



St. Michael's Church  
CHARLESTON, SC

SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 13, 2020

ROMANS 10:5-15  
MATTHEW 14:22-33

PREACHER: THE REV. AL ZADIG, JR.

HELP US LORD TO BE SO CONNECTED TO YOU THAT WE MIGHT BECOME YOUR  
DISCIPLES AND THE SERVANTS OF OTHERS.

TAKE OUR LIPS AND SPEAK THROUGH THEM,  
OUR MINDS AND THINK THROUGH THEM,  
AND TAKE OUR HEARTS, AND SET THEM ON FIRE.

This morning, the **Covid** story of Kathie Hodgson. Kathie is 41, single, and confined to her apartment basically 24 hours a day. Recently she said, “Some days I smile and feel okay, And other days I curl up in a ball and wonder if this Pandemic goes on much longer, will I be able to take it mentally? Can I last sanely living alone for much longer?”

In our country, 35.7 million Americans live alone, many with no meaningful social contact, making loneliness almost as lethal as the pandemic itself. On the other hand, let me tell you about 41 year old Caitlin Gladow, she lives with her husband and three young kids—and says she’s never felt more alone. She says she has zero emotional energy for self-care, since she’s juggling work, home-schooling, and regular parenting while dealing with “paralyzing” stress and anxiety, just exhausted.

So, I confess to you, I’m preaching our Gospel for today with these Covid eyes. Certain things are popping out at me from Matthew 14 that never popped for me before. It’s not just that a big storm came up on the Sea of Galilee, not just that Jesus at 3am walks on water to the boat where the disciples are in total fear. Not JUST that Peter walks out on the water to Jesus, Not just the fact that Peter gets scared, begins to sink and Jesus saves him. Not just that Jesus calms the storm. **What stands out to me? The Disciples are in the boat together.** Something they could do because it was pre-covid!

Seriously, just that image pops for me. The disciples are simply in the boat doing life, doing ministry with each other. Again through Covid eyes, we long for that now, don't we? Visualize the disciples in that boat with me. What a beautiful image! But How did the disciples end up there?

Earlier in Chapter 14, the unimaginable happens. King Herod kills John the Baptist, literally beheads him. The disciples are forced to bury John's body, and together tell Jesus. Jesus's response? Take me into seclusion so I can deal with it. But the crowds hear where Jesus is headed and they follow Him, begging for healing. Jesus sees this crowd, and empathy takes over. Jesus calls the disciples back and together they put on a pop-up healing conference for the crowds. Jesus and the disciples pray healing prayer into each and every soul. Which produces one thing..hungry stomachs! Led by Jesus, the disciples then feed the 5,000!

As an aside, this is so typical in ministry. You're dealing with a tragedy when another pressing need hits and you can't process the first one! Jesus never gets the chance to get away and reflect. So after the feeding miracle, Jesus, who still has this pit of pain in his heart from the murder, sends the disciples into a boat, and He goes up the mountain to pray. Jesus wants the seclusion he was never given to be with the Father. And that's how the disciples end up together in the boat.

So, don't just visualize the boat, put yourself in the boat with them. To hear the most intense conversation you've ever heard, as they talk about everything from:

- John the Baptist Dead
- Quiet retreat with Jesus canceled because of the pop up healing conference.
- The emotional joy of seeing healings and miracles of provision!
- Dropping Jesus at the foot of the mountain

Wow, what conversation, what deep longings and sharing there must have been. But there is something else going on. In many ways, Matthew 14 is a game changer for the church today. For it is here we have the very first Christian Small Group! That boat of disciples! Yes, the very first Christian small group in that boat!!

Isn't that what we're missing right now? In this covid time, some of our small groups have stopped. Our patterns of being together as Christians have diminished. More of us than ever are walking out our Christian life ALONE.

I was talking to one of our precious parishioners a couple of weeks ago who said, "Al, you know this live stream church thing, I love it! I wake up on Sunday, get my coffee, go back to bed, holding my coffee in one hand and church on my phone on the other! What's not

to love about that!” I laughed hysterically when I heard her say that. It’s true, what’s not to love! Church in bed, another Covid Miracle!

But it reminds me of the Old Testament story of the Jews who when their temple was destroyed, it didn’t take them long to get used to **not** going to worship! Quickly an entire generation grew up without going to temple. Now, I know in our pandemic world there are those who cannot come back due to health concerns and many who will not come back to church until there is a vaccine. I totally support that. But there might be some, for whom Church in bed is awfully alluring! For some...time to get back into the big boat!

Now, back to the small boat on the Sea of Galilee. It’s now 3 am. The disciples are still talking away, processing the last 24 hours. But, as the winds pick up, their conversation dies down. Passionate conversation turns into a passionate fear. As the waves begin to grow violent, they lose track of land, says the Bible. It’s then that their fear goes up another level as a figure begins walking to them. Through the white caps and fog... is it a Ghost? A sea creature? Again, put yourself into that boat, feel what they feel, think what they’re thinking. But with this mindset... We are together! They are going through hell at that moment together, but they are together! It’s completely different to go through hell and back with fellow believers than alone.

And in the moment of their highest fear, Jesus speaks and says to this very first Christian small group, “Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid.” Shock fills the boat! It’s Jesus! Peter, buoyed by what He sees in Jesus and in the courage felt by his small group, says I got this! Jesus you’re the man, if it really is you through the fog, then ask me to come to you and I too will walk on water. Jesus says it is me, c’mon out! For about 45 seconds the small group cheers him on, “That’s our Peter, way to Go!” But Peter, as soon as he takes his eyes off Jesus, and simultaneously isolates himself from the small group, begins to sink as if someone lay a boulder on his head. Jesus with His hand, grabs Peter up and into the boat, and Peace overwhelms that little life group, and causes something we often miss when we read this story.

The Bible, in almost a throw-away line, says this little life group erupts into spontaneous worship! The small group begins to sing! They sing: 7 words: Jesus, truly you are the son of God. You are sovereign. You are in control. Imagine if it was only Peter in the boat. What this story teaches me is that Christians are wired to be in deep relationship with others.

Case in point. Two weeks ago my family and I decided to hike our favorite mini-trail, the perimeter trail around I’ on in Mt. Pleasant. I like it because you can’t get lost on it. But that’s when we did something we never do. We saw a yard sale sign and actually went to it! The owner of the house guided me around for 30 minutes, we found treasures and it was wonderful! Then I paid by Venmo through my phone and the owners name came up...Lydia Evans. I looked at her through her mask and said, “I know a Lydia Evans...active in our diocese...” She looked at the Venmo and said Al Zadig, is that you? We took down our masks and it was like this joy-filled reunion! Lydia had taken me all around her garage and I had not recognized her! When the discovery was made, this sense

of joy swept over me, re-discovering a friend in Christ. Why? Because we're wired for relationships!

Yes, it's messier that way, even sometimes more painful. But through all the messes we are called to be boat people! Wired to be in boats with each other! Again, remind yourself what the disciples had been through!

- The death of John the Baptist-TOGETHER!
- The miracle of the feeding of thousands TOGETHER!
- Going through terrified gale force winds, and rain TOGETHER!

My Friends, Sundays this worship service is like the big feeding of the 5,000. But small groups are like the time with Peter in the smaller boats, we need both, we need each other, big groups-small groups! Small groups of people around us to survive the sorrows and pains that life throws at us. A small group that truly knows our junk in our trunks and still love us! Boat people! Isolation leads to devastation.

Which begs the question...Who is in your boat? I'm not talking about just good secular friends and family, I'm talking about people who believe in Jesus who look at your life through the lens of faith. They know your gifts and warts and everything about you...and they're there for you.

Who is in your boat to carry you through a John the Baptist like Tragedy? Who is in your boat to witness the transcendent beauty of a miracle that could only be from Jesus? Who is in your boat to join you in riding through times of terror you could have never seen coming? Who is in your boat to say go for it, walk on that water, we believe in you! Who is in your boat when you feel like a failure to say we still have your back. Who is in your boat for Sheer worship? To help you grow in the faith? And who are you inviting into your boat? We are wired to need boat time. Do not go it alone.

One of the goals our vestry set at our retreat in June was something called: Life on Life Discipleship, doing life with just a couple others, living in Christian accountability. This is how we grow! Worship is essential to our lives, but most of our Christian growth comes in small groups of accountable believers learning deeply these critical areas like Romans 10. Small groups, it's the way Jesus did it! And those relationships don't just happen, Jesus brings us together. In fact, might we say that boat of the disciples was not just the very first small group, but the first Podz! Tonight, Lowcountry Vespers podZ launches. A pod is a backyard small group of people coming together to worship. Six are being launched at 5pm tonight.

- 6 boats
- 6 pods
- 6 zip codes
- 6 hosts
- 6 teachers

It is my prayer that you might meet new and old friends that will be part of your boat for a long time! Now Podz are face to face. But I'm amazed at other boats emerging at St. Michael's right now. Here are just a couple!

- Sunday School every Sunday for all ages over zoom and video
- Alpha on Mondays over zoom
- Our boat of mid-day prayer over zoom!
- Existing boats of small groups meeting outside
- Our boat for men's ministry on Wednesday mornings and Wednesday nights!

Who is in your boat? Launch out with us in podZ! There's a lot on the line here. Centuries ago, there was another boat God ordered out to sea. God ordered men, women and children, even animals aboard Noah's ark. In fact God used Noah's Ark to save everyone on board from the destruction of the flood, which was a pre-cursor to Jesus. Jesus using the Ark of his bride the Church to save people from the destruction of the floodwaters of Sin. This big ark is a lifesaving boat in the floodwaters of sin. These smaller boats and podz are the same on a more intimate level, going through life with just a couple others, meaning, these aren't just leisure boats, but rescue boats, saving eternal lives. Critical for us. We need a boat.

Finally, as I began with the stories of Kathie and Caitlin, let me tell you about Elizabeth Druga. Elizabeth and John were members of St. Michael's years ago before they moved to North Carolina. During covid and our live streaming, they rediscovered St. Michael's online and have been watching every Sunday. Not only that, but Elizabeth has found her smaller boat. She is part of the boat we call daily Midday Prayer, led by Bill Biggie, Cynthia Straney and others, where a boat load zooms every day. That is her boat... over zoom, and daily. Amazing isn't it!

Do not go it alone...who's in your boat?