

ONE JOB

Proper 14, Year A, v6

1 Kings 19:9-18 / Romans 10:5-15 / Matthew 14:22-33

Holy Faith Episcopal Church

August 9, 2026

Good morning, church.

I want to tell you something
that happened at home this week.

Because I think it could happen in yours too.

A woman came to clean my house.

She comes once a month.

And I did what I always do.

I told her what I have been working on.

I played some of the music I produced from A Book of Psalms.

I showed her the book —

one hundred and fifty Psalms,

pulled from the original Hebrew text,

the first Bible written in English,
the New Revised Standard Edition
that we read from this morning,
and Eugene Peterson's landmark work, The Message.
Paraphrased. Printed. Finished.

She looked at it,
and the first thing out of her mouth was,
You could make some money with this.

And I said,
I am giving it away.
All of it. Free.

She was stunned. Stopped in her tracks.

A little while later,
almost without thinking,
she quoted the apostle Paul at me.
The worker deserves to be paid.

And she is right. That is Scripture.

But I told her the truth.

There is no joy in that.

I am giving it away,

and I have never been happier in my life.

And she looked at me.

Stunned. Again.

I saw a hint of fear creeping onto her face.

Afraid of the cost

to actually *believe* that.

Now — some of you just felt

the same thing she felt.

Something in you... agreed with her...

and something in you *got a little bit afraid.*

But the conversation wasn't over.

On her way out my door,

I said the thing I'd been circling all morning.

The world does not have a financial problem.

It does not have a political problem.

It does not have a work problem.

It does not have a relationship problem.

The world has a heart problem.

And she agreed with everything.

Yes. That is true. That is exactly true.

But when she walked out my door
and got into her car
she still carried every bit of the weight
she walked in with.

Some of you are nodding.

Yes, Father. Heart problem. That is true.

But just *knowing* it
hasn't changed one single thing.

Because here is what we get wrong.

We think if we could just understand it,
we could beat it.

If we could just get the diagnosis right,
the healing would follow.

It just doesn't work that way with the heart.

Peter knew who Jesus was.

He just watched him feed thousands of people
with one young boy's lunch.

He *knew*.

And he *still* went under.

Elijah *knew* the Lord.

He had just called down fire from heaven
on top of Mount Carmel, the chapter before.

He knew.

And we find him *in a cave*

begging God to *just let him die*.

Knowing your heart is the problem
is not the same as letting *God anywhere near it*.

We all live in a high-tension world.
And we spend most of our lives
trying to force things...
more pressure... more drive... more grip.

Not so in parts of Africa.
In Yoruba tradition, there is a stick called Orin Ata.
It comes from the candlewood tree.
Just a root, cut from a tree that will grow another.

You chew the end of it,
a little every day,
until the fibers fray soft
into something like a brush.

No dentist. No toothpaste. No money.
Perfectly bright, white teeth. Healthy gums.

But here is why it matters.

You cannot rush it.

You cannot force it in one sitting.

Bite down hard, try to make it happen all at once,
and you do not get bristles.

You get splinters.

It only becomes what it is meant to be
slowly. Patiently. The same way, every day.

That is not a dental lesson.

That is a way of life.

Joy is never formed in force.

Peace is never formed in force.

And love —

love is never, ever formed in force.

They are *only* formed

the way the *stick* becomes a *brush*.

Slowly. Faithfully. Released into, not seized.

Which brings us to Peter
and the water.

And I want to clear something up about Peter.

He gets a bad rap.

For years and years, preachers have been telling us

Peter sank because he didn't have enough faith.

That is *not* what happened.

Peter **had** faith.

He is the *only one* who *got out of the boat*.

He *asked...* if *he* could *walk on the water too*.

Lord, if it is you, tell me to come to you.

And Jesus said, Come.

And Peter took his first step.

He got out of the boat.

He stood up on the water.

And he walked.

If he didn't *believe* he could do it, he never would have asked.

So what happened?

The text tells us *exactly* what happened.

When he noticed the strong wind... he became frightened.

He took his eyes off the face of Jesus
and looked toward the powerful wind.

And tried to force it.

What if the wind gets worse.

What if I go under.

What if I cannot do this.

What if he does not catch me. What if. What if. What if.

And the moment he tried to force his way through the water
instead of staying with the one steady thing in front of him,
he stopped walking... and started sinking.

He didn't sink from a lack of faith.

He sank the way orin ata splinters in your teeth
when you bite down hard, all at once,
instead of chewing it slow.

And if you want to see *the same thing*
from *the other end* of a life... look at Elijah.

Elijah is wound so tight... *he wants to die.*

"I alone am left.

They have killed the prophets.

They are coming for me.

I am the only one."

And every bit of that... feels true to him.

He has been biting down on his fear... for so long...

he doesn't remember...

how to let something form slowly.

The tension is palpable. Release seems impossible.

And God says, Come out.

Stand on the mountain.

I am about to pass by.

And then comes the wind.

A wind so strong

it is splitting the mountains

and breaking the rocks.

But God was not in the wind.

And then an earthquake.

But God was not in the earthquake.

And then a fire.

But God was not in the fire.

All the big, loud, forceful things.

All the places we are so sure

God is supposed to be.

And God was in none of them.

And after the fire,

the Scripture says,

a sound of sheer silence.

Not force. Not all at once.

Something slow, and patient, and quiet
finally allowed to do its work.

And there was God.

Not in the spectacle.

In the patience.

Now hold on to that.

God in the patience, not the spectacle.

Because it is about to get personal.

Every one of us... has our deep water.

Every one of us... has the passage
we did not think we would survive.

The lost job. The diagnosis. The grave.

The water that meant to take you under.

Orin ata takes patience to become what it is.

But when you are going under,
God does not ask you to wait.
He reaches without hesitation.
As if he was *just waiting*
for you *to ask for help*.

The gospel says Jesus reached out... *immediately*.

He didn't wait...
to see if Peter could pull himself together.
He didn't let him thrash around... to build character.
He responded... *Immediately*.

The hand *was already* there.

The distance... was never as far... as the fear... made it look.

I want to take you back
to my first year of seminary.

There was a professor — strict, exacting,
the kind who made you afraid to open your mouth
unless you were sure of your answer.

One morning, he went around the room,
one student at a time,
and asked us all the same question.

What is your purpose in ministry?

Say it. One sentence. One thought.

Some of the other students
gave long answers.

Paragraphs. Qualifications.

Anything to keep talking... so he couldn't tell...
they didn't actually... *know*.

I did *not* want to be called on.

I sat there... chewing my orin ata,
trying to disappear into the back row,
hoping he would skip right over me.

He did not skip over me.

He called my name.

And before I could stop myself,
it came out.

*That every single person
would know
how deeply God loves them.*

And *the release* came over me
like a *wave*.

I *did not* plan those words.

I *did not* have time to force them.

They came the way orin ata... finally gives you the brush
after all that patient chewing — not forced. Just ready.

And in that moment

I knew.

I had one job.

And here's what I didn't understand...
sitting at that well-worn desk.

That it would take years...
before I would see...
what that sentence was *actually doing*.

*That every single person would know
how deeply God loves them —
was never... just a sentence **about them**.*

*It was the **same** trust... turned **toward me**.*

Because if God loves **them** that deeply,
God loves **me** that deeply too.

And if **that** is true,
then *whatever I need*,
God will provide.

The two were never separate.

One is the mission.

The other is what happens...

when you *actually believe...*

the *mission is true...*

for *yourself... at midnight... scared...*

about the rent... or the diagnosis... or the work... or the people

Say the *first... and eventually*

You *can't help saying the second.*

They're the same sentence... wearing two different coats.

Nowadays... When I get scared — and I do get scared,

about money, about illness, about the work —

I *still reach for it.*

I say three words to myself.

God will provide.

And I say them again.

God will provide.

And I say them again,

over and over and over,

the same way, every day,

*until.. ***I start to believe them.****

*And something ***lets go.****

*The ***tension drains out.****

*And I begin... to ***trust God... again.****

That is one kind of tension —

the kind you carry alone,

in your own chest... in the middle of the night.

But there's ***another kind.***

The kind somebody else hands you.

There was a priest in our diocese... who said...
that people would come to him
wound tight, loaded for a fight,
ready to hand him their tension
and watch him carry it.

And he learned to say
a version of the same thing every time.

Look. I have one job here.

Just one.

*To convince people
that God actually loves them.*

Always has. Always will.

One job?

Yes.

If it's not about ***Love...*** It's not about ***God.***

And if there's ***no love...*** in what *you bring me...*

I'm going to ***set it down.*** I ***won't*** pick it up.

Now... *Is there something else you wanted to ask?*

He ***didn't*** fight them. *Fighting is just more tension.*

He ***released*** it. He ***set it down...*** and did ***not*** pick it back up.

That is ***orin ata...*** in a church office.

Slow. Patient. Refusing to force it.

In a hospital room.

Slow. Patient. Refusing to force it.

Paying bills when money is tight.

Slow. Patient. Refusing to force it.

My one job... is to convince you...

that God actually... loves... you...

Always has. Always will. That's it.

That's the whole thing.

But I have been talking about me long enough.

What about you?

Do you truly know... how deeply God loves you?

Not the version you say out loud.

The version you actually believe... at two in the morning.

Do you truly believe... that God will provide?

Or are you still trying to force it...

instead of reaching for your orin ata?

Are you going to walk on water?

Because somewhere in your life... right now...

There's an invitation... to get out of the boat.

And if you do... when the wind picks up... and it will...

will you keep your eyes on the face,

or will you look at the water?

His hand is already reaching.

It was reaching before you were afraid.

It will still be reaching.. after the fear passes.

Your one job...

is ***not*** to walk on water.

It's ***not*** to still the storm.

It's ***not*** to fix the world's heart... or even your own.

Your one job... is to let the tension go... and trust the hand.

To stop staring at the wind.

To stop trying to force the water
into giving up its answer all at once.

To go slow enough... patient enough...

to hear the voice in the silence...

say what it has always said.

Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid.

The world does not have a financial problem...

or a political one... or a work problem...

or a relationship problem.

It has a heart problem.

And the cure... is a hand...

that is already reaching... already there...

already closer than the fear... ever let you believe.

Let go.

And be caught.

Amen.