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Series: Wandering Hearts: Figuring Out Faith with Peter

Sermon Title: Jesus Rescues

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Text: [Matthew 14:22-33](#)

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[Watch Service](#)



When I was in the 7th grade, I went Whitewater Rafting for the first time with my youth group. We typically went Whitewater Rafting each summer. The first summer I went, we went to Nantahala. It's a fun, fairly tame river. The second year—I was in the 8th grade at this point—we went to the Ocoee. The Ocoee river is a lot of fun, AND it is made up of a lot of Class 3 and 4 rapids. Looking back, I'm not sure it was the best river for a group of teens and pre-teens to raft down. That trip, we got caught up in a class 4 rapid and several of us, including myself fell out into the river. I remember swimming and the guide reaching out a paddle for me to grab onto and then pulling me into the boat. Rescuing me. And at the end of the river, he told us that in that particular spot, someone had drowned the previous summer.

About a year later, I was having a conversation with someone my age who I didn't know particularly well, except I knew he attended the local Baptist church. He was asking me questions about my church and then asked me THE question: "Have you been saved?" And so, I proceeded to tell him about being pulled out of the Ocoee River. Not really the answer he was looking for, I suspect.

We are in the second week of a series called *Wandering Hearts: Figuring Out Faith with Peter*, where we are looking at some of the most important moments in Jesus' life and ministry through the lens of one of his closest disciples, Peter. In reading the Gospel, we see that Peter is perhaps the most human of Jesus' disciples, the one we can identify with the most. Today, we are going to encounter a story where Peter, having seen Jesus walking on water, attempts to do the same himself.

I occasionally think about the question that person asked me so many years ago, perhaps you have been asked the same question. Have you been saved? I know what he meant: "Have you confessed Jesus as Lord and Savior so that you are plucked from eternal punishment and into heaven." But that description shortchanges the full meaning of salvation, which at its root means to be made whole. Not in a future life, but in this life—here and now.

Of all the things Jesus is called in the Gospels, he is only referred to as Savior twice. Once in the Gospel of Luke: “Your savior is born today in David’s city. He is Christ the Lord Luke” (2:11).

And then again in the Gospel of John, in the story of Jesus and the Samaritan Woman: “Many more believed because of his word, and they said to the woman, ‘We no longer believe because of what you said, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this one is truly the savior of the world’” (John 4:41-42).

These are the only two occasions...and yet, at its root, the Gospel is a rescue story. And we cannot save ourselves. We cannot rescue ourselves.

Jesus has been teaching and feeding all day and at the end of the day, he sends his disciples away, across a lake, in a boat. Jesus goes up a mountain by himself to pray. The conditions on the lake were not ideal for a boat, and this is what the Gospel of Matthew tells us:

Meanwhile, the boat, fighting a strong headwind, was being battered by the waves and was already far away from land. ²⁵Very early in the morning he came to his disciples, walking on the lake. ²⁶When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified and said, “It’s a ghost!” They were so frightened they screamed.

²⁷Just then Jesus spoke to them, “Be encouraged! It’s me. Don’t be afraid.”

²⁸Peter replied, “Lord, if it’s you, order me to come to you on the water.”

²⁹And Jesus said, “Come.”

Then Peter got out of the boat and was walking on the water toward Jesus. ³⁰But when Peter saw the strong wind, he became frightened. As he began to sink, he shouted, “Lord, rescue me!”

³¹Jesus immediately reached out and grabbed him, saying, “You man of weak faith! Why did you begin to have doubts?” ³²When they got into the boat, the wind settled down.

³³Then those in the boat worshipped Jesus and said, “You must be God’s Son! Matthew 14:24-33

Peter wants to prove himself. He is bold, stepping out onto the water. And he is doing it until the wind and the waves get to him and his confidence and trust begin to shrink.

The old saying goes, “If you want to walk on water, you have got to get out of the boat.” This is true, but what happens when we get out of the boat, we step out in faith, and we begin to sink?

We know what that feels like, don’t we?

We are going along and we get knocked off balance and it feels like we are sinking

- A relationship hitting rocky ground
- Loss of a loved one and devastating grief
- Loss of a job or financial troubles
- A bad grade, not getting into the college of our choice
- The weight of what is going on in the world

The realities of life and faith—emotional, relational, physical, professional, and global dangers. Like Peter, we have taken that bold step of faith, and then the storms of life come and it feels like we are sinking

You know that feeling. Maybe you are feeling that today. I read an article this week by Naodia Bolz Weber, a Lutheran Pastor, and in the article, she talks about those WWJD (“What would Jesus Do?”) bracelets that were popular 20 years ago or so. Nadia calls them the “Little-Disciple-That-Could Bracelet.”

If you remember, the idea was when in a difficult situation, the bracelet would serve as a reminder to just do what Jesus would do in that situation. In theory, it’s good. Be loving, compassionate, inclusive as Jesus would be.

