

“Enduring Witness”

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Texts: John 14: 1-14 and Acts 7: 55-60

In the fourteenth chapter of Matthew’s gospel, Jesus has sent his disciples, at least some of them, off on a trip on the sea. He tells them to get in the boat and he says, “Y’all go across to the other side. [The “y’all” wasn’t in the King James Version, but that is what he said.] Y’all go across to the other side,” relates the Rt. Rev. Michael Currie in his sermon on that chapter (*Daily Meditations: Center for Action and Contemplation, April 27, 2026*). He continues...

As they were on the perilous journey on the Sea of Galilee, in the middle of the night, if you will, a storm erupts, and they’re fearful for their very lives, because this is in the middle of the night. This is night with no ambient light. This is night without artificial light. All they had, whatever lamps they had in that boat, that was it. It was *night*. James Weldon Johnson said, “Blacker than a hundred midnights down in a cypress swamp.” And they were fearful because they couldn’t even see the wind and the rain, and yet they could feel them buffeting them back and forth, back, and forth.

Maybe you haven’t been on rough seas lately, but I think you and I can relate well to this experience. I don’t think I need to explain to you what it feels like to be in dangerous times. Some of you may know that far better than I do, but all of us – to some degree—can relate. Meanwhile, in his commentary on the Acts passage we shared today, William

Willimon asks us, “What is worth living and dying for?” reminding us that this is the primary question of Acts 7.

Yet another way of putting it is to wonder how we might endure as witnesses to love and a kingdom that is greater than anything the world has ever seen. How can our witness endure?

I won’t go through all that we talked about last week, but we did share what it means to witness, and the call was for us to become better witnesses to who we are and what we believe forms this community. In some ways, we are your typical church, but in many others, we are not the norm, and we represent community that is different from others who bear the Christian name. That could mean that we won’t fit in as well as some others might. I don’t know that we are risking our lives, but the stark question of the book of Acts is what if we were. What would we need to endure?

In John’s Gospel, the author is concerned with a group who have ostracized from their faith community. In this discourse, Jesus is speaking to frightened disciples. “Don’t be troubled. Trust in God. Trust in me,” Jesus begins. Someone doesn’t tell you those things unless they know things are, or are going to be, rough. Times will be hard, and faith will be hard to come by. It will be tempting to walk away, to run away, or even to hide. There is plenty of biblical evidence of faithful people doing all three—and God finding a way to include them again in God’s mission of love, true freedom, and deep community. Think of Moses who ran and Elijah who hid, and the disciples who denied and who also hid. God

wasn't finished with them and isn't finished with us. The Good News is that God is at work in ways we cannot see or even understand. Return with me to Michael Currie's sermon.

And then, when it was darkest, when it was most uncertain, Peter ... saw a figure coming toward them.... It was Jesus. He was walking on the water. And Peter, without even thinking, says, "Lord, if you bid me come to you, I'll come to you!" And Jesus says, "Well come on, brother." Peter jumps out of the boat and starts walking on the water, heading toward Jesus, and he *actually did it*. He just saw him, he said, "Lord!" He kept walking. "Lord! It's you!" Then, he looked around, and it was a serious "uh-oh" moment. And the text says ... that when Peter looked at the wind and the waves and saw the storm around him and lost his focus on Jesus and focused on the storm, that is when he began to sink.

There's no blame. Jesus didn't get angry with Peter, and after the resurrection he pronounced peace to the very disciples that turned away from him. But here in John's Gospel, Jesus knows that he is leaving and he wants to give the disciples something to hold onto so that they can remain faithful in the days, weeks and even years ahead. What would you need from God to give you the courage to keep on keeping on with faithfulness? What enduring legacy would you like to leave so that others could follow in your faithful footsteps.

Jesus leaves the disciples—and us—with a promise. Remarkably, it is familiar passage used in funeral services. "I'm going ahead of you," Jesus says, "to prepare a place. There's lots of room, and most importantly, I will not leave you orphaned." In the Acts story, Stephen relies on this completely as he faces the angry mob as they hurl stones at him. And in case you missed it, Stephen's last prayer is that his enemies also be forgiven. Further, the persecution of Stephen is not an isolated act of violence. "The community (except for the Twelve disciples) is now hunted down and scattered into Judea and Samaria. Earlier, it had been predicted that the gospel would be taken by witnesses into 'all

Judea and Samaria' (Acts 1:8)." Funny thing is, as William Willimon reminds us, "Little did the followers know then that the impetus for this far-flung evangelism would be persecution! These refugees scattered like seed, take root elsewhere and bear fruit. God is able to use even persecution of God's own people to work for God's purposes. Not even this new demonic force named Saul will quench the spread of the gospel."

When God is at work, even the most demonic forces cannot ultimately stop God's love from changing the world! God's mission will prevail through the worst of persecution, and in fact, it may even grow!

In Michael Currie's sermon he then breaks into song:

*I got my hand on the Gospel plow
Wouldn't take nothin' for my journey now
Keep your eyes on the prize
Hold on, hold on
Keep your eyes on the prize
Hold on*

To endure means to hold on, but it also means to let go. The trick is to figure out when it's the right time to hold em and the right time to fold em. Currie reminds us that the storm never stops in Matthew's story of Peter walking on water. I think we all had that image that Jesus comes and just takes the storms away, but that's not the gospel. Instead, Jesus gives us what we need when we need it most. When we can't see the shore, and we're caught up in the storm, Jesus arrives. That doesn't mean Jesus only arrives in the storm, but

you can darn well bet that Jesus will meet you in the biggest storms of your life. And the more you love, the more likely the storm. It's sad to say, but I remember mentors in times gone by who would remind us that, "Every time love comes into the world, the world tries to kill it." Try as they might, the message of the gospel is that love will never die.

The storm rages on. But if you want to know how to walk through a storm? Keep your eyes on the prize. Keep your eyes focused on this Jesus, on his teachings, on his spirit. Abide with him, dwell with him, live in him. And when you live in him, guess what? He will start living in you....

That's how Peter walks on water. To throw yourself into the arms of Jesus ... and hold on. That is an enduring witness that we all can hold onto.

Amen.