

Good morning.  
So my name is Shane Sanders Marcus  
And I'm the Minister for Children, Youth & Families at St. John's.  
I actually started one year ago Tuesday,  
And it's been – professionally – the most fulfilling and wonderful year of my life.  
But don't get me wrong – I'm taking tomorrow off.  
It is my anniversary, after all.

**\*\*Sunday Morning\*\***

I have to confess to being a little uncomfortable this morning,  
Because of the events in Charlottesville, Virginia yesterday,  
And the racist and white supremacist protests that happened.  
I had several friends there, marching as counter protesters,  
And it was a long afternoon waiting for them to check in and see if they were safe.  
And while I had written a sermon about dreams and about pursuing our greatest joy  
for the sake of justice,  
I knew I had to address the events of yesterday.  
So I'm glad that as I listened to the readings for this morning,  
I saw that they already addressed these events:  
Jacob moved to the land of Caanan,  
And lived as an alien.

The brothers of Joseph said,  
"Come, let us kill this dreamer."  
And in America,  
Where we know who the dreamer was and what his dream was,  
I think that maybe our sin is not that we have the dream,  
But that we ordinary people  
Fail to live up to that dream  
And in fact killed the dreamer ourselves.

And even in the passage from Romans:  
Do not say, who will bring Christ down from heaven,  
Or who will bring up Christ from the abyss;  
But the word is always on your lips.

As Episcopalians, that word always on our lips should be our baptismal covenant:

Will you persevere in resisting evil, and whenever you fall into sin, repent and return  
to the Lord?

*I will, with God's help.*

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

*I will, with God's help.*

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?  
*I will with God's help.*

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One of the things I do week to week is run Children's Chapel during Sunday Services,  
Taking the wiggliest members of the church  
During the readings and the sermon:  
You know, the boring parts?

One thing I appreciate about the structure I inherited for Children's Chapel –  
And I think it ultimately comes from our Godly Play class for pre-K students –  
Is beginning every Sunday with a wondering question.  
It's usually a little abstract, and it previews the lesson or the spiritual practice for the morning.

So for a moment, I'm going to ask you to be quiet and wonder about this question:

What do you want so deeply that it scares you?

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Today I find myself firmly in Peter's shoes.

Well, let's be real. It was the first century.  
He was on a boat –  
He definitely wasn't wearing shoes.  
So I guess that makes me even more likely to stand right with him!

So first Century Peter is on the boat.  
He has no North Face rain jacket.  
He has no xenon headlights.  
And – tragedy of tragedies –  
He has no iPhone weather app with an hour by hour forecast,  
Google Maps voice technology telling him which way to turn,  
Or even my sweet beloved flashlight app.

He's been in the boat all night through a fierce thunderstorm,  
Completely, totally, and utterly at the mercy of the waves and the wind.  
He hasn't slept.  
And I don't know about you,  
But I tend towards being pretty unpleasant when I haven't slept.

In that state, I suppose we can forgive the disciples for being terrified:  
It is a ghost!  
They were wondering:  
“Are we going to get out of this alive?”

Remember our wondering question?  
What do you want so deeply that it scares you?  
With that in mind, hear these beautiful, beautiful words from Jesus:  
Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid.

But back to standing in Peter’s shoes -  
Er, his place.  
Standing with him.  
Whatever, shoes aren’t important,  
The ground wherever you put your feet is holy.

Peter, with his feet planted firmly in the boat,  
Exhausted, sleep-deprived, terrified by the wind and terrified by this “ghost”  
Hears Jesus’ words:  
Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid.

The voice of Jesus created an overwhelming joyful *need* within him:  
“I want to go out there.  
If he can do it I can do it.  
I want to go out there.  
I want to be with him.”

And even though he’s been told:  
Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid.  
His response is so exactly my own:  
Lord-  
IF

...

IF it is you,  
Command me to come to you on the water.

The voice of Jesus created this joy within Peter,  
This desire,  
And even power.  
But even then,  
Knowing what he wants, now,

And what he wants so much the joy of it scares him:  
He still asks for permission before he goes out to get it.  
Even when he's already been told NOT to fear,  
He still has to be told AGAIN that it's OK to go and get it.

