

JESUS OUT OF THE BOAT

There was once was a young man named Jimmy who had heard a family rumor that his father, his grandfather and even his great-grandfather, had all "walked on water" on their 21st birthday. When the day of his 21st birthday came, he believed that if they could do it, so could he. So, off he went in a boat with his friend. When he got out in the middle of the lake, he got up and stepped out of the boat. He fell into the water and almost drowned. The next day, Jimmy asked his grandmother why he wasn't given the same gift as the others men in his family. She told him that his father, grandfather and great-grandfather had all been born in February, not in August, as he was.

Today we are continuing in our series Walking with Jesus. Last week we talked about Jesus in the boat. Today we want to talk about Jesus out of the boat. There will be times in our walk with Jesus that He calls us out of our comfort zones and into a life of faith with Him.

Matthew 14:25-33 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." 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. 30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" 32 And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. 33 Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

We see from this passage 3 things about faith;

1. Faith to Step Out

The first thing you have to do if you are going to truly live the life of faith is that you have to be willing to follow Jesus even when it is difficult; even when it does not make sense. You have to be willing to get out of the boat. You have to be willing to step out and follow Jesus when He says come, even if you do not understand why or how.

Think about this with me for a minute. Peter had been a fisherman all of his life. He had been around the lake all of his life. I am sure he had been out in the lake during a number of storms on the Sea of Galilee. He probably knew of people who had died in storms on the lake. He knew that the last thing you do in a storm is separate yourself from the boat. The boat is your salvation in the storm. With all that understanding He sees Jesus walking on the water and hears Him say come.

Matt 14:29 Come, he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

This is the first step to leading a life of faith. It is being willing to leave your place of safety and security and to step out and trust God instead. How do you get the faith to do that? So often God places a dream in our lives. We spoke about that a few weeks ago when we talked about David and Goliath. God gives us a dream but we allow delay, discouragement, disapproval and doubt to hold us back. That dream challenges us to step out in faith but we hesitate.

Because of that, we often miss God's plan for our lives and settle for something far less.

A mother was taking her four-year-old daughter to school. She was a doctor and had left her stethoscope on the car seat. Her little girl picked it up and very excited began to play with it. Excellent, thought the doctor, my daughter wants to follow in my footsteps! Then the child spoke into the instrument, "Hello and welcome to McDonald's may I take your order?"

How do you step out in faith? You do it by listening to God in prayer and reading His word. You need to hear what God is saying to you and not what the world is saying to you.

Years ago, someone on the television program The View said that Vice President Mike Pence had a mental illness because he claimed that he hears from God. She said "It is one thing to talk to Jesus, it is another thing when Jesus talks to you. That is called mental illness, if I'm not mistaken." She is not correct. Mike Pence responded by saying that hearing from Jesus was a normal part of the Christian life. He said, "I can honestly tell you my faith sustains me in all that I do and it's just a regular part of our lives. But I'm not unusual."

As we read the bible and listen to God in prayer, He speaks to us. Listen and be obedient to what He says. You read it, you listen to God, but then you do what he says. You act on it. I could give you so many examples from my own life.

In 2001 Naomi and I left Kuwait and I served as a pastor in a Mennonite Brethren church in Niagara-on-the-lake. This church had gone without a pastor and had been looking for several years. There was a lot of excitement and growth when I started. Attendance was up, we had gone from only a handful to multiple services and had hired additional staff. Everyone was happy. However, after a few years I was approached by the director of the denomination's mission. We got talking about the Middle East and he asked me if I would ever consider going back. I said no, but slowly God began telling me that I needed to go back. I resisted the idea because I was worried about the church. How could I tell them that I was thinking of leaving after the amazing years we had just had?

In addition, the church in Kuwait was not looking for anyone. I figured that, since I felt that God was calling me to go back, that there was a need. I wrote the pastor to ask how things were going. He said that everything was great. The person that I had raised up to replace me was doing well and they were not looking for any new pastors.

Still, I had this growing sense that God was telling me that it was time to leave. I was preaching a series on obedience at the time and my own hypocrisy was killing me. God was calling me to step out of the boat, even though it made absolutely no sense. There was no reason to go, and there was nothing to go to. In obedience, I knew that I had to follow through with what God was telling me to do. I called the head of the elder's board and took him out for breakfast. He also served as the Spiritual Life Director at the local Christian High School. He was obviously upset when I said that I was resigning, he just sat there looking at his food unable to speak.

I went home from that breakfast feeling completely defeated and that I had just made a HUGE mistake. An hour later our phone rang. The pastor who had replaced me in Kuwait had just resigned and, after praying about it, they wanted to know if I would ever consider returning. That was one part of the puzzle. I knew then that God was calling me back, but I still felt bad for the church we were leaving.

I called the head of the elders to apologize again for my decision, only to realize that he was silent not because he was mad, but because God had also been calling him into pastoral ministry! Within a month the church transitioned and continued to grow. God rewarded that obedience.

A few weeks ago, the team got back from Ecuador. It was an amazing trip. I remember at one of the first meetings that we had, a number of people said that what they were really fearful about the trip was the bugs. The spiders and other nasty things that lived in the jungle. From the first day we encountered some of those things. We saw deadly snakes and tarantulas and scorpions and all kinds of other scary bugs, but it was not a problem. We just got used to them. The idea of them was much worse than the reality. They were no big deal. What if people had not gone simply because of fear?

