and the natural order of things, the season after Pentecost helps us witness Jesus changing even more: eternal outcomes.

Does this sound familiar? It’s early on in relationships you meet someone, a new family member, a first date, a co-worker new to the place or maybe someone new to church and immediately you like something about her or him. Now we don’t know much about them yet but something grabs our attention, some characteristic they’re kind, they’re hardworking or they are just nice. That’s how things often begin.

We know that there is a lot more to this person but in the beginning, that one quality or thing is enough. For sure, it can go the other way too; maybe we catch someone at a bad time, and unfortunately, we make a quick condemnation. First impressions.

What happens next? If we invest enough time in that person, we will find that she or he is more than one description could cover. Maybe a moment arises that tests that person's mettle, and we realize that someone who always struck you as flighty can bear down or rise to the occasion.

Maybe we walk through the valley of the shadow with someone, and that someone we've always seen as happy breaks into little pieces right before our eyes. Maybe that person entrusted to us his deepest fears or her darkest dreams. In moments like those, we have a couple options: we can try to push the person back to arm's length because we're more comfortable with our caricature, or we might realize that none of us is so easily defined.

Here's the thing: people, by and large, we are not poorly written characters who are always this or always that. Life is, always has been, and always will be more complicated than that. People are more complicated than that. They defy our expectations, because believe it or not, most people's goal in life is not to fit nicely into our little categories and show up to fulfill whatever we need at particular moment. The funny friend has worries. The dependable friend fails people sometimes, even fails us.

The point is, we do the same with Jesus. We define him quickly and simply, and, because of that, sometimes we are frustrated or confused when he's more than that.

Here's an example. Having a conversation with a person sitting in a waiting room. The conversation eventually leads to talking about church stuff. He mentions as we talked how he didn't understand people who went to other churches who often seemed to mourn their faith, to find sadness in their faith.

“At our church,” he said, “we have a giant painting of Jesus, and he’s laughing. That’s the way I like to picture Jesus,” he said. “For me, Jesus is the guy who has fun at parties.”

The more I’ve thought about it, well, I think it’s kind of sad. He didn’t want any image of Jesus that wasn’t a happy one. Yes, Jesus is a guy who sometimes has fun at parties; his first miracle at Cana in Galilee, water into wine, had pretty much zero practical value, other than saving the host a good deal of embarrassment. But as much as Jesus surely had fun, he is also the Man of Sorrows, who weeps outside the tomb of a friend and laments outside Jerusalem that its inhabitants are so utterly lost. He is also that One that goes to Jerusalem, stands trial and is nailed to the cross. Granted the outcome of these events are happy but the image of Jesus hanging on the cross doesn’t bring images of partying.

The more we get to know Jesus, the more we realize that he isn't some poorly written character with no depth, no complication. And if you listened to Matthew today and listened to the Gospel over the course of the last many weeks, we see that.

John the Baptist wasn't sure. So unsure was he that he sent his disciples to Jesus, knowing, John did, that his death was likely at hand. He had seen his whole life through Jesus. He was given purpose by his ministry of preparation for Jesus. And then near the end, he was so confused by Jesus because his expectations of what Jesus would be didn't seem to match up with reality that he had to know. So, John sent some of his disciples to Jesus with these words on their lips: ***“Jesus, are you the one, or should we spend the time we have left looking for someone else?”***

Many were gathered to see Jesus more than that, to hear Jesus and he regularly defied expectations. They had traveled miles on foot to hear him speak and possibly perform some miracles.

Some were not pleased, and some were even confused with Jesus. When goes home he doesn't receive a "welcome home" banner or parade on his trip to his hometown. He is mocked. Teased. And sent away. He has compassion on and heals the deeply diseased, the terribly sick. He touches the untouchable and hears the voice of the voiceless. He gives up private time with his closest friends and feeds thousands with meager supply. Unexpected.

Now he misses the boat, literally, and he is alone on a mountain. He who is prayed to by millions around the world himself spends time in prayer to his Father. And when he finally says, "amen," his disciples and their boat are too far from shore to hail. So, what does he do? Jesus walks across the water.

And we all know that we can't walk on water, so the disciples think he's a ghost. After all they had seen him do, this still stands out as special. He speaks words of comfort and then welcomes Peter onto the water.

But just as soon as this amazing moment begins, it begins to slip away, and Peter begins to sink. So, the strong hand of Jesus takes hold of him and drags his soggy self into the boat. And Jesus says, ***“O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”***

After all the mockery, the teaching, the healing, the doubts, the feeding, the walking on water, the elaborate and complicated vision Matthew provides for us, the disciples make their confession of faith, ***“Truly you are the Son of God.”***

Jesus is no longer just the one who healed or the one who provided. He is no longer just the one who goes to parties or the one who restrains his strength and is mocked in his hometown. He commands audiences with the strength of his voice and commands all of creation as the sea rises to meet his feet. The disciples realize for certain that they are uncertain about exactly what this means. Jesus changes their perception, their reality. They realize that he indeed ***“.. is the Son of God.”***

What are we getting at? Jesus is tough to get our heads around sometimes. He is bigger than and more complicated than something that makes perfect sense to us. He is tough to categorize. He is hard to label, unless we confess, in faith, that he is special, unique, the Son of God. And though we can't quite grasp him sometimes, he's got a hold of us.

Sometimes lifting children to his lap, sometimes dragging his disciples into the boat, always holding on to us. And he'll drag us by the hand long enough that he'll take us to tremendous places. It will also mean remarkable difficulties, because he will take us to the cross, where beauty defies our ideas of prettiness and strength looks nothing like we've ever seen before. And when we doubt and when we struggle, he will reach out his hand once again, strong and wounded, and create in us the same spirit that will lead us to confess, Jesus is the Son of God.

And though we don't quite understand him all the time, his relentless power is worth beholding, and his path is worth following. "Come," says Jesus. "Trust and walk toward me. I have your hand." Whether we are sinking or swimming he is with us. He reaches out his hand and takes hold of us.

"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you.."

Amen