

SERMON, August 9, 2026

Pastor Cris Frigm

Why did Jesus and the disciples cross the water? To get to the other side.

The journey has purpose. There was a reason for them to risk the waves together. And it was terrifying.

About 15 years ago, Cole was around 10-12 years old, Syd would've been 8-10, and the four of us were spending some time at Rehoboth Beach. This wasn't long after Laurel's mom had moved to Lewes – or near Lewes to be more accurate. She lived about 20 minutes from the beach – about 45 minutes by bike but that's a different story.

I had grown up going to OCMD. Not every year, but most of the years of my childhood, I spent some time in the summer enjoying the ocean and the waves. We have some great and not so great memories of vacations at OCMD. When our kids were really young, we still went to OC as my wife's aunt had a condo where we could stay. I was used to that beach and all its amenities.

But now our convenient beach was Rehoboth. So, we learned to adapt. Mostly.

On this particular trip, we were getting settled on the beach. As far as we can remember, I was setting up chairs and all the stuff. Syd may have been helping me. Cole was in the water and Laurel was watching him. It was still early in the day, so there weren't a lot of people around yet.

One of the things we were getting used to at Rehoboth was that the waves were a little different from Ocean City. They tended to be shorter runs with a stronger pull at times.

Cole was bouncing up and down and diving under the waves in the relatively shallow waters. His recollection of what happened next was that he heard some whistles and looked up to see the lifeguard waving...kind of in his

direction...but he didn't think much of it for a moment. The lifeguard left the chair and started running and he looked around to see who might be in trouble. Then he saw his mom running and he realized it was him.

He hadn't realized that as he dove under a wave and come back up, he had gone from a very reasonable distance out from the sand to much too far out in the water. He's a pretty good swimmer so he wasn't yet struggling and the lifeguard got to him rather quickly and helped him onto the shore through a riptide he had never seen.

That day we watched 13 lifeguard rescues over the next few hours. One of them was scary and amazing to watch as we saw six or seven lifeguards swimming out in sequence to help someone to shore through a particularly bad riptide. You could see their exhaustion as they came back in. And we were really impressed with how the lifeguards handled their job.

But that's only part of the story. We watched these rescues happening from the comfort of our umbrella and chairs, but at some point, Cole and I were getting a bit bored, so we decided to go back in...the shallow water. We may have been warned by someone that we shouldn't go in the water at all. I remember thinking it wasn't really going to be a problem, we knew how to stand in the waves. The warning may have been repeated.

But we went anyway.

You could tell that the waves were stronger, but we were firmly planted in knee-high water as they rolled in and out. We were bending down to get cooled off by the low-breaking waves. And then, as one wave rolled back out, I realized that we were now in water that was chest-high...on me. In a matter of moments, the wave had carried us about 100' farther into the waves.

"Cole, we're in trouble," I said. "Follow me." I was smart enough to know that we couldn't just swim for shore, that we had to angle our way in and not swim directly in. It wasn't too hard to get back into shallow water, but we

were tired. My heart was racing from the anxiety. And then I had to tell Laurel what had happened. She was...not amused.

We call that day, “Cole’s Failed Attempt to Swim to Europe.” And it’s the kind of memory that barely fades over time. Both the realization that he was in trouble...and recognizing how lucky we were that the lifeguards were good at their job. And the realization that my carelessness and cavalier attitude later put him in danger. I thought I could handle it. I thought nothing would happen. I thought I knew better than my wife – that the waves weren’t really that bad. I was bored with doing nothing so I thought we could take a chance.

That day was a day of recreational swimming for the joy of being in the ocean and we’re forever grateful it turned out the way it did.

The disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee so that they could continue to proclaim the kingdom of heaven. They were braving the dangerous waves of the sea because they needed to, but they weren’t afraid until a ghost showed up.

Hearing Jesus’ voice mostly allayed their fears, but it wasn’t enough for Peter. Peter wanted to **prove** it was Jesus. He wasn’t satisfied that Jesus was joining them on their journey – through extraordinary means. Peter wanted to prove that he could do more. Peter thought he would be a braver, more faithful disciple if he did what Jesus was doing. He thought he knew better.

So, he took a chance. He got out of the relative safety of the boat to test the waves for himself. And it didn’t go well. He learned very quickly that he...isn’t...Jesus. He wasn’t made for walking on water. He wasn’t the Son of God with power over the wind and waves. He was mortal. And he should’ve just stayed in the darn boat.

The purpose of this story isn’t to test Jesus, but to get him and the disciples to the next part of their journey. They had ministry to do on the other side of the sea, and they had to get through these waves to do it. Jesus broke

the laws of physics to be part of their trip and **all** the disciples needed to do was ride in the boat together. It took a near-drowning for Peter to figure that out.

We don't have to walk on water to do God's work. In fact, we're pretty well prevented from doing that because we **are** bound by the laws of physics. But the image of a boat has remained an important metaphor for the church. We gather together to do the work that God asks of us and if we stop trying to outthink God and break the laws of physics, we might just find ourselves arriving where God wants us to be.

One of the hardest things about understanding our mission as a congregation is thinking that we know better – that we can do the impossible simply because we want to. The reality of this journey across the sea of life is that we are put in the boat for a reason. We journey together for a reason, for a purpose – and together we'll arrive on the other side if we just remember to listen to our spouse. I mean, if we listen to the way God is speaking to us and leading us.

We just need to stay in the darn boat. Amen.