But as she says,

But when I am struggling in life, I don’t know if “Nadia, what would Jesus do” is the most helpful question. What would Jesus do? I don’t know—something super cool like Raise the dead or cast out demons or turn water into wine... none of which feel like a fair test of faith for someone who can’t even remember to send thank you notes.

She goes on to say,

I mean, if we really could just muster up what it takes to do what Jesus did, doesn’t that mean we wouldn’t end up really needing the guy anymore I mean, if you can make yourself that Christ-like you’ll never again be in need of healing. Mercy and forgiveness will be things other people need but not you. But that doesn’t sound like faith to me. It just sounds like arrogance.

The Gospel is at its root a rescue story. And we cannot save ourselves. Perhaps it’s not about what we can do, but it’s about what Jesus has already done.

Peter is sinking, but Jesus is not going to let him sink. When it feels like we are sinking, Jesus isn’t going to let us sink. What is one of the first things we learn as a child? Jesus loves me, this I know.

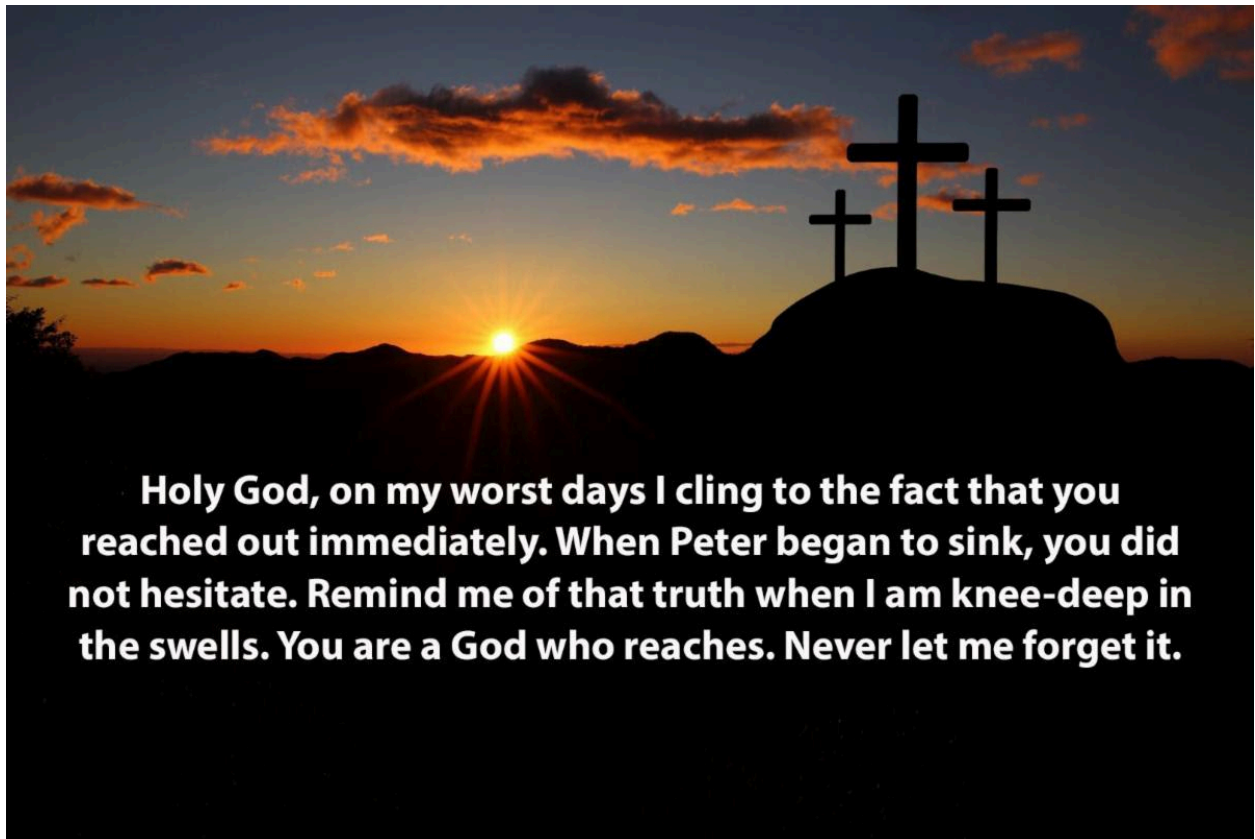
When life’s storms are near, it doesn’t mean that God is far off. When storms are near, we can trust that God is near also.

Peter calls out to Jesus to rescue him, and Jesus is there, reaching out his hand. Jesus Rescues. Jesus Saves...time and time again.

As we will know and as we will see in this series, Peter's life and his faith will continue to grow. He will continue to be made whole. He will know the fullness of life, not just in the life to come but in this life.

When we feel like we are sinking, the Lord is there, reaching out to us. Ready to rescue us. Jesus never tires of walking toward us in the midst of a storm. Never tires of being our help and our salvation.

Let Us Pray:



Holy God, on my worst days I cling to the fact that you reached out immediately. When Peter began to sink, you did not hesitate. Remind me of that truth when I am knee-deep in the swells. You are a God who reaches. Never let me forget it.