

Sermon for Sunday August 9, 2026 James Stanton, Lay Preacher

Dear Lord, May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight. *Amen*

We begin today's lessons with our protagonists overcoming fear and doubt, recognizing the presence of God in quiet or unexpected ways, and acting on the call to faithful proclamation with demonstrations of belief. Let's take a walk among these tales of faith.

In Kings, Elijah is fleeing for his life from Jezebel, paralyzed by isolation and fear until God meets him on the mountain and restores his purpose.

In Romans, Paul emphasizes moving away from anxious self-reliance under the law to the open, confident confession of faith in Christ.

And in Matthew 14, Peter steps out in faith onto the stormy waters of the Sea of Galilee but sinks the moment fear and doubt take over, needing Jesus' saving hand.

To begin with Elijah, around 850 BC, we find him at Horeb, the mount of God, in a cave, after spending the night there. Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He answered, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away." God said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by."

Keep in mind that Elijah had challenged the powers that be when he won a major victory against the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. After the priests of Baal failed to light the flame of their offerings. Elijah reached out to God. Then, fire fell from the sky, consuming Elijah's sacrifice, the stones of the altar itself, the earth and the water in the trench as well. When the people saw this, they declared, "The Lord—he is God; the Lord—he is God." Elijah then ordered them to seize the prophets of Baal, and Elijah brought them down to the River Kishon and slayed them, at which point the rains begin, signaling the end of Israel's famine.

Now, Queen Jezebel is threatening to kill him in revenge.

Arrested by fear of Jezebel's threats, Elijah sinks deeper, and deeper into the depths of unbelief. He probably thought that the miracle at Carmel would have led to the conversion of the whole royal court and of the country, but, finding himself mistaken, he is greatly discouraged and he asked God to let him die.

But God is not done with Elijah, there is more to do. He must rebuild his faith and embrace his mission to assure the continuity of God's plan. Feeling utterly alone and like a failure, Elijah hides in a cave. God tells him to stand on the mountain. A massive wind, an earthquake, and a fire pass by, but the text emphasizes that God was not in any of these grand, destructive displays. Instead, God speaks to Elijah in a "gentle whisper" (or "still small voice"). This means God often reveals Himself in quiet, subtle ways rather than overwhelming displays of power.

He heard God's directive: "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram. Also, you shall anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place. This new wave of divine agents will finish the bloody religious crusade Elijah began in 1 Kings.

Later, Elijah, in company with Elisha, approaches the Jordan. He rolls up his mantle and strikes the water. The water immediately divides and Elijah and Elisha cross on dry land. Suddenly, a chariot of fire and horses of fire appear, and Elijah is lifted in a whirlwind. As Elijah is raised, his mantle falls to the ground and Elisha picks it up.

God had stirred the heart of Elijah in his depression and brought him what he needed. Elijah needed a *friend*; the core of his complaint before God was that he was alone. God let him know that there was a man, Elisha, ready to learn from the great prophet and be his disciple and companion. And He let him know that ultimately justice would be done, and God would not allow the institutionalized promotion of idolatry to go unpunished.

God also told him that he would protect and save the seven thousand in Israel, those whose knees had not bowed to Baal. This was a final encouragement to Elijah, letting him know that he was not the sole true follower of God, as he feared. This both assured Elijah that he was not alone and that his work as a prophet was successful.

Elijah also needed hope, and since Elisha would be raised up as a successor to Elijah's prophetic office, Elijah then knew that his work would continue even after his death.

Displays of power and preaching God's anger don't necessarily change hearts. Instead, the still small voice of God speaking to the human heart is more powerful. God spoke to Elijah and he speaks to us today.

In Romans the Apostle Paul contrasts righteousness through the law with righteousness through faith in Christ, emphasizing that the message of salvation is accessible to all — both Jew and Gentile — who believe in their hearts and confess with their mouths. Instead of having to go to great lengths to *achieve* righteousness by the law, we can all immediately *receive* righteousness by faith, by trusting in the word of the gospel.

Paul emphasizes righteousness by faith. The word of faith is near, residing in the heart and mouth. Believing in one's heart leads to justification and confessing with one's mouth that Jesus is Lord leads to salvation. Paul shares the universality of faith and emphasizes that there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

We do not gain God's righteousness by works. Instead, we gain it by *confessing* and *believing* in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Believe that Jesus can save you; believe that he will save you; in everything leave the whole matter of your salvation with him in unquestioning confidence. Depend on him without fear as to your present and eternal salvation. This is the faith which saves the soul.

And Paul states the necessity to send preachers to proclaim the good news. People cannot call on Him if they have not believed, they cannot believe if they have not heard, and they cannot hear without a preacher. And as he states: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" God's way of bringing people to Jesus

Christ is through the preaching of the gospel. And we are all thankful for those who share the Gospel, bringing glad tidings of great joy.

And part of the joyful message is the incredible story of Jesus walking on the water In the Gospel of Matthew.

“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.”

The Sea of Galilee is well known for its sudden storms, and during this storm the disciples were without Jesus. As the storm picked up it was between 3 and 6 a.m. Jesus came to the disciples when the boat was in the middle of the sea and after they had exhausted themselves rowing against the waves and winds of the storm.

Jesus wanted them to shed their fears. Even though they were afraid of the danger, even though the problem was real, there was even greater help at hand. He wanted them to have faith.

Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” He said, “Come.”

When Peter asked the Lord, “if it is you, command me to come to you on the water”, his faith in Jesus was remarkable – he responded to Jesus’ invitation. So, Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. He realized that the disciples had been given power to do exactly the sort of miracles Jesus was doing. What is more natural than want to follow Jesus in this new demonstration of supernatural power?”

He walked on the water!

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?”

This is a wonderful picture of walking in faith, showing that Peter was able to do the miraculous, while he looked to Jesus. But fear is part of human nature. Fear separates us from divine guidance and our faith. Thankfully, Peter knew who to call out to in crisis. Jesus brought Peter back to the boat of faith.

Peter here shows us the weakness of little faith. The dangers of low expectations where great things are possible. Little faith is far too eager for signs. Little faith is too much affected by its surroundings. Little faith is too quick to exaggerate the peril.

But little faith can be the foundation for great things, if it is true faith and seeks to come to Jesus. Little faith will accomplish great things in time. With prayer in times of trouble, faith will grow.

It is useful for us to confront our doubts.

But if you do believe, why doubt? If you have faith, why little faith? Remember safety is at hand because Jesus is near.

When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. This moment transformed the disciples from fearful witnesses in a boat into worshipers who declare, "Truly you are the Son of God", preparing them for future ministry.

How can you grow your faith? Through prayer, through reading and studying the gospels, through walking with Jesus in your daily life.

And today, like Elijah, let us seek renewal in our walk with God.

May we share in the spirit and remember that
“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

That the word of faith is not distant or hard to reach,
"not up in heaven" or "down in the deep".

That we are all more beautiful when we deliver the
“Good News.”

And even if we aren’t planning on a trip across the Sea of Galilee, that we can ask
Jesus to join us every day, in our journey of faith, on our trip towards salvation.
Amen