

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditations in our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord our Rock and our Redeemer; Amen.

About a week ago I found myself doing one of the things I genuinely love to do most. I was at church camp, surrounded by an enthusiastic group of Confirmands, a combined group of 19 youth from both Salem and St. Paul. It was our first full day at Camp and following breakfast we headed out to the upper field to try our hand at the climbing tower, high ropes course and zip line. We received instructions, fastened on our harnesses, and settled in for a fun morning. The counselor who was giving instructions suggested that we each make goals for ourselves. Maybe our goal was to try to climb the rock wall, or simply accomplish climbing up onto the high ropes course, not even completing it. Or maybe we had loftier goals of flying down the zip line. Whatever our goals were, they were supposed to be our focus for the morning.

One of our youth, a boy by the name of Andrew who happens to be a member at St. Paul's, informed me that his goal was to do whatever it took to get to go down the zip line. Now there were two ways to accomplish the goal. The first option was to climb the rock wall. The rock wall was 50 feet tall and straight up. It had three sides to it, with varying sizes of rocks, spaced out in different ways. The second option was the high ropes course. The course had four stations, the second and fourth the most challenging. And although the high ropes course started at 12 feet, it ended at the top of the 50 feet rock wall. Andrew scanned both options and decided the rock wall seemed like the most attainable. So he began to scale the wall. Now I'm not sure how to say this gently, but you know I'm a pretty honest person so I'll just come right out and say it, Andrew is one of those nerdy kids. He has glasses and is skinny as a rail with no apparent muscles on his body. He talks a lot, probably because of his nerves, and when he does talk he spews random facts about many, many, many insignificant things.

To be honest, I have to admit that I was impressed he decided to give either option a try at all. That being said Andrew was having a LOT of difficulty with the wall. He tried side one three or four times. No luck. He tried side two three or four times. No luck. He tried side three, three or four times and you guessed it still no luck. When he felt like he gave it his best shot Andrew looked at me, feeling defeated and said, “Well Pastor I guess I’m done.” I of course assumed he meant all together and said, “I’m very proud of you for trying. Let me show you where to put your harness.” He looked at me with wide eyes and said, “Oh no. I’m going to try the high ropes course.” I smiled and replied, “Ok then.”

Andrew climbed up the first station of the high ropes course. He was twelve feet off the ground. He jumped onto a single wire and buckled his lobster claw clips, designed to keep you from falling, onto the wire overhead. The first station had a single wire under you, for you to walk on and a wire on each side of you. Andrew flew through that first station. The second station was clearly more difficult. It was called the Tarzan station. It had a single rope under you, but none on the sides, only ropes every 10 feet or so, dangling from the top. Andrew took off. He made it to three out of five hanging ropes before he froze. He began to shake. His eyes got wider. And he began to whine. He said I’m stuck and I can’t do it. I chanted in my best pastor voice “Of course you can! Look how far you’ve already come!” Other youth from our group began to encourage him. Pastor Rob tried to reassure him, but Andrew couldn’t hear anything. He couldn’t hear us telling him he couldn’t fall because he was fastened in. He couldn’t hear us saying he was already halfway there. Fear overtook him and he began to cry. And not just cry a little. He began to cry so loud people in the next field over were aware of his distress. In fact it was closer to a full on wail and temper tantrum. Finally, after what seemed like forever, the camp director came over, climbed up onto the course, grabbed Andrew’s hand and basically carried

him to a point where he could climb down. Fear overtook Andrew in spite of logic. He was paralyzed, irrational, and inconsolable; his only way out was to be totally dependent on someone else.

As I stood experiencing the story I just shared with you, I saw and heard Peter. Peter, my brazen friend, was so confident in his abilities and in Jesus' abilities. So confident in fact, he boldly commands Jesus to prove the person walking on the water is indeed him. He says, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." Jesus replies, "Come." Now I don't know about you, but if I didn't think it was Jesus I wouldn't have gotten out of that boat. I would have stayed where Jesus put me. I'd imagine that would also be the same for Peter. And so Peter climbs out. And he walks toward Jesus in spite of the wind, in spite of the rough waves. He's doing exactly what he wanted to do. Jesus has proven himself. So what happens? Peter gets distracted. He begins to look around and notices the wind. He sees how high the water is sloshing. He sikes himself out, he gets scared and he goes from walking on water to sinking. And what does Peter do? He calls on Jesus to save him. And immediately, without hesitation, Jesus reaches out his arm, catches Peter, places him back in the boat and asks Peter, "Why? Why did you doubt me?" Then the storm stopped and those in the boat worshipped Jesus.

Every time I hear this story I recognize myself in Peter. There are times in my life that I am so confident in Jesus, so willing to put my life on his promises. And then there are times I look to God and say, "If you love me surely you won't let this happen or that happen." Or "since you are God, save me from the mistakes I made or the train wreck that I know is heading in my direction." Often times instead of actually seeking Jesus in those situations I see the chaos. I hear the wind whipping all around me. I am consumed in my own stuff, in my own fears and I fail to recognize that in the same way that Jesus reached out to grab Peter immediately, Jesus does the

same with me. Now Jesus doesn't always prevent the storm, but he always, always, always shows up in the midst of it and holds me in the aftermath. That's Jesus promise to us in the waters of our baptism, that no matter what's happening in our lives we are God's forever. Not just today when we have smooth waters. Not just tomorrow when there is a tornado, but we are God's forever. And part of being God's means that God will show up when we call on him. No matter what.

I've had moments in my life like Andrew. I have feared for my safety and the safety of those around me. The world that we are living in is a scary place. Just this weekend in Charlottesville, Virginia people who look like me, but who consider themselves white nationalists, are lighting torches and surrounding churches who are filled with people who are in a prayer vigil, filled with the hope that God has created all of us in spite of the color of our skin in his image. They are driving vehicles into crowds of people, killing and wounding them. I've heard from my fellow pastors in that community that the churches, which are acting as temporary urgent care centers are seeing many head injuries as members of the white supremacy group use brass knuckles and tear gas against their neighbors. The images of clergy lined up facing men wearing semi-automatic weapons is terrifying. As they gathered on Friday evening for prayer the faith community that filled the sanctuary was held inside by police, being protected from guns, from fire, from death chants outside those church walls. The chaos for that community, for our world and for us is real and alive. And Jesus calls us to stand up to violence and hate with the assurance that he right there standing beside us.

Hear Jesus' words to Peter, to the disciples, to us, "Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid." For in the helm of the storm, for in the chaos that ensues, for the waves that seek to engulf us, even in the face of death, our God is bigger. Our God is greater. Our God has more love for his

people and for his creation. And our God promises to show up no matter what we are facing. He even promises to go as far as the grave, to pull us out, to catch us and bring us back to a new, eternal life spent with him. Thanks be to God for that Good news. For the grace. For the mercy. For the love.

Jesus says, "Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid." Go out into the world and tell others. Show them your love, the love you have because of me. Show them I am with them always. Show them the hope I give them. Show them the mercy I offer. Show them me. Tell my story. Worship me. Do not fear. For I am with you, even until the end of the age. Amen.