Why did Peter walk on the water? Because that is where Jesus was. For Peter, walking on the water just meant that he was doing what Jesus was already doing. You start doing what Jesus is doing in the world. Jesus is forgiving so you start being forgiving. Jesus is kind; you start being kind. Jesus cares about the poor so we serve. That's what it means to have a walk-on-water kind of faith. To get out of the boat. We start doing what Jesus does in this world. Have faith to step out.

2. Faith to Step On

The second step to living a life of faith is this, once you get out of the boat, you keep walking. You don't stop. You don't look back. You keep walking forward.

Matt 14:30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink...

As long as Peter was focused on Jesus, he was able to walk on the water. As long as his focus was on God's power, he was able to do the impossible. The moment he looked away and saw the waves and started depending on his own power, that is when he began to sink.

Have you ever said yes to God's leading, but then later wondered what in the world you were doing? You are asked to speak to the youth, and you agree to do it. Then, as you are getting ready to speak, you wonder what in the world you are doing? Why in the world did you ever agree to speak to the youth in the first place!

E.g. arriving in Kuwait

The reality is that we do not have the resources to live the Christian life, anymore than a refrigerator has the resources to keep things cold. It only works when it is plugged in. We cannot live the life of faith apart from God.

There is a kid's book called The Little Engine that Could. It is a cute book, but bad theology. Peter did not get out of the boat and go, "I think I can... I think I can... I think I can... I think I can..." across the water. It's not I think I can. It is "I know I can't, but with God's help I know He can." When you know God can do it and is doing it then you know that you can do it as well.

It is not by your power or strength. Faith to step out and faith to step on.

3. Faith to Seek Help

One last thing. The third thing you do is to remember to cry out to Jesus when you need to.

Matt 14:30 ... beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

When Peter got into trouble and cried out for help it says that IMMEDIATELY Jesus was there to catch him. There will be times along the race of faith where we stumble and fall. It is important at times like that to remember that God is still with us and is still supporting us.

A lot of us have a kind of faith that can't face failure. As long as we're doing great, everybody's impressed with us, we're walking on water, we're growing, good things are happening, then we can think, I'm a person of faith. But when there is a failure in our lives we want to get as far away as we can from everybody else, God included sometimes. We like to pretend it never happened. We don't have the kind of faith that can face failure.

But guess what? If you walk on water, if you try to live this kind of life, you're a human being, you're going to sink sometimes. You've got to have the kind of faith that can face failure. And you face it by crying out. By saying save me even now.

This would not be the only time that Peter failed. Peter would go on to boast that even if everyone else deserted Jesus that he never would, and then he went on to deny Jesus three times. You think a failure like that would have ruined him. It did not. He went on to preach and 3000 people were saved on the day of Pentecost. He was a pillar in the early church.

What do you do when you fail? You cry out to God. And immediately Jesus will do the same thing for you that He did for Peter. He reaches out and brings you back to a place of safety, healing and purpose.

Where are you at today? Maybe Jesus is calling you to leave your place of safety and security and step out in faith to follow him in what He is doing in the world. It may cost you, but it will be worth it.

A priest was taking a tour of Israel and visiting all the biblical sites when he came to a beach on the sea of Galilee and saw a boat and a sign advertising, "Take a boat ride out to the exact place where Jesus walked on water!" Inquiring about it, he learned that the ride there was free, so he went out to the middle of the lake. After viewing it, he said to the captain of the boat, "Ok, I'm done, let's go back now." The captain of the boat smiled and said, "Getting out here was free, but it will be \$100 to go back." The priest, shocked by the charge, exclaimed "Wow, that is expensive. No wonder Jesus got out and walked!"

Or maybe today you are out of the boat and you just need to keep walking. Or maybe you feel you are sinking fast. Remember that Jesus is with you.

What do you think the other disciples were thinking when they saw Peter getting out of the boat? They probably thought he was crazy! Likewise, when Jesus calls you out of the boat there will be people who question your decision to step out in faith to follow Jesus. Do not let that stop you. There are some people that you will never be able to please.

A man read an ad in the newspaper, "Hunting dog for sale, \$2,500.00, but well worth it." He called the number and the man told him that he had to see the dog in action. The next morning they met and went hunting early. The dog flushed two birds from a clump of bushes and when they fell into the water, he walked on top of the water, grabbed the birds, and walked back on top of the water. The man was amazed, and bought the dog on the spot. The next day he persuaded his brother to go hunting with him. They flushed a couple of birds and the dog again walked on top of the water, retrieved the birds, and walked back to their boat on top of the water. He asked his brother what he thought of the dog and the brother replied, "So, you bought a dog who can't swim."

Stepping out in faith may seem scary. At times it will cost you, but in the end, it is always worth it. The safest place in the world to be is at the center of God's will.

In the early 1990s, gang violence erupted in Boyle Heights, a section of East Los Angeles. Several gangs were in conflict in the parish around the Dolores Mission Catholic Church. Killings and injuries happened daily. People were afraid to leave their homes. A group of women met for prayer together. One day they read the story of Jesus walking on water. One of them suggested that it was time that they stepped out in faith and did something about the situation around them. That night, seventy women began a procession from one barrio to another. They brought chips and salsa and drank Cokes with the gang members. They brought guitars and sang traditional songs together. The gangs were disoriented, baffled; the war zones were silent.

Each night the mothers walked. By intruding and intervening, they broke the rules of war. As the relationships between the women and the gang members grew, kids began telling their stories. Trust was built. Hopelessness of