

I don't remember the first time I was on a boat. We always had a boat growing up. So did my mom and dad. My family today has a boat so we are continuing in the tradition.

Boats have rules. One of them, the first one, is that we had to ask permission to board our sailboat. Dad would either say, "Welcome aboard!" or "Wait." Now I don't remember Mom asking permission to board but Dad would always take her hand and welcome her onto the boat. My friends had to learn to ask permission to board. I have a friend, Ian who was kind of hyperactive as a child. One day, Ian was so excited that he ran full sprint and then jumped onto the boat. Dad looked at Ian and said "Please step off, you need to have permission before you can board." Ian looked really confused, he had never been admonished by my dad before, so he stepped back on the dock. Dad smiled and said, "When I come to your house do I just open the door and walk in, or do I knock?" Ian said, "Well yeah, you knock." Dad replied, "By asking permission to board my boat you are knocking and that way I can say welcome aboard come on in." From that point forward Ian would salute Dad and ask permission to board.

If you have been on a cruise, you just can't walk on. They had to do a number of things with your paperwork but finally, they say, "Welcome aboard."

I looked up when the tradition – to ask permission to board – started. There is no definitive answer. Some say it is from ancient Egyptian times. The bottom line is about the sovereignty of a boat and the responsibility of the captain to know each soul that is aboard.

You might wonder what this has to do with Jesus walking on water? I'll get to that in a minute; let me paint a picture for you. Jesus had heard that John the Baptizer had been murdered in prison. He wanted to spend some time alone. He walked off to a quiet hill but people followed him. He had compassion for them and healed them. In the afternoon, the disciples wanted to dismiss the crowd so they could find something to eat. Jesus told them to gather what they have, he blessed five loaves of bread and two fish and handed them to the disciples. Five thousand people were fed as well as women and children. That was the story from last week. Today's lesson is after that was over. He made his disciples go into a boat so he could have some alone time. He then sent the crowds away. Finally, Jesus gets some quiet prayer time. At some point in the early hours of the morning, Jesus set off, by foot, to go to where the boat was headed. The most direct route is a straight line. As he was walking, on the water, a storm was going on and the boat, with the disciples in it, had not made it very far.

In Jesus's day, in that particular region, storms kick up in the late afternoon and evening. Jesus "made" his disciples go because people normally don't head out into storms. The question of what was Jesus thinking comes to mind. We don't know what he was thinking. But, we have recorded here in three of the four Gospels that Jesus walked out to them in the storm on the water. They were terrified when they saw him; thinking he was a ghost. Peter said, "If it's you, command me to walk out to you." Jesus said, "Come" and Peter got out of the boat and started walking. He got afraid and he started to sink. Jesus reached out his hand, grabbed him, pulled him up, and the two of them got into the boat.

This boat isn't like what we see on Sarasota Bay. It most likely had high sides to it. The boat is not designed to get in and out of on the sea. So, two things about it: They probably had to lift Peter and Jesus into the boat; Jesus may have had to ask permission to board. It's maritime tradition. As soon as Jesus was in the boat, the wind ceased it all became calm. They worshiped him.

I studied under a professor of homiletics in seminary who does not believe this story in its literal form. She believes it is a metaphor. For those of you that struggle with the scientific idea of Jesus walking on water; and it's a rational idea because nobody has walked on water before and nobody has walked on water since; there are no other stories like it in the Bible. Moses didn't walk across the Red Sea on the water, he parted the water so they walked on dry land. So, this is a unique story.

Here is a metaphorical way to look at it: God sends us into storms. In our storms in life, it's not that God has us avoid them; believing in God and being a part of the Christian faith isn't that you will never have a storm, or you will never have tragedy, or difficulty, that is not the case. What is reality is that when God sends us into a storm, God is behind us, God is around us, God is in front of us. We have a choice of telling Jesus *welcome aboard* or *wait*. When we are in a storm in life, when we are going through hard times in life, we can invite Jesus into our metaphorical boat. Jesus, who brings with him the peace of God; the peace that will calm the storm the peace that will come from the inside and radiate outward; whatever it is we are facing, Jesus and the Peace of God requires permission.

This means we can also tell Jesus to wait – to not give permission to board. We can try to do things on our own; work things out our own way. Jesus will wait, standing on the rough seas, he'll wait until we give permission to enter in.

Nowhere in the New Testament or in the Bible does God force God's will onto God's people. God asks permission with Mary – *let it be with me according to your word* – in other words, she said to God, Welcome Aboard! The very earliest writings about liturgy about how we do services in the church with baptism, with healing, with following the Lord, all of them ask permission. Do you wish to be baptized? Do you wish to follow Jesus as your Lord and Savior? Do you wish to be healed? We can't be baptized without giving permission. All of it requires permission.

Peter asked permission to enter Jesus's world by stepping out onto the water. When he became frightened, tried to walk on his own, and started sinking, Jesus saved him and they got into the boat. As soon as Jesus was welcomed aboard the storm stopped. The Peace of God took over.

For some, the Peace of God in the storm might be about physical health, for others that storm might have something to do with mental health, or financial health, or concerns about our country. Jesus is standing there, in the storm, asking permission to come aboard.

The question is this: will we tell Jesus *Welcome Aboard* or we will we tell Jesus to wait.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen