

## Sermon Outline: New Roots in Nature - Surrender

Sunday, August 13, 2023 | via Zoom

Scripture: Matthew 14:22-33

**Overview:** We are in the midst of New Roots in Nature, focusing particularly on the wisdom of the water. Last week we met at Carson Beach and learned about the relationship between the gravitational pull of the moon and the tides. Today we will explore what Jesus walking on water and Alexis Pauline Gumbs' work in [Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals](#) have to teach us about the spiritual practice of surrendering to God and to the Earth.

**A Look at Scripture:** Jesus makes his disciples get into the boat while he dismissed the crowds. Then Jesus goes up to the mountain by himself to pray until evening came. The disciples were left in the boat, in the midst of storm, until the morning. Jesus approaches the boat by walking on the water, which scares the disciples. Peter is not convinced it is Jesus so he says, Jesus if it is really you, command me onto the water. Peter begins to walk on water until his fears and anxieties take over, at which point, he begins to sink. Jesus says, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" Peter's own sense of reality, his sense of what was actually possible, filled his mind with the fear that caused him to sink. Peter did not know how to surrender.

### **Key Points:**

- Reclaim surrender. Surrender is often associated with defeat or giving up. It often has a negative connotation. To surrender is not to let fear, anxiety, a prescribed notion of how things should be, or a limited view of what is possible get in the way of our relationship with God and with the natural world.
- Get in flow with the Earth. Read the Excerpt A below from *Undrowned*. Most of modern life leaves us dependent on the machine and not in tune with the nature cycles and rhythms of the Earth. We are not often required to surrender to the natural world - shed in the fall, slow down in the winter, rebirth in the spring. We cannot try to produce a late summer harvest all year long.
- Surrender is a spiritual practice. Read Excerpt B below from *Undrowned*. It is an act of prayer to choose to align yourself with the movements of the earth. It is an act of prayer to unplug from the pace, demands, and anxieties of modern life because the act itself demonstrates an exercise of agency, an informed choice to be in relationship with God and with all of Creation as more important than the demands of a society of extraction, exploitation, oppression, violence, and isolation.

To surrender is to quiet the fear-ridden mind of Peter, to trust that God Godself will always be doing the unexpected, the unimaginable. To surrender is to step onto the water out of our own agency, our own trust, rather than waiting to be commanded to do so. To surrender is to hold divine wonder above the limitations of our knowing, our doing.

May we learn to listen. May we too surrender to a love too big to name. To God. To Creation wisdom

**Reflection Questions:**

1. Where in your life are you resisting surrender? What areas are your fears, anxieties, and/or expectations preventing you from surrender?
  2. What rhythms/patterns/movements of the natural world do you notice? (Changing of seasons, movement of tides, lunar cycles, etc.) What have you learned from these patterns? How might you attune/align yourself with these patterns to deepen your surrender to the natural world?
  3. What practices, people, or places challenge and encourage you toward honest surrender to God and the Earth?
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Excerpt A:

“And what happens if we just let go? Like dolphins who beach themselves on shore to eat, and trust the tide to bring them back into the water, or who time their birth cycles to seasonal floods, or migrate across the world following warm currents on a menopausal planet. What it would take to tune in with our environment enough to be in flow with the Earth, instead of in struggle against it. Inspired by the evolution of the extinct prehistoric *Livyatan melvillei* (so-called sea monster ancestor of the contemporary sperm whale), from the being with the largest sharpest teeth to a being who uses those same teeth not to kill or even to chew, but to listen, I wonder if we, or the species that comes after us can turn our weapons into weathervanes in time.” - 121

Excerpt B:

“Yes. I aspired to dominate in a world that oppressed me. But now I need antennae for a world I can't imagine. Now I need to listen more than I need to say this. But I still do need to say this: I surrender. To a love so big it could face and acknowledge monsters. To a love so deep and wide it could create oceans and whales. To an ancestral reach so long it could become us. And when they name us back what will they say? What stories will they use? How great a love, that could create all this? How will they name all of what we destroyed? What fugitive intentions will survive? Or will the planet sing again without us? I surrender. To a love too big to name. - 123-124