

“Boating Rules: Circa AD 29”
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*Presbyterian Church
Wilkes-Barre, PA
Matthew 14:22-33*

Last Sunday afternoon Shawn and I traveled to the Mohonk Mountain House in the Hudson Valley New York area, to attend the Commonwealth Health Annual Retreat. I've had the honor to serve on the Board for the last several years. It is a magnificent area! And as Shawn and I walked down the early 20th century halls to our room, we were both thinking about Steven King and Jack Nicholson and "REDRUM". Some argue that Mr. King got his inspiration for THE SHINING, from his many visits to Mohonk. Well, we survived the 24hours.

Sunday evening, following dinner, we were inspired and entertained by Captain Michael Abrashoff. Captain Abrashoff is a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, and was a military assistant to the former secretary of defense, the Honorable Dr. William J. Perry. He left the Navy in 2001 and founded GRASSROOTS LEADERSHIP, INC.

He was a truly inspiring speaker! He shared his story of being assigned to the third worst ship in the navy. He figured, "this is where my naval career ends". He decided he was going to make a difference with this crew! And he did! Among many other ideas and techniques, Captain Abrashoff accomplished gaining the trust of his sailors, "and, eventually, their enthusiastic commitment to our joint goal of making our ship the best in the fleet." And he did succeed in creating a climate of trust, and more! Twenty months after arriving on the guided missile destroyer, the USS BINFORD - became the best in the fleet!

Much of that risk behavior was trusting and instilling trust!

I could not help thinking about the importance of trust and its relationship to our faith, to Jesus Christ and his direction for our lives. Also, I thought of the many times Jesus, and his crew (disciples), were in their boats, on and off the Sea of Galilee. These wayfaring followers of Jesus were often not totally onboard with what Jesus was saying and doing. He was gaining their trust, but it was taking time: along with storms of misunderstanding, confusion, and even fear. And as is often the case with we humans, the disciples were averse to taking risks. They constantly needed to work on their trust levels.

This morning, we are in the boat with the other followers of Jesus. This rendition is from Matthew's story of the disciples struggling on the Sea of Galilee, as the storm raged and the waves threatened to capsize the boat and drown them all. The "risk" out there was at a very high level, indeed! Also, their trust in Jesus was waning: seeing he was NOT in the boat with them! I'm sure when they originally got into the boat, they were not thinking they were soon to be risking their lives.

Some risks come up fast and furious!

They are in a panic! Tossed about by those huge waves and wind. All anyone could think was “this is the end,” “it’s all over,” when Matthew tells us that they see a ghost out on the sea. “No. No, it’s not a ghost, (as they thought) it’s Jesus”. Jesus calls out, “Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid.” And Peter, good old, high risk Pete – ramps up the risk!! Peter’s trust level has moved up a few notches, even with all of the wind! “O.K. Lord, if it’s you – call me to come over to you!” Jesus responds, Pete, all right, great, step out of the boat, come on over!

But once Peter is out of the boat, he falters a bit. His trust is lowering as the winds beat against him, and the water from the waves pelt him. (Who wouldn’t question his/her trust?) And, of course Jesus reaches out, and lifts him up. But, let’s give Peter his due! A great storm rages in the middle of the sea, you’re in a boat – the only security around – who in their right mind would risk stepping out of the seemingly only place of any security or hope? Talk about risky behavior! Talk about TRUST! Peter takes the risk!

Thank God there are those of us who see things differently! They see beyond the wind, waves and lightning all around us. They intuit, they sense, they reason – the risk is worth taking! They possess an inner TRUST! For us that TRUST is focused on JESUS CHRIST! His way of life! His plan for your life! His plan for all of life!

- How are you doing in the trust and risk department?
- Are you open to the possibility that taking a risk could enhance your life, and the lives of others?
- Is there a risk facing you that might redirect your life?
- Are you in a storm, and have you considered that God has a plan for your life, is waiting to uphold you when you “take the risk?”
- There is ONE who is worthy of your TRUST, and will sustain you in your endeavors, no matter where they lead!

Captain Abrashoff titled his first book, IT’S YOUR BOAT, referring to all those sailors who were not living up to their abilities: not trusting themselves, nor their former Captain, and they were extremely risk averse! Then a new Captain boarded the ship! And that made all the difference!

So too for us!

Who is your CAPTAIN as you navigate through this life? Jesus gets in the boat, and is a trustworthy navigator!

TRUST HIM AND HIS WAY!

Amen.