

## **Walking On Water In Bad Weather** **Matthew 14:22-36** **Jim Stephens**

**Text:** Matthew 14:27-29 (Supplemental texts: Mark 6:45-56; John 6:15-21)  
*27 But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." 28 "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." 29 "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. (Matthew 14:27-29 NIV)*

**Thesis:** The storms of life can be opportunities for accomplishing things we never dreamed of.

### **Tell the story.**

They say bad news travels fast. This bad news had come from Judea only that morning. Two of John's closest followers rushed from Jerusalem to Galilee looking for Jesus. When they found him in Capernaum after a few days of searching the towns and villages around the lake, they told him the news that a week earlier, at his birthday party, Herod had executed Jesus' cousin John the Baptist as a party favor to his step-daughter Salome. Jesus took it pretty hard and asked Peter to get a boat so they could get out of town for a few days. They crossed the lake to a remote area, but word got around and crowds of people followed on foot from all the towns in the area.

When Jesus saw them, he had compassion on them and healed the sick ones. Then it was late and Jesus' disciples wanted him to send the people away so they could get some food. Jesus told his guys, "You feed them!" This led to one of the most talked about miracles in the Bible – feeding 5000 men plus women and children with five biscuits and two sardines and having twelve garbage bags of food left over. Incredible!

Jesus still needed some down time to process his grief over his cousin John's murder so he sent his twelve closest followers back with the rented boat while he sent the crowds away. It was getting dark by now and Jesus climbed up the hillside above the lake to pray. He was alone.

### **Matthew 14:24-27 NIV (Read this aloud) (Page ??? in the chair Bible)**

*24 but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. 25 During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. 26 When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. 27 But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." (Matthew 14:24-27 NIV)*

His twelve closest followers were quite a distance from land by now, rowing rather than sailing because the wind was dead against them. **The New Living Translation says, "...the disciples were in trouble far from land..."** They were about halfway to their destination on the NW shore of the lake (Bethsaida – Mark's account, Capernaum – John's account) but a serious storm had come up **(300 ft below sea level lake surrounded by 1500 foot hills created a temperature variable that caused sudden and violent storms on this little inland lake.)**

They were exhausted from rowing, the storm was not getting any better, and they were beginning to wonder if they were going to make it. They weren't really panicky yet, but they knew things weren't looking too good.

Some time around three or four in the morning Jesus approached the boat walking on the water. What they saw was a ghost moving their way across the waves. They freaked! **(Angel of death coming for to carry me home?)**

Jesus shouted to them over the roar of the wind and water and said, "Don't be afraid. It's me."

Peter called out, "Jesus, if it's really you, tell me to come to you by walking on water!" Jesus looked at Peter and shouted back, "Come on!" **Come on. Peter, Do it!**

What was the next five seconds like? Did Peter vault over the side? Did he get a firm grip on the side of the boat and gingerly step out with his right foot, putting a little weight on it, then his full weight, then bringing his left foot over the side and standing on the water next to the boat? What did the water feel like? Was it like Jello or like ice? Did Peter's feet get wet? **I know this much, Peter got out of the boat!**

Then he started toward Jesus, walking on the water. For a few moments, there was no storm in Peter's mind. Only the words of Jesus, "Come on Peter!" But the storm didn't let up, the waves were churning and the wind still blasting. Then storm-awareness began to leak back in. Peter got distracted and as soon as the **fear level exceeded the faith level** he started to sink. As soon as **storm-awareness exceeded Jesus-awareness**, he began to sink.

The good thing is that he was walking toward Jesus and Jesus was walking toward him, so when the fear/faith balance tipped and Peter cried out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus reached down and grabbed his hand and pulled him back up on top. Jesus said, "Hey faint-heart! What happened to brave-heart? Why did you doubt me?" But Jesus had a big grin on his face as he said it!

Then the two of them walked over to the boat and climbed over the side and the wind stopped, the storm died down, the waves smoothed out. They landed a few miles down the shore at Genessaret and it was "back to work!" for Jesus and the team.

**Here are some things that stood out to me as I read and thought through this story from the life of Jesus and his friends....**

**Jesus' friends were doing what he told them to do and they were experiencing a pretty serious storm.**

- The storms of life come to people who are doing their very best to do exactly what God wants them to do.
- Don't judge others and don't judge yourself solely by whether things are going well right now.
- There are factors in the equation we can't see. There is information we don't have.
- We've been reading from the book of Job recently in our RSG Daily Bible Readings. That whole book is about bad things happening to good people. And about how most people get it wrong when they try to judge why the bad things are happening.
- Job's "friends" (If those are his friends, he sure doesn't need enemies!) were convinced he had some deep dark sinful secret and that's why all the bad stuff.

One time Jesus' disciples saw a blind man and asked, "Who sinned – this man or his parents – to make him a blind?" Jesus said, "This has nothing to do with sin. This is an opportunity for God to do a miracle!" (John 9:1-3)

*1 Walking down the street, Jesus saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked, "Rabbi, who sinned: this man or his parents, causing him to be born blind?" 3 Jesus said, "You're asking the wrong question. You're looking for someone to blame. There is no such cause-effect here. Look instead for what God can do. (John 9:1-3 The Message)*

- The storms we face – the situations life hands us – can be overwhelming and completely outside our ability to control. **May or may not be your fault.** But these storms can provide an opportunity for a miracle! Like Peter, we can experience a miracle in our storm!

**The storm you're facing can be your opportunity to walk on the water..**

**If you want to walk on water.... Some lessons in water-walking!**

**If you want to walk on water in bad weather, you've got to want to walk on water.**

- The disciples in the boat were in trouble in the storm. When they saw Jesus walking on the water they screamed out in terror. They thought it was the death angel coming for them. Hey, some of these guys were fishermen. **You can't tell me fishermen aren't superstitious! "My lucky fishing hat!"**

- But when they found out it was Jesus and not a ghost, it struck Peter differently than it did the others.
- Peter saw Jesus walking on the water and it just triggered something inside him. Peter thought, "I want to do that!"
- See, all of these guys had an inner desire for something more. They weren't couch potatoes. They had begun following Jesus through their own desire for something more and then he had chosen them out of a large number of Christ-following people..

Peter and several of the others followed John the Baptist. Then they followed Jesus. (Come and see)  
Six months after they first met, Jesus said, "Follow me and I'll make you fishers of men."

- Something in Peter reached out to something in Jesus and Peter said, "Lord if it's you, tell me to come to you by walking on the water!" "Come on Peter. Do it!"
- **What's your burning desire?**

### **If you want to walk on water in a storm, you've got to face your fear.**

- The most common command in the Bible? Fear not! The most common emotion humans experience? Fear. **When God is challenging you to take a water-walking step of faith, fear is a normal response.**
- My fear of water – Tell the story of canoeing on Sacheen Lake and gliding gently over the huge rock that seemed to lunge upward out of the murky depths of the lake. The heart-stopping fear. The lingering fear of something under the surface.
- Fear and Faith were battling away in Peter.
  - Fear of the unknown
  - Fear of loss
  - Fear of change
  - Fear of looking foolish?

- A middle-aged man feels called to switch careers, but fear holds him back.
- A woman feels trapped in a painful and abusive marriage, but fear keeps her from acknowledging reality and seeking help.
- An elderly man is afraid of dying, but he has never told anyone about this. Fear of what others might think keeps him from speaking up.
- A successful businessman risks financial security every day, but is afraid to risk emotional intimacy or real self-disclosure since he was a child.
- A marriage has gone dull and lifeless, but the couple is afraid to talk about what they're feeling.
- A man struggles with internet pornography, but is afraid to admit his addiction.

## **If you want to walk on water in a storm, you've got to wait till Jesus calls you.**

It was three or four in the morning and they had been in the boat since before sundown. They had been in a storm since evening. Jesus showed up after they had pretty much exhausted their resources. They were out of strength and out of ideas. It's time for something to happen. **Let's see some action here, Lord!**

Waiting is really hard. We don't like to wait for anything. That's why we have microwaves. That's why we have Express Lanes (10 items or less) in the supermarkets.

That's why on those occasions when I have to go to the supermarket with Jean, she resigns herself to the inevitable search for the shortest line (lots of calculation to do here – Number of customers X Items in the cart. Is a checkbook visible? And then when I settle on a checkout – make the commitment – the checker calls for a price check and it's all pointless really.

That's why we think about charging the doctor an hourly rate for waiting in the Waiting Room. It's called a Waiting Room! Anyhow...

### **Waiting is hard..**

- Abraham waiting twenty four years for the birth of the promised son.
- Joseph waiting 13 years for the dream to come true.
- Israel waiting 400 years for their promised deliverance.

### **Waiting is hard..**

- But waiting grows us – it matures us.
- Do you want an ice cream cone now or a bicycle for your birthday? That's always a hard one for me.

### **Waiting is hard..**

- The waiting of a single person who hopes God may have marriage in store but is beginning to despair.
- The waiting of a childless couple who desperately want to start a family.
- The waiting of Nelson Mandela as he sits in a prison cell for 27 years and wonders if he will ever be free or if his country will ever know justice.
- The waiting of someone who longs to have work that is meaningful and significant yet cannot seem to find it.
- The waiting of an elderly person in a nursing home – alone, ill, waiting to die.