A therapist told me once that I needed to be more impulsive,  
She said she could tell that I was a person who didn't act, much,  
Unless I knew how my actions were going to be viewed and received by others.

Time, I'm somewhat ashamed to admit,  
Has mostly proved her right.  
I'm a person who craves approval.  
I hedge my bets.  
I make sure that before I start anything, it's going to be seen positively,  
Or that at least I can spin it in a positive way.

And sometimes, even when I know what I want,  
I have to have permission to go get it.  
It happened just this week:  
We had a pool party scheduled for Thursday,  
And of course that meant there were rainstorms  
And it was below 70°.  
I *knew* I needed to cancel the pool party,  
And substitute a movie night or bowling or something.  
But first I waited a couple of hours obsessively checking the magic iPhone forecast.  
Then I drove into church and called John Corlett, our host for the pool.  
And then when I saw I had a voicemail from *him*,  
I *still* copied Susan on the e-mail making the switch,  
Still looking for approval and affirmation and permission.

Why do I crave that approval?  
Why do I need permission?  
Why am I, like Peter, so often stuck in the boat?

So if you've made it with me this far,  
I'm going to warn you –  
There's a big word coming here.  
I'm sorry.

In these moments –  
When I need to ask why,  
And the reason why I have to ask permission to pursue my own joy  
Is because my theology is off.

Yeah  
I said it  
In an outdoor sermon at a lake  
Theology.

I don't blame myself, always, for my theology being off:  
I'm in Peter's shoes, after all.

Here's Peter, in the boat.  
There's Jesus, over there.  
Peter, human.  
Jesus, God.

Human being, emotions all contained inside, body/soul mixed up together.

Jesus, God, over there, Jesus as flesh but God as Spirit, something else entirely,  
A barrier fixed between the two.

But I don't believe that theology.  
I don't believe that I'm down here and God is up there,  
That I can't know or experience "God"  
Who is this all-powerful spirit unknowable by human means,  
Completely cut off from me.  
I don't believe that the bad things I do are messed up human me  
And the good things I do are God taking control of me.

I believe the whole world is charged with the grandeur of God,  
A Trinitarian flow of love that exists within itself  
Yet overflows into creation and  
Is itself the love inside me,  
The passion and joy that are wholly unique to me,  
God's expression of love through Shane in the world.

One ancient theologian (Gregory of Nyssa) puts it this way:  
What you truly Desire  
Is God's calling in your life.

A more recent saying puts it this way:  
Your greatest calling is at the place where your deepest joy and the world's great  
hunger meet.

What separates Jesus from Peter (And from me)  
Is this tiny little sentence buried at the beginning of the gospel reading:

Jesus went way on his own to pray.  
He sent the disciples away.  
He dismissed the crowds.  
And then he went on his own to pray.  
He went up the mountain physically,  
But spiritually he went inside himself to find the divine source of his joy.

Peter and I, on the other hand –  
We don't always know what our joy is.  
We have to ask questions about it.  
No matter how much you tell us not to be afraid,  
How much you reassure us that whatever we want is ok,  
How much approval you pour out on us,  
We are still going to want to ask for permission to do it.  
Because we are thinking that God is out there, over there, in front of us,  
External to our identities.

But we need to go deep,  
To find where God is inside us.  
We need to embrace a healthy solitude of prayer,  
Of meditation,  
To find the divine source of our joy,  
To hear the voice of the triune God resounding within us,  
To find the flow of love and joy pushing us out of the boat.

One of my favorite songs begins like this:

I know you've been afraid  
Don't know what to do  
You've been lost in the questions  
I don't know what to say  
I'm sure if I were you  
I'd proceed with some caution

But I want you to know  
When the joy that you feel  
Leaves a terrible ache in your bones  
It's the voice of Jesus  
Calling you back home

And I wonder.

What do you want so deeply it scares you?

And in the context of the events of violence and hatred this weekend:

Do you think if more of us found & pursued our deepest joy –  
And learned to pursue it without always needing permission -  
Would that create more justice in the world?