

Winfield United Church Reflection – August 9, 2020
by Rev. Joan Kessler

Try

Matthew 14:22-33

I feel like the title of this message could be *How I Spent My Summer Vacation...* my Staycation, thanks to COVID 19, was a restful and restorative two weeks. I am not going to bore you with all the details of that time but I am going to tell you about what I experienced last Sunday on my daytrip to Penticton.

Last Sunday morning I made the journey to Penticton to visit the public gallery there and take in an exhibition of the works of Bob Ross. Bob Ross, as many of you will recall, was the host of the PBS sensation, *The Joy of Painting*. Bob took an oil painting technique known as wet-on-wet he had learned during his time in the military, and between 1983 and 1994, he showed those who tuned in how to create their own landscape masterpieces in about 22 minutes. His pieces always seemed to contain clouds and trees, which were very endearing to him. I suspect most of us here have tuned in or through channel-surfing come across an episode of *The Joy of Painting*. Bob just had this relaxing, non-anxious presence about him. He made us believe that anybody could be an artist. Visiting the exhibition of his pieces on display at the Penticton Art Gallery, I was struck not only by the beauty of his landscapes but what I left with that day was a new appreciation of this man's sayings that have some rather poignant and sage wisdom to share with us all still today, some 25 years after his death.

Speaking of clouds, Bob said, "Boy that's a job I want in my next life. I want to come back and be a cloud and just float around and have a good time all the time."

"Boy I know what you are saying, "Bob you've made a mess this time." You may be right too. I've certainly been known to do that. There we go. But we don't make mistakes you know. We have happy accidents."

Boy we have a lot of fear when we first touch a big old blank canvas. But once you get over that, that's when you really, really begin experiencing the joy of painting."

Another famous saying that you have likely seen around as a meme on social media pertains to his view on capturing contrasting light his painting:

"You know, you need dark to show the light and light to show the dark. It's just like in life, you need a little sorrow in your life so you know when the good times happen. There. Alright. I'm ready for a good time right now, though.."

"You should only be limited by your imagination, 'cos your imagination can take you to any world that you want to go to. And with a little practice, you can create any illusion that your heart desires – at least on a piece of canvas."

This piece, entitled *Wilderness Day*, was the last painting aired on the Joy of Painting before his death in 1995 at the age of 52. And he had this to say as a closing piece of encouragement:

"I think the greatest thing about this style of painting, it has allowed every person, every person who's ever wanted to put a dream on canvas to do just that. You don't have to be blessed by Michelangelo, don't have to go to school half your life. You can paint, and you can do a real nice job of it."

"Experiment. Just do crazy things. What's the worst that can happen. On this canvas, nothing."

I hope these quotes will pique your interest to do your own viewing of Bob Ross' work and sayings at the Penticton Art Gallery. I took these pictures because I wanted to take home with me the optimism and encouragement Bob was speaking to me. I dabble in paints, I am by no means a Michelangelo or a Bob Ross. But it's so easy to get stuck and leave the paints and the brushes and the canvas in the cupboard and tell myself I can't do it. The theme of this Sunday is Try. Sometimes we need another's encouragement and guidance and life experience to move us

out of our complacency, our comfort zones and into a new realm of possibility... that we maybe all have a dream that has gone unrealized... but it starts with trying, taking a risk and accepting the possibility that things won't turn out the way we expected. As Bob reminds us this morning, there are no mistakes, only happy little accidents.

Our story from Matthew is one of the miracles Jesus is said to have performed during his life and ministry. Unlike his healings, his feedings of thousands of people with meager rations, the miracle of walking on water doesn't really seem to serve much of a practical purpose. Depending on the day you are having, you might think Jesus is being a bit of a show off. But perhaps instead of explaining the unexplainable, we look to Peter's response. Peter so badly wanted to believe all the things he had heard Jesus teach and the wondrous actions he saw him perform, the way he changed people's lives. So when he and the others in the boat that early morning saw Jesus coming towards them on the water, they were terrified, they didn't know what to think. Peter wants to do what Jesus is doing...to walk out on the water and meet him...Jesus says you can do it Peter! Just get out of the boat and come. So for that moment in time, Peter believes he can do it. He gets out of the boat and he begins to walk, but fear overtakes him, and he falls into the water. But we are cheering Peter on every step of the way. Jesus is there to pull him up, to save him from peril... life and death may have hung in the balance. When someone shows up at the time we need encouragement, when a dream is laying on the cutting room floor, at the time we maybe need a hand up, things change, our ideas about what is possible could take a shift. For me, this is our miracle...not the vision of Jesus walking on the water... but that Peter believed he could do it too and took a chance.

What is your unrealized dream today? What have you always wanted to try but haven't had the courage or the right amount of encouragement to go out and do? Maybe it's paddle boarding... that would be like walking on water... it's something I see others do and wish I could do that too. But I haven't. We come to church on Sundays to be inspired I think. To hear sacred stories, and sing songs, and pray our deepest longings. My hope is we leave here feeling strengthened and supported by a community that is part of a bigger Dream, a divine presence that is cheering us on and wants to catch us when we fall. And then we go out

into the world the other seven days and inspire and encourage others...those in our families, our neighborhoods, those in this circle... As we look at how far we have come since we first learned of COVID and left the building back in the middle of March, we keep encouraging one another to stay the course, to stay patient, to keep ourselves and our loved ones safe, to make wise decisions and pull together so we can face a future that is unclear and may feel uncertain. And so we stretch out our hand to another and encourage another who may be struggling and need a pulling up and we say Come. Come.

Amen.