

If you Want to Walk on Water You've Got to Get Out of the Boat (John Ortberg)

Fear I looked up the definition of the word fear and it said: *"an unpleasant emotion caused by the threat of danger, pain, or harm"*. Oh my goodness I can identify with all of that. I do have rather a long list of fears – snakes (I almost stood on a slow worm in the garden and my screams could be heard for miles) frogs – too jumpy and I don't like sudden movements, deep water – I would prefer to have a life jacket on near water that is deeper than me, a cruise would be my worst nightmare, heights – on one visit to the theatre we could only get tickets for the upper circle and I wanted Colin to tie a rope to me and the seat. I could go on.

Have you got a fear and if the answer to that question is "no" then I stand in awe of you. I think there is a little bit of fear in all of us. We fear our own death and the death of those we love, we fear loss of health, security, failure, the unknown, what other people think about us -another fear of mine. What would you put on the list?

I have every sympathy with the disciples in our reading today.

This passage contains three miracles: 1. Jesus walks on water. 2. Peter walks on water. 3. The calming of the storm.

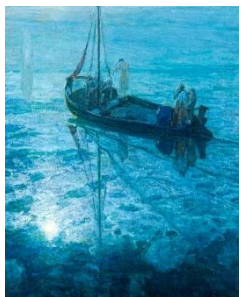
So what can we learn from this very familiar story? Lets dive in.

This story is also recorded in Mark and John but Matthew's account gives the most details and is unique in that it's the only Gospel to record Peter walking on water. First we need to put it into context to fully understand what is happening.

Jesus feeding the 5,000 has just taken place so you would imagine that the disciples' faith has to be at an all-time high. They have just witnessed a few loaves of bread and fish feed a large crowd and then Jesus immediately made the disciples get in the boat to go ahead of him to the other side of the sea of Galilee. After this Jesus dismisses the crowd and goes up a mountain side to pray by himself.

So far, all pretty normal but Things are about to get interesting.

A storm brews up. There were violent waves and a strong wind. They were experienced fishermen and storms in this area were common but still the sea had claimed many lives and it wasn't something to be messed with. They are terrified.



As dawn approaches and the faintest light starts appearing, Jesus decides to go to the disciples. Perhaps he felt sorry for them. On the still stormy water Jesus walks on the water toward the disciples in the boat who are still a long way off.

The disciples can't quite tell what or who is walking toward them and assume it must be a ghost. A common superstition among seafarers of the day was those who drown would haunt the waters. They didn't know what they saw, but they certainly didn't think it could be Jesus. And honestly who could blame them. Knowing their fear Jesus calls out to them.

"Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

(Henry Ossawa Tanner – *The Disciples See Christ Walking on the Water*, c. 1907.)

Peter is known for being a little headstrong. He's quick to speak before he thinks things through. And while that got him in trouble from time to time, it also led him to experience things no one else did. So he responds to Jesus' . *"Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water."* Jesus answers with a single word, *"Come."*

With remarkable trust and courage Peter climbs over the side of the boat. It is easy to be critical of Peter for what happens next. But stay in this moment for a minute. In the middle of strong winds and waves Peter trusts Jesus to step out of the boat. That's an incredible display of faith in Jesus. Those first steps must have been surreal.

But... As Peter walks on water he starts to notice how powerful the wind and waves are, and he takes his eyes off Jesus. He gets distracted by his harrowing circumstances and he sinks. Peter's doubt was about to take him out.



Matthew records that he was afraid as he began to sink. You think? He must have been terrified. I imagine as he gasped for one last breath before he went under he cried out, "LORD SAVE ME!" "Jesus doesn't wait, immediately He reached out his hand and caught him.

Jesus walks on water. Peter walks on water. The storm is calmed But what does that mean for us today?

Peace Is Not Found In The Absence Of The Storm, But In The Presence Of Jesus – "It is I. Don't be afraid."

When Jesus bid Peter to come to him he didn't calm the storm. Rather, he invited Peter out into the storm, into the rough seas. The rebuke of Peter's lack of faith was because he took his eyes off Jesus and instead focused on the storm. We think peace is found when the waves of life are calm. But Jesus never promised us smooth sailing. Instead he promised to always be with us. Peace is found in the presence of Jesus, even in the middle of a storm. Peter's walk on the water teaches us that in the middle of storms we can have peace IF we keep our eyes on Jesus. The storms of life give us good reason to be afraid. But Jesus is bigger than even the scariest of storms.

Faith Requires Stepping Out Of The Boat - Peter got down out of the boat, and came toward Jesus

We like comfort. We like safety. And that's not all a bad thing. But we often over inflate our desire for these things. Sometimes Jesus is going to ask us to take a risk and trust him. Sometimes, we have to step out of the boat. Just like Peter, sometimes we will step out of the boat and then be overcome by fear. We will sink. But Jesus is right there to catch us. You might stumble, but we won't drown. I imagine, the next time Peter "stepped out of the boat" he did so more confidently. His faith and trust in Jesus was greater. The same will be true for us. The more steps of faith we take the easier it gets. Once we see God's faithfulness it's easy to trust him more and more.

So, step out of the boat.

Without Jesus We Will Sink *beginning to sink, Peter cried out, "Lord, save me"*

Peter's walk on the water was short lived. It was short lived because he took his eyes off Jesus. Peter learned an important lesson that day that we shouldn't ignore. When we take our eyes off Jesus the storms of life will quickly overcome us. We see it for ourselves, the people we know. When Christians stop looking to Jesus they quickly sink. They get sucked into temptations. They get overwhelmed by life. They forget who's in control. Life is full of storms. Big storms. Storms that will destroy. Unless we keep your eyes on Jesus. With Jesus we cannot only endure, we can walk on water above the storm. Keep your eyes on Jesus.

Worship Is Our Response *those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God"*

Maybe the most important lesson from this story is our response to the power of Jesus. It's worship. When we encounter Jesus, we should worship him. Matthew intentionally highlights this moment because that's the point. This story wasn't about Peter and his faith, or lack of. Ultimately it was about the power of Jesus. Our response to Jesus should be the same as the disciples. When we encounter him, it should bring us to a place of worship. It should remind us of who we are and who he is.

When we Follow Jesus, He Will Do Incredible Things Through us *"how beautiful are the feet who bring good news"* Romans 10:15

I'm convinced God wants to tell an incredible story through our life. He wants to do things in us and through us that we can't even imagine. God has walk on water moments for us.

God wants to tell a good story in our life. But often we settle for boring and safe stories.

I bet Peter was talking about the time he walked on water for the rest of his life. It's a great story! Why? Because he took a risk. He didn't play it safe.

God wants the same for us. He wants to tell a good story in our life. Will you let him?

If we want to walk on water, then we really do have to get out of the boat . Amen