

Truth-telling, wind blowing, life-giving spirit—
we present ourselves now
for our instruction and guidance;
breath your truth among us,
breathe your truth of deep Friday loss,
your truth of awesome Sunday joy.

Breath your story of death and life
that our story may be submitted to your will for life.
We pray in the name of Jesus risen to new life—
and him crucified. Amen.¹

I wonder...

Long after Peter had gotten his reputation as “the rock” of the church, how often do you think he remembered this night? He had spent many nights at sea before, but this night was different. No breaks in the storm clouds for he, James, and his other friends to see the brightness of Orion or Ursa Major. Most nights, by the time they got to the 4th watch—no matter how tired they were—the stood captivated as the night sky changed from black to red to orange to yellow to crystal clear blue. In those moments, the possibilities of the day were infinite.

Not tonight though.

Something about the direction of the winds and the heavy swells have made this storm one of the worst they’ve ever encountered. The rain is falling at a slant with the kind force that makes people today pull over to the side of the road. The disciples and their measly pails are no match for the water that keeps seeping into the boat. They’ve got blisters on their hands and have lost the ability to maintain any sort of grip. Their linen tunics hang on them like dead weight, and their sandals are more hazard than help. If that weren’t enough, this guy who looks a lot like Jesus is walking toward them *on* the sea. As much as they want to believe it, surely they must be hallucinating.

So, they do what one naturally does when they’re freaking out. They scream like a teenage girl running from a haunted house in a low-budget horror flick. And as much as the

¹ Walter Brueggemann, *Prayers for a Privileged People* (Nashville, Abingdon: 2008), 179.

thought of twelve men screaming at the top of their lungs as their boat lists them back and forth has to make you chuckle, it's a short lived laugh. Who hasn't been that scared before?

Remember the face the doctor made after you explained the mole on your shoulder or the ache in your lower back wouldn't go away and she said, "I'm concerned, so we're going to run some tests." For the next three weeks, every worst-case scenario ran through your mind.

Or, what about the moment when your parent or lover said to you as you walked out the door one morning, "What time will you get home tonight? We need to talk"? For the next 9 hours you couldn't rid yourself of that dreaded feeling in your gut that things were about to change and probably not for the best. How will you go on? you wondered.

Then there's the time you nearly lost it at the stoplight at the thought that despite all your hard work and good will, someone would still you that you've let them down? Or, maybe you thought you would come to say it about yourself.

Remember the day when white supremacists of the alt-right unleashed their hatred and ignorance on peaceful protestors? I don't know about you but fear and sadness and rage filled my soul well into this morning, and I asked God, "how long, oh Lord, oh Lord?" Deep down, as much as we may not like to admit it, such enmity and unrest are not without precedent.

We know we're supposed to "have faith" that all will work out, but it's downright frightening to realize that laws do not change hearts, politics has come before faith, and the mores of polite society that tell us to let things go unsaid have imploded.

It's unnerving to put your kid on the bus knowing how sensitive he is and how difficult it may be for him to find his place.

It's maddening to get another notice from the bank reminding you that you've missed another payment.

It's unsettling to hear that we may be confronting another war of an entirely different magnitude or that hatred and racism are still seen as acceptable. Even the most reasonable and logical among us can spiral down the rabbit hole or irrationality or cynicism.

So what do you do when your positive thoughts fail? Like Peter, what if the very moment you take a step forward into what you start to believe is not an illusion of hope but an actual call to peace, another gust of wind blows against the boat, or the doctor calls, the check bounces, or the teacher sends home another note about little Johnny? Just like that

your feet trip against themselves, and you are certain you, your family, your friends, your homeland are about to sink.

Our instinct is to turn back toward the shore of firm ground, but as counterintuitive as it may seem, don't. At the very moment that Peter starts to flounder, Jesus reaches out, grabs his arm, and brings him to his very self. And Peter does not fall.

"Yes, Peter should have kept his eyes on Jesus... and so should we," theologian David Lose says. "But when we don't, when we falter, or even fail, Jesus will be there to grab us, to catch us, to support us and set us up straight again, ready to give it another go."² The power of this night and Matthew's recounting of it has little to do with simply having more faith or plowing on ahead. We could a self-help book and get the same advice. Jesus, however, doesn't want to give us a mere boost. He wants to transform and uphold us beyond each moment into a place of wholeness and peace. On what may very well have felt like the last night of his and his friend's lives, Peter sees that God will preserve and keep him for the work that Peter has been called to do. Fear is real, but it's not the boss of us, and it "does not mean that we lack faith." It means we need to draw upon our courage because "courage, after all, isn't the absence of fear but the ability to take our stand and do what needs to be done even when we're afraid."³

Now, more than ever, we need to be audacious people. How many more people have to die or fear for their safety because of the color of their skin before EVERYONE decides enough is enough? It's easy to say "it's not my problem" or "it's not a big deal." But the moment we walked into these doors and dared to affirm faith in Jesus Christ we lost the luxury to care only for ourselves or people who think, act, or look like us or people whom we like. Trying to absolve ourselves of responsibility or guilt is the equivalent of saying that some people deserve dignity while others are not. Yet, Jesus did not die on a cross and rise from it simply for us to have a comfortable life. He came to transform the world. If we don't make that our priority then we are all just wasting our time. And if not now then when?

We cannot turn back now, no matter unsure we may feel. As Lutheran Bishop Guy Erwin said, "they have the torches, but we have the Light."

² David Lose, "The Road Less Traveled," *Working Preacher*, July 31, 2011, <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?m=4377&post=1594>.

³ David Lose, "Pentecost 10A: Something More," August 7, 2017, <http://www.davidlose.net/2017/08/pentecost-10-a-something-more/>.

Over the next few years Peter would have more ups and downs. He would deny his affiliation with Jesus and he would try and stop his crucifixion. But tonight began a journey of transformation for Peter. By the time Jesus and Peter returned to the boat and caught their breaths, Peter would come to realize that he was not as strong as he thought he was nor did he need to be. That night, all of them discovered something new about God's Son: Even in the midst of a storm, Jesus has the power to still the greatest chaos in the name of pure unadulterated love. For you. For this creation. Jesus never leaves us to ourselves because Jesus wants us to come to know the abundance of freedom in Christ—freedom from the darkness that threatens to destroy and divide us all.

It *is* dark. It *is* scary.

But,

“hush...hush.

You don't have to have the answers.”⁴

It's always darkest before the dawn.

Hush...

Hush...

Jesus has got you. *He's got you.*

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⁴ Nichole Nordeman, “Hush, Hush,” in *Every Mile Mattered*, Sparrow, 2017, MP3.