

Sermon Title: **“For the wind was against them”**

Bible: **Matthew 14:22-33**

Where & When: at Gilroy UMC on Sunday, August 9, 2020

Audience: about 25 YouTube Live-streaming viewers

### **Opening Prayer**

Gracious God, even when we cannot feel your presence, we know that you are with us. Even when there is no miracle, we know that you are with us. You are more important than any miracles, because you are our God. Please open our eyes to see your presence. Please be with my lips in your love and grace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

### **1. What or How do we see?**

I would like to show one illustration. I will share the title later. What do you see? Can you find someone? How about another one? How many people are there in this illustration? Or how many people can you see? This illustration's title is "My Wife and My Mother-in-Law," by W. E. Hill in 1915. Now can you see two people? And I want to show another picture. There are two lines. Which line is longer without the arrow? These two lines have arrow marks at the end, but the arrow directions are different. Which line is longer? Perhaps, the bottom one? It looks like the bottom one is longer, but actually, these two lines are the same size. When we see something many times, we can be distracted from really paying attention to the situation or context; we can be more influenced by our own bias. This can lead us to misunderstand, or to be stuck in stereotypes, and not to have an open mind.

## **2. The Story Between Two Miracles**

Today's Gospel of Matthew Scripture Reading is from the lectionary for the 10th Sunday after Pentecost. The main story is that Jesus walks on water. How can a person walk on water? It is definitely a miracle. Last Sunday's scripture reading was about feeding the five thousand. With only five loaves and two fish, Jesus and the disciples fed five thousand families. As this was another miracle, it sounds like there are only stories of miracles in the reading of Matthew.

For the early Christians, the Bible format was not like what we have now. We have a book called the Bible, which has many pages. Thanks to the invention of the printing press, we can have this format of the Bible. Furthermore, it has many chapters and verses. The system of chapters and verses that we use today was finalized in the 13th century. However, for the early Christians, there were no copy machines. Paper was not cheap, and not all people knew how to write and read. Some people had to copy the Bible by hand. At that time, there were no divisions of chapters and verses. So, the format of the Bible was not a book like what we have now, but a scroll format. When they read the Bible, they might not have read only the part of the Gospel of Matthew. They might have read the whole Gospel of Matthew at once. This means that they might have read the part of feeding the five thousand, and today's scripture reading together, one after the other, because there was no division of chapters and verses. So, I have tried to read today's scripture like the early Christians, without the division of chapters and verses.

## **3. Disciples' Struggle against the wind?**

For my reading, I discovered a story between two miracles, after a story of feeding the five thousand, and before a story of Jesus walking on water. It is the story of disciples. It is the title of my message, "By this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them." Disciples struggled in the water against the wind. Somehow, right after feeding the five thousand, Jesus asked the disciples to cross the Sea of Galilee ahead. Disciples followed what Jesus said. However, because of the waves and the wind, they were not able to get to the other side. When they were stuck in the boat, Jesus walked on the water to the disciples.

#### **4. Jesus' Making Disciples? Another Miracle?**

Why did Jesus ask the disciples to cross over first? Couldn't Jesus go to the other side with the disciples, after they dismissed the crowds together? They could pray together on the mountain. And then they could get into the boat. But what was Jesus' intention in sending the disciples first? How could the disciples follow what Jesus said, even though the waves and the wind were against them? Was it wiser to come back to the land and wait for Jesus, rather than trying to go to the other side? Then, one image came to me, which is what many of us do. It is running on the treadmill. There are many fitness facilities with equipment like treadmills. And I know that there is a swimming pool machine, as well, to swim in the pool at the same place. We are kind of stuck, but we do exercise a lot. That's because our goal is not to go forward, but to exercise or to strengthen our bodies. Probably, Jesus' intention was to make disciples through this exercise. Even though there are many challenges, can we follow Jesus? Even when we feel hopeless, can we do what Jesus said?

It sounds like we have many challenging issues during this difficult time. Safely staying connected during this COVID-19 is one of them. Our relaunching team has met three times already. It feels like we cannot do many things in the context of COVID-19. But it is not true. It looks like we are in the same place, but we breathe our love and care to others who are heavy-laden, and build muscles of generosity. How about helping the homeless? We have a long history of helping the homeless through St. Joseph's Family Center, and Monday evenings at the Armory. But we still see that many are homeless. But it does not mean that what we have done is nothing. What we have done is in us. Our love and volunteerism makes us better disciples. How about Black Lives Matter? Does non-violent protest work for changing social injustice? For many issues of social justice, we can feel that we are staying in the same place. However, it is not true. When we run on the treadmill, we are running with sweat. Sweat changes us a little by a little. Heaven is not completed yet on the earth, but, definitely, we can taste heaven now, because Jesus has started heaven on the earth.

The mission of the church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Today, I learned that Jesus himself makes us his disciples for the transformation of the world. Like a personal trainer, sometimes, Jesus leads us to run on the treadmill or to swim in front of the swimming pool machine. Jesus wants to transform ourselves for the transformation of the world. Don't we want to be disciples of Jesus Christ? We are not only children of God, but also disciples of Jesus Christ, not only for ourselves, but also for the transformation of the world. Feeding the five thousand is the miracle. Jesus' walking on water is the miracle. And for us to be disciples of Jesus Christ is the miracle. So, when we feel in the same place, because of

the challenges, do not be disappointed! Do not give up! Let us keep against the waves and the wind! Probably, it is a time to run on the treadmill, just like the disciples sailed the boat against the waves and the wind. It will transform ourselves into disciples. We are disciples of Jesus Christ, and we are the miracles. And let us be the miracles together!

### **Closing Prayer**

Gracious God, thank you so much for giving us an open mind. Even if we are stuck during this difficult time, we know that you are with us. Please give us your love and justice against the waves and the wind. Please guide us to be better disciples. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.