

## Matthew 14

### A clinic in “walking by faith.”

- These middle chapters in Matthews gospel are hard to outline as a part of a larger argument or scheme for the whole gospel. Most attempts seem to force relationships that are hard to justify. It is not difficult however to see units that seem to tie together.
- Why is the account of the death of John followed by the stories of faith in Jesus? I don't know! What we have is a dramatic paradox that mirrors life as we know it. There are times when, no matter how special we are to God, we will face circumstances that suggest that God is not there and does not care. On the other hand, we are encouraged to place our trust in him, expecting a supernatural intervention.

#### **1. Suffering and injustice can come to people who are favored by God. (14:1-12)**

##### **a. Herod mistakes Jesus for John. (14:1-2)**

“1 At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the news about Jesus, 2 and said to his servants, “This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead; and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.”

- Herod betrays a sense of guilt for what he did to John the Baptist. He knew that John was a holy man (Mk.6:20) and that he was wrongfully killed. Could it be that he has come back?
- What follows in this chapter is the context out of which Herod's feelings are formed.

##### **b. Jesus allows John to be beheaded. (14:3-12)**

3 For when Herod had John arrested, he bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. 4 For John had been saying to him, “It is not lawful for you to have her.” 5 And although he wanted to put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they regarded him as a prophet. 6 But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before {them} and pleased Herod. 7 Thereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. 8 And having been prompted by her mother, she said, “Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist.” 9 And although he was grieved, the king commanded {it} to be given because of his oaths, and because of his dinner guests. 10 And he sent and had John beheaded in the prison. 11 And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl; and she brought {it} to her mother. 12 And his disciples came and took away the body and buried it; and they went and reported to Jesus.

- The influence of women upon the shape of history (through men) would be an interesting study.
- The question that we can hardly avoid is this, “Why could not the Jesus who raises the dead and walks on water not have intervened for the greatest of all humans?”

- Verse 13 suggests that Jesus did not know that John had been killed until he was told. Why did he not know this?
- What must John have thought? Did he feel betrayed? Forgotten? Unloved? He was a holy man who was put in prison for a courageous stand for righteousness. What did he expect at this point? He had honored Jesus, would Jesus now honor him by coming to free him?
- What does this event suggest to us about our experience in this world and our expectations? Could it be that our existence is to serve God's purposes and not just to experience the good life?

## **2. Jesus asks the disciples to Feed 5000 (14:13-21)**

### **a. Faith requires that we participate with God in His work. (14:13-16)**

13 Now when Jesus heard {it,} He withdrew from there in a boat, to a lonely place by Himself; and when the multitudes heard {of this,} they followed Him on foot from the cities. 14 And when He went ashore, He saw a great multitude, and felt compassion for them, and healed their sick. 15 And when it was evening, the disciples came to Him, saying, “The place is desolate, and the time is already past; so send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.” 16 But Jesus said to them, “They do not need to go away; you give them {something} to eat!”

- After Jesus heard about John’s death he withdrew. What was going through his mind?
- Jesus had many options in feeding the multitudes. Why did he chose the one he did?
- This passage says little about social welfare as a part of the gospel. It speaks more to the “sign power” that witnesses to Jesus’ authority and nature.
- It is significant that Jesus asks the disciples to solve the food problem. He, no doubt, wants to teach them an important lesson. The question for us is, will we also learn the lesson?
- One of the important lessons from this text is the simple fact that the ball is in our court. We are expected to do more than spectate. There are other hints of this in Matthew (7:7-12).

### **b. Faith demands that we put our resources, no matter how small, in God’s hands. (14:17-21)**

17 And they said to Him, “We have here only five loaves and two fish.” 18 And He said, “Bring them here to Me.” 19 And ordering the multitudes to recline on the grass, He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed {the food,} and breaking the loaves He gave them to the disciples, and the disciples {gave} to the multitudes, 20 and they all ate, and were satisfied. And they picked up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve full baskets. 21 And there were about five thousand men who ate, aside from women and children.

- The disciples’ response is understandable . They feel that they are being asked to do something that is beyond their ability. They are right.
- Jesus has given them lesson #1 (go do it), and now lesson #2 (bring it to me).
- The challenge for us is to take initiative but not control. We too often cannot separate the two ideas.

## **3. Jesus asks Peter to Walk on the Water (14:22-36)**

### **a. Faith is not presumptuous when it is responding to the call of God. (14:22-29)**

22 And immediately He made the disciples get into the boat, and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. 23 And after He had sent the multitudes away, He went up to the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there

alone. 24 But the boat was already many stadia away from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary. 25 And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea. 26 And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were frightened, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid." 28 And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." 29 And He said, "Come!" And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

- Fear is one of our greatest challenges in following Christ.
- We might label this chapter - "Jesus, is he John, a ghost, or Lord?"

**b. Faith must be willing to persevere through trials. (14:30-33)**

30 But seeing the wind, he became afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" 31 And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" 32 And when they got into the boat, the wind stopped. 33 And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, "You are certainly God's Son!"

- Peter was eager to venture into a life of faith but could he sustain it?
- The lesson for us is powerful. It is not enough to initiate faith if it is not continued.
- Peter's fear is directly related to what has his attention. When he sees the wind and the waves he is afraid. When he sees Jesus, he is saved. What might this look like in our life situation?
- The cry to Jesus for help by Peter is significant. His options included getting back in the boat, starting to swim, or drowning.
- What would most of us do? - 1. Become cynical, 2. Get back in the boat, 3. Take charge in our own power, 4. Learn never to trust Jesus again, 5. Keep building on our faith.

34 And when they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret. 35 And when the men of that place recognized Him, they sent into all that surrounding district and brought to Him all who were sick; 36 and they {began} to entreat Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak; and as many as touched {it} were cured.

- What does this paragraph have in common with the rest of this chapter? How about "and brought to Him."

### *Insights and Lessons*

- a. The fact that life does not always work out as we would like, does not mean that God is not there and that He does not love us.
- b. God expects us to be participants not spectators in the Kingdom.
- c. The key to fruitful ministry lies not in our natural resources so much as in our faith response to Jesus' call to put them in his hands.

- d. Listening to the Spirit's leading is an important part of knowing the difference between faith and presumption.