

## Walking on Water?

*Matthew 14: 22-33*

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

Whenever I hear the story of Peter walking on water it reminds me of a book written years ago entitled, "If You Want to Walk on Water, You Have to Get Out of the Boat." The book essentially makes Peter the hero and the rest of the disciples' scaredy cats. And it says that if we want to see God's miracles happening in our own lives, we need to have the faith to take risks and get out of our comfort zones. We know the sermon: if we have enough faith and just keep our eyes locked on Jesus, not allowing our fears to distract us, we can walk on water like Peter does. Sounds basic enough, right? So if anyone wants to try to walk on water we have a little kiddie pool here. We can give it the good old Christian try...and best of luck.

Of all the miracles Jesus does, this one is one of the trickiest. Maybe it is because we all know that it is impossible to walk on top of a lake unless it's frozen. But more, if it's a story that makes Peter the hero and everyone else in the boat a zero, it makes the story about mustering up enough faith. And to be honest, that isn't someone we always have. I mean sometimes we have it and I know some of you have stepped out in faith: some have moved away leaving established lives behind. Some have changed jobs without the certainty that everything will work out. Some have stepped into the unknown and what seemed like a few easy steps became scarier the farther we've went. We also know what it is like to feel like we are sinking. What seemed doable enough one day can suddenly become overwhelming the next. I mean, I can't tell you how many times I've sat with people just this week who are sinking in debt, or grief, or fear, or addiction, or uncertainty just hoping something can keep them above water. It's a tricky story because having faith is not always that easy.

Then we look at the story and there are some problems as well: like why would Jesus command the disciples to get into the boat just for the point to be that we need to have enough faith to get out of the boat? Why does Jesus tell Peter he has little faith if he has enough faith to even try to walk toward Jesus? Notice Jesus never asks Peter to get out of the boat, but simply says, "fine"

after Peter wants to try it. Also notice that the strong winds end only when Peter gets back into it? Obviously, if the story was about us mustering up the faith to walk on water then something isn't lining up here.

So what if? What if Jesus' comment about Peter having little faith has nothing to do with his failure to walk on water or ours? What if it has more to do with what happens before and after Peter tries walking on water that really matters? You see, what bookends the glamorous walking on water moment is that Jesus is always moving toward them. Before Peter gets out of the boat, Jesus is walking toward the disciples. When Peter starts sinking, Jesus reaches out toward him. The challenge of the story might be that fear sinks us and faith saves us, but the truth of the story is that whether we have an abundance of faith or a shortage of it, Jesus is always, *always* moving toward us, no matter what we are going through.

If our faith is solid or shaky. If it's something we dive into headfirst, or something we just dip our toe in, God's movement is the same: always moving toward us saying, "It is I, be not afraid." I am with you in the midst of fear. I am with you in the midst of uncertainty. I am with you in the midst of overwhelming storms.

Something remarkable happened this week when I was visiting Bob before he went in for his quadruple bypass surgery. When I arrived at the pre-surgery area, I asked him how he was feeling. He said, "I'm scared, but I can feel the love from everyone around me, and that is what is making this okay." The thing about God's love—or love's presence in general—is it isn't something we have to strive for. It isn't something we have to step out of the boat to prove we deserve. It is simply something we trust is always there, always moving toward us whether we find ourselves in the boat or out of it.

Honestly, there is not much glamor to it. But, at least in my opinion, it is quite possibly the most wonderful miracle there is because life can be painful and frightful and overwhelming. And, at the end of the day, our salvation has to depend on something deeper and wider than *our faith alone*.

So in a moment there will be some open time for you to step into the kiddie pool. Not trying to walk on water—although you can try—but soaking your feet in the promise of God's presence and love. May it surround you and give you the assurance that as you walk through the waters of fear, or grief, or pain, or uncertainty God is still saying, "It is I, be not afraid." God's love is always moving toward us; and we are all in the boat together. And somehow that makes whatever we are going through okay.