



**North Shore  
Congregational  
Church**  
FOX POINT, WI

**From the Pulpit...**

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***“Our Part of the Equation – Seek It!”***

**Rev. Dr. Martin Hall – Preaching**

*Matthew 7: 7-11; Matthew 14: 22-33*

*February 3, 2019*

Over the course of the past 14 years, I’ve come to understand that the experience of parenting is a remarkable window into the love and character of God. It’s not, necessarily, that parenting creates new theological doctrines that you’ve never considered or revelations of faith that you’ve never before discovered. It’s more that experiencing life as a parent who loves a child provides an entirely new understanding of the perspective and experience of God and his love for us. Even before our oldest was born, the anticipation and preparation for her arrival gave me new insights into the very heart of God. In the years since, I’ve found that being a parent gives me a new appreciation for that love God holds for us, as well as for God’s longing in the way we might embody our love in return. The lessons have continued year after year in this parental journey Sharon and I are sharing. But, one of the more challenging experiences for me, as our children have gotten older and increasingly independent, has revolved around that innate parental desire to help.

Second only to things like providing for their fundamental needs and keeping them safe, it is probably one of the most pressing things we want to do for our children. We want to help them. We want to help them learn. We want to help them do well in school. We want to help them build strong relationships. We want to help them develop personal strength and character. We want to help them to better understand this world in which we live, and become better equipped to flourish within it. We want to help. But, one of the things you quickly learn as children get older is that such help is only going to go as far, and only do as much good, as they are willing to let it. As each year exacerbates the burgeoning independence of our children, I am perpetually reminded of the fact no matter how much I want to help in one place or another, my help will always (and in many ways increasingly) be restrained by their desire and willingness to accept it.

And, when we turn that perspective to God, that’s one of the recurring themes to which we seem to come in Scripture – the hope and assurance of God’s promises of help in our lives. In times of despair, grief, worry, fear, sorrow, pain, strife...we constantly are reminded of the promises that God has made to be the yoke upon our shoulders and our companion in the valley of the shadow of death. As we engage this story of Peter walking out to Jesus on the water, however, what I want to suggest is that we are brought back to that same lesson that we learn as parents – that, as God’s children, we have a part in that equation. As we look at this story of Peter and Jesus, we

are reminded that God's help in our lives hinges on our willingness to do three things – to seek it, to see it, and to trust it! So, over the course of the next three weeks, we are going to explore these paramount parts we have in God's work in our lives. We are going to spend the next three weeks digging through this story of Jesus and Peter on the water and exploring what that means for God's help and work in the course of our daily living. And if we are going to explore our part of the equation – our role in embracing God's role in our lives – it starts with the invitation!

“Ask, and it will be given to you;” Jesus says in Matthew's Gospel, “search and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.” I think we sometimes forget that we have to take the initiative to bring God's help into our lives. We have to seek it – we have to ask for it! We have to take the initiative of knocking on that door that it might be opened to us. The exchange between Peter and Jesus, on the sea, begins with Peter calling out to Jesus. Jesus doesn't grab him and pull him out into the water. Jesus doesn't force Peter to accept that moment of grace in his life. Jesus is there, Jesus is longing to be a part of that moment, Jesus wants Peter to welcome that help into his life, but it is on Peter to call out for it. It is on Peter to ask for it. It is on Peter to open that door and seek that presence in his life.

“Here I am!” says Jesus in the book of Revelation. “I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.” I think we all too often forget that God is always there – no matter what, no matter when, no matter where – God is there. When God seems absent from our needs and our lives it is not because God has gone away, it is because we have failed to open the door and invite God into our needs. I think we all too often forget that when God seems absent from our needs it is not because God is not there to be found, it is because we have failed to take the initiative – to seek, to invite, to welcome God into our strife.

So often, when I picture our relationship with God in our times of despair, I can't help but picture that strong-willed pre-schooler sitting on the floor tying his shoes, or trying to manipulate one of her toys, or struggling to get the seat-belt latched in the car. As they struggle, the parent quietly and lovingly enters into the scene offering assistance only to be rebuffed with a scolding, “No – I do it myself!” We are a strong-willed and independent being, us humans. And, in many cases, that's of great value. There's nothing wrong with that pre-schooler struggling, for a bit, as he or she hones those motor skills and continues to grow into the child God created him or her to be. But, there is also a time in which it is no longer a blessing of growth but a cycle of frustration and angst – and that child can continue to spiral into the depths of struggle and strife unless and until they allow themselves to receive the help that is being offered.

We are a strong-willed and independent being, us humans. And, in many cases, that's of great value. But, there comes a time in which the angst, sorrow, pain, strife, loss, struggle, worry and fear of life no longer serves as the character building moment of adversity but instead as the spirit-crushing narrative in which we allowed our commitment to personal strength and independence to shut the door and cast aside the help God so lovingly wanted to share.

In the story of Peter and Jesus on the sea we see three things that are essential to our embracing God's help in our lives, but none of it even begins without the seeking, the invitation, the

welcoming of that help into our lives. For nearly every one of us, today, there is a place in which we are that strong-willed pre-schooler determined to do it ourselves – and God is right there waiting to help. But, if we want to steer clear of that spiraling descent into self-destructive independency, it's not going happen if we don't open the door and let it God in.

Somewhere in our lives, today, we are that strong-willed preschooler on the brink of giving in and God is there – lovingly longing to help. It is on us to open the door and let him in.