

Sunday, August 13, 2023 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church
Bible Study
“What Are You Seeking”
Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28 and Matthew 14:22-33

Open with a word of prayer

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants answer, “Where in the last week/month/year have you recognized God’s presence in your life?” [i.e., during my hike yesterday; when people helped one another; when my cousin was miraculously healed from cancer; when I was able to reconcile with my parents; during my personal devotion time; during worship service, etc.]

Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28. Context. This week’s reading introduces yet another chapter in the saga of the dysfunctional “first family” of Genesis: the story of Joseph. Joseph is Jacob’s favorite son, whom he honors with a “long robe with sleeves,” clearly a special garment that the Greek and Latin translations call a “coat of many colors” – no doubt a cause of envy for his brothers. On top of it all, Joseph had dreams that suggested that he would rule over his brothers. Then Jacob sends Joseph on a two-day’s journey (from Hebron to Shechem) that turns out to be three days (to Dothan), to his brothers who hate him so! No real surprise that things go wrong.

Matthew 14:22-33. Context. This week’s reading follows immediately on the episode of the feeding of the 5000. Based on Mark’s account of the same story, Matthew makes it a point that Jesus sent his disciples on ahead, adds the verses that describe Peter’s attempt to walk on the water, and changes the ending by having the disciples confess Jesus as the Son of God. When Jesus addresses the disciples with “it is I,” the Greek phrase simply reads “I AM,” a common shorthand for God’s sacred name from Exodus 3 (I AM WHO I AM). When Jesus asks, “why did you doubt?” it has the meaning here of “hesitate” or “vacillate.”

Read Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28 and Matthew 14:22-33

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn't make sense to you in the text?

Read Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28 and Matthew 14:22-33 again -

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

- Do you know someone who, like Peter, is a risk-taking believer who would jump into the water for Christ?
- What are the storms in your life? What is causing you to feel like you are sinking? [These could be personal matters, church-related issues, and/or societal concerns such as climate change.]
- “We celebrate the signs of God’s presence among us. We lift up our acceptance, our hospitality, our fellowship, and our service to the wider community.” What signs of God’s presence has your church celebrated recently, or what signs does it seek to celebrate? What have you not celebrated that perhaps you should have?
- Continuing with the question above, what storms in your church’s community prevented you all from seeking, manifesting, and/or celebrating these signs? Looking back, how can you better discern God’s presence in those storms?
- In the Matthean passage, the boat symbolizes safety in the midst of chaos. How should we Christians should face our troubling waters: “I’d rather get in the boat with Jesus and ride out the storm all the way to the other side.” Do you agree with this suggestion? If not, what does “walking on water” or “risk-taking faith” look like to you? How do you experience the peace of Jesus when the storms are raging?

- “What would we look like, what would our community look like if we really believed what we say about Jesus and about grace and salvation?”

Closing Reflection Question

How is this scripture calling you to change, to see, to be or what might it be calling you to do?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). After all, have shared, end by praying the following or a similar prayer:

God of peace, we thank you today for rescuing us from the troubled waters of our lives. We are comforted by your presence, mercy, and grace. We see them in our church, in our communities, and in the world. As we seek to manifest your love by becoming your disciples, help us as we share the Good News that Jesus is our lifeboat, our Savior, our Messiah. Guide our hearts as we face this world with the gift of divine peace. In the name of the one who calls us, **Amen.**

And now we pray The Lord’s Prayer....

Our Father who art in Heaven

hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,

on earth as it is in Heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power

and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.