

*The Rev. Micah Krey*  
The Installation of Pastor Alex Zuber  
Muhlenberg Lutheran Church  
Harrisonburg, VA  
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### Call Me Out Further

#### **Matthew 14:22-33**

<sup>22</sup>[Jesus] made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side [of the Sea of Galilee], while he dismissed the crowds. <sup>23</sup>And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, <sup>24</sup>but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. <sup>25</sup>And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. <sup>26</sup>But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. <sup>27</sup>But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." <sup>28</sup>Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." <sup>29</sup>He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. <sup>30</sup>But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" <sup>31</sup>Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" <sup>32</sup>When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. <sup>33</sup>And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Let us pray,

*May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.*

It's an interesting scene that we get in this Gospel text today. Jesus and the disciples have been moving around from place to place for some time. Jesus was healing, teaching, speaking in parables, and right before this text, he takes 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish, and feeds over five thousand people. Because of all of these miracles and amazing moments, there are crowds and crowds of people that have been following Jesus and the disciples for some time.

For whatever reason, whether it's knowing that the crowds need to return to their homes and families, or because Jesus was embracing an introverted moment, he dismisses the crowds and goes up to the mountain to pray.

During this time his closest followers, remain close. They stay in the boats but because of strong winds, they are carried further out to sea.

And so, early in the morning, Jesus comes down from the mountain, and begins walking out to them on the water.

And the disciples see this figure, walking on top of the water and they scream and cry, It's a ghost. Because that must be the only explanation for what they were seeing.

But Jesus gives comfort, "Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid." An incredible line in our scripture. Because the more accurate translation of this text would be, Take heart, I am. Do not be afraid.

Jesus literally calling himself, by the name of the burning bush. Jesus literally calling himself, the I am. God. The creator.

And so, looking at the face of God, Peter responds with more guts and faith than I could ever have. Looking at the face of God, Peter calls out.

"Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."

Peter's faith is deep within him. Peter's faith is so convinced of Jesus' power, that he dares God, to call him out onto the water.

Now, as Christians and preachers and teachers. We sometimes give the disciples, especially Peter, a hard time. How is it that they didn't get, or didn't fully comprehend, that this was God in their midst? How is it that they doubted and struggled so much even though they were able to see God face to face?

But in this text, we hear incredible faith. Incredible certainty from Peter.

Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.

Daring God, to call him out further.

I have had the privilege of knowing Pastor Alex Zuber for about 5 years now.

And if there was a way that I could describe Alex's ministry and his faith:  
It would be that Alex constantly dares God, to call him further into his life in Christ.

I first saw it in Alex's commitment to a new program at the seminary in Philadelphia. We both started together in this Co-Op program. Over the course of 3 years, we would simultaneously complete our academic studies and our internship with a congregation.

For anyone, this is a tough program. But Alex decided to make it exponentially harder. My single congregation was a half hour away seminary and my home was in between. I had two supervising pastors on site and plenty of other staff members to help me get acquainted and to make sure that I was able to manage my workloads.

Alex on the other hand... served Stony Man Lutheran Parish, a two-point congregation (of Grace Lutheran and Beth Eden Lutheran... in Luray, VA). 4 to 5 hours away from the seminary campus. With a detached supervisor who served another local congregation of his own... and this two-point congregation had very little staff.

For the first two years of Seminary, Alex was traveling 8-12 hours and over 500 miles a week, in order to live out this calling. All the while being an incredible pastoral presence to people of Stony Man Parish, being a remarkable student, and one of the best friends that I could ask for.

It didn't stop there. Alex would dare God again in his first summer in seminary, serving at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, for his clinical pastoral education. 300 miles away from family and friends. Serving in one of the most challenging chaplaincy experiences in a busy and chaotic trauma bay. Countless on call hours. Comforting family and friends of gunshot victims. Being a pastoral presence to those who would lose their lives. Holding holy space with those who were hurting most.

Over and again, Alex dared God to call him out further, and Alex was always willing to take the next step out.

If it is you, command me out onto the water.

Alex is an incredible friend and role model. He not only dared God, but dared others around him, to take greater steps into our faith journeys. Alex constantly dared me to step out of my comfort zone and to be more involved in the community around me. He dared me to live into the fullness of my life as I began my life in recovery of alcoholism. He always pushed all of the members of the co-op program of the seminary to take better care of each other and for the seminary to take better care of us. He challenged and dared the people of Stony Man to look to the future and envision new possibilities.

Daring others to come with him on the water.

And then Alex dared God once again. After graduating from seminary, he took a 1-year call to Stony Man as their pastor. But then left that position to be closer to Renna as she started her PhD program. Knowing that there was no certainty of a pastoral position in Charlottesville, Alex dared God, to make a way for him to serve in his calling. Over a year of supply and interim work. Meeting incredible communities from different backgrounds. Congregations with long histories or diverse communities. Communities with new initiatives or new challenges. Alex took steps to engage and be the best pastor and leader for every community that he worked with.

Throughout seminary, and first call, Alex dared God, and then stepped out onto the waters when God responded. I'm sure Alex would be first one to tell you that it was never easy, and the winds certainly swept through, and there were times when he may have begun to sink under the water. There were times when the co-op program was just too busy. Weeks when driving 500 miles just wasn't possible. Alex's time at the Hospital at the University of Pennsylvania was one of the most challenging times of his life and the weight of those experiences and images were overwhelming. Leaving his first call to enter into the unknown of supply work, interim ministry, and Uber driving, may have felt like it would never end.

And then... one day, a new call appeared. Muhlenberg Lutheran Church. A home away from home. In the city that captivates his spirit. Next to the school that makes him bleed purple. If it is you, command me out onto the water. And Jesus said, "Come."

People of Muhlenberg, you have a pastor who dares God to call him out onto the waters, confident that God is guiding him. And he is a pastor who dares others, to come out onto the water with him.

Pastor Alex will challenge you; he will dare you; he will preach the Good News, the Grace of God, and the cost of discipleship – and he will preach it hard sometimes.

And when he calls you out onto the waters with him, you all can have the confidence to know that he is doing it because he himself is following Christ out onto the water. Because Alex has been there on those choppy waters and won't ask you to step out of the boat without having stepped out in faith with you. He will accompany you as you search for the face of Jesus in the midst of the storms of your lives. He will remind you of God's unfailing presence and love for you.

He will encourage you to be bold, to dare God to call you out even further into your community, into the world, into the messiness, the difficulties, the challenges around you, knowing that Christ's presence will always be there to guide us and catch us.

Pastor Alex, this is what you have been called to. This what you have been called for. To be the person who dares God to call him out onto the water. Have courage and confidence in that calling and lead these people on that journey with you. And when the wind whips up around you and when you yourself begin to sink. Know that Christ's presence is with you too. Present in the Word and in the Spirit. Present in family and friends who are always by your side. Present in Pastor Lauren. Present in this community. Here to reach out and catch you when water seems to be rising. Know your limits but be confident in your gifts.

People of God, Pastor Lauren, and Pastor Alex, Christ has heard your daring effort, and is calling you into the unknown. Step out of the boat with confidence, knowing with all certainty that Christ is guiding you in the work of God.

In Jesus' name we pray: Amen.