*But those who wait on the Lord will find new strength. They will fly high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint. (Isaiah 40:31 NLT)*

## **A word of wisdom:**

- This is not skydiving without a parachute. This is not white-water rafting without a lifejacket. This is not skiing downhill blindfolded. It's not about doing crazy stuff.
- This is about an inner stirring to try something impossible and saying, Lord if it is ok, I'd really like to try this and him saying, "Come on! Give it a shot!"
- It's a stirring of desire, a hope of possibility, a scary, thrilling, hopeful passion to do something exciting. Then saying, Lord if this is really you, tell me to step out in faith, to let go the oars, to get out of the boat. And he says, "Come on then. Come to me."
- It's about obedience to the call.

## **If you want to walk on water in a storm, you've got to get out of the boat.**

Peter stepped out of the boat and walked toward Jesus. Fear and faith were battling inside him, but as long as he stayed focused on Jesus' command, "Come on" and as long as he kept his eyes on Jesus and as long as he kept putting one foot in front of the other, he was doing it!

- Peter could pretty well calculate his chances in the boat.
- Peter understood that water won't support a 165 pound fisherman.
- Peter had to leave the relative security of the boat.

And he did it. There was a specific point at which he stepped over the edge and put his weight on water.

You can wish and hope and dream and say "Someday I will..." Someday I will what? "When this or that happens, then I will..."

- When I get to be a better person, then I will become a Christ-follower.
- When we get the house paid off, then I will start pursuing my dream.
- When things ease up a little, then I'll deal with my addiction and stop self-medicating my hurts.
- **Put the thoughts and info on [Celebrate Recovery here](#).**

## **If you want to walk on water in a storm, you've got to keep your eyes on Jesus.**

Then out of the corner of his eye, he saw a particularly large wave, froth whipping off the top of it and spattering him, and he lost focus and fear just started to get the upper hand. And Peter began to sink. He didn't sink like a rock. He started to sink. And then he turned his head just a little and got a good look at the waves and he was terrified!

For Peter – and this seems kind of unfair – the storm didn't stop the moment he stepped out of the boat. Peter took a huge step of faith – you'd think God would stop the storm and pat Peter on the back and say, "Way to go, Pete! You da' Man!" But the storm kept right on raging.

- Fear and faith were battling in Peter's mind. Fear and faith are battling in your mind and my mind as we face life's storms.
- Which is getting stronger? It absolutely depends on which direction you're looking! Absolutely!
- Daily devotions – looking at Jesus. Meditating on scripture – looking at Jesus. Involved in a small group – looking at Jesus. Learning to pray about everything – looking at Jesus.
- Allowing your thoughts to spiral downward in fear – Looking at the waves. Engaging in conversations with negative attitude people who feed your fear – looking at the waves. Thinking about the worst-case scenario – looking at the waves.
- Keeping your eyes on Jesus is your part of the deal. Get help – you'll need it. But it's still your part of the miracle of walking on the water in the storm!

### **If you want to walk on water in a storm, you've got to trust Jesus to catch you if you start to sink.**

Peter cried out, "Lord, save me!" Best thing you can do. "Lord, save me!" And Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. Not by the collar, not by the hair. Jesus didn't walk over to the boat dragging Peter. Jesus pulled Peter back to the surface and they walked together to the boat!

What if you want to walk on water and you face your fears and you hear Jesus call you and you get out of the boat – and, like Peter, you get distracted and scared and fear rises up and faith starts to shrink and you start to sink? What if that happens?

- Do you believe Jesus cares enough for you to take you by the hand and lift you out of the sea and walk you back to the boat?
- Do you believe Jesus can rescue a well-meaning person – you – who is trying something scary and gets distracted by the size of the challenge?
- 'Cause we do start to sink sometimes and we need to be confident that when we cry out to Jesus, he'll be there.

## **Invitation and response:** (Let's put our things aside)

What constitutes faith and what constitutes failure?

- Facing fear?
- Stepping out of the boat?
- Taking his eyes off Jesus?
- Fear again?
- Sinking?
- Jesus' comment about little faith? "Why did you doubt me?" "Because I was looking at the storm and thinking about the storm."

Did Peter fail? Did Peter succeed? What did Peter do right?

- He responded to the stirring inside.
- He asked Jesus to call him to come.
- He stepped over the side of the boat.
- He cried out, "Save me, Lord!"

Are you ready to get out of the boat? Are you ready to take the step that will put you on the way toward Jesus? Are you ready to take the risk of faith and do something you've never done before?