Hi,

The first on-line class yesterday actually went really well. It was great to see some old friends join us. Interesting that this social isolation creates opportunity for community, even if it is across social media. [The video of yesterday’s class can be found here](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0N107IyKUq8) as well as on my Facebook page.

* **Today, the Tuesday class (Genesis) will also be on Facebook Live at 11:45**. I’ll be there about 11:35 or so. Once you are on the page, you’ll see the live feed. You will be able to comment and ask questions during the class. If you have joys or concerns you’d like to lift up in our Tuesday class, please email those to Patti at pattiengle@tx.rr.com.
* [**If you don’t have a Facebook account, click here**](https://www.facebook.com/scottengle) and you will be taken to my page.
* I am recording the audio from these on-line classes and will post them to Podbean this afternoon. They are available at scottengle.podbean.com. They are also available on Apple podcasts. Search by my name, “Scott Engle.”

**Immediately he [Jesus] made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”**

**Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 33And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.” *Matthew 14:22-33***

Perhaps the skies were darkening as the disciples climbed into the boat. Some were experienced fishermen and knew how quickly ferocious storms could form over the Sea of Galilee. Perhaps they even thought about the time not long before when they had awakened Jesus to save them from a storm (Matthew 8:23-27). He had, of course, saved them, calming the storm and chastising the disciples for their “little faith”.

But, most likely, their minds were consumed with what they had just experienced. Just hours before, on a remote shore, Jesus had miraculously fed a huge throng. In front of their own eyes, he had taken five loaves of bread and two fish, looked up to heaven, blessed them, broken the bread . . . and fed thousands. Then, Jesus had quickly sent the disciples on ahead, instructing them to get into the boat and head out across the sea while he headed into the hills to be alone and to pray.

Jesus had never sent them ahead of him before. He had always been with them, there to protect and to lead. But now they were in the boat alone, heading across the sea in a growing storm, buffeted by stronger and stronger headwinds, the boat tortured by higher and higher waves. Shortly before dawn, the disciples looked out across the sea and saw a shocking and, indeed, terrifying sight – Jesus was walking toward them across the surface of the sea.

This story begs us to use our imaginations. Perhaps this is why so much of the Bible is stories. We can put ourselves in the story in a way that we could never engage an essay on doctrine. Who wouldn’t be a little anxious about climbing into the boat without Jesus? There is no indication that Jesus gave the disciples any instruction about what he wanted them to do when they reached the other side of the sea. Who wouldn’t be scared as the sea rose and the boat struggled? Who wouldn’t be terrified to look over the side of the boat and see someone, anyone, walking on the water? Who might not think it’s a ghost or at least an hallucination? Nobody can walk on water . . . or can they?

Would I respond as Peter did? That is the question. Would I get out of the boat? Peter did. He heard Jesus call out in the wind and identify himself. He heard Jesus tell them all to set aside their fear, to “take courage.” Peter yelled out that if Jesus called him, Peter would walk out to him. And when Jesus said, “Come,” Peter climbed over the side of the boat. When he got out there, for at least a few moments Peter walked on the surface of the water himself. But then the wind hit his face. Perhaps he realized what he was doing. Regardless, he looked toward the storm and away from Jesus – and sank like a rock. Thrusting his hand upward, Peter cried out “Save me.” And Jesus did. But he also rebuked Peter for his “little faith”. Pointedly, Jesus asked Peter, “Why did you doubt?”

*A story for the church*

It isn’t difficult to see why Matthew tells us the story in this way. He is writing to a post-resurrection church that can’t see Jesus and touch Jesus as the disciples had years before. The disciples had climbed into the boat without Jesus beside them in the same way he always had. They felt alone but they weren’t. Jesus was still their Lord, coming to them in the most surprising way. Matthew’s community might feel alone, but they weren’t alone. Jesus would come to these Christians also, in the most surprising ways.

In response to Jesus’ call, Peter climbs out. He responds to Jesus in trust, in faith. But about as soon as he gets out, he takes his eyes off Jesus and sees the storm instead and sinks. Would it have been possible for Peter to have faith so strong that he could walk on water all the way to Jesus? I don’t know. All I know is that Peter’s faith was fragile, as is my own. It is far too easy, too human, to see the storm and discover that our faith has fled us, replaced by doubts and fears. But, Jesus was there to save Peter and is here to save us, to grasp our outstretched hands and pull us to safety. Surely, Matthew wants us to see all this in his telling of the story.

Despite Peter’s sinking, notice one thing in the story. Peter *does* walk on water. He doesn’t climb over the side and slip between the waves. He gets out of the boat and, at least for a moment, walks until he sees the wind. How that moment must have seemed to Peter. When he looked back on it, how did he feel? What thoughts ran through his brain? We can’t know, but we can know this – if Peter had not gotten out of the boat, he could never have walked on water at all.

When Jesus sent the disciples on alone, he knew that he would not always be with them as he was then. He would be with them always in another way, a different way. They would no longer be able to rely on their five senses for their faith in Jesus. They would have to learn that faith is about being certain of what we can’t see (Hebrews 11:1). They would have to grow in ways that they couldn’t even imagine at the time.

When Peter stepped out of the boat, he took a risk. It was only by taking a risk that he was able to walk on water at all, if even only for a few moments. We don’t often think of our faith as being about risk-taking. We live in a world that makes it seem easy, without risk, to be a Christian – but that is an appealing lie. Being a Christian is risk free only so long as we don’t take it too seriously, don’t let our faith truly shape our priorities and agendas. Once we step forward to admit and to proclaim that Jesus is Lord of all creation, much less our own lives, we embark on a journey that is all about taking risks, about stepping out of the boat ourselves

*A site to check out*

[*First Things* is a prominent Christian journal](https://www.firstthings.com/#login) that has an extensive archive and a daily email you can sign up for. It is worth checking out.

*Movie recommendation*

Awhile back, Anne Rice wrote three novels of Jesus. The first was made into a movie a few years ago, *Young Messiah*. Patti and I both enjoyed it. I particularly liked the film’s depiction of Satan -- I think they got it about right.

*Book Recommendation*

If you are a reader, you will enjoy Karen Swallow Prior’s book, *On Reading Well*. It was a big help to me when working on the recently completed sermon series on the virtues.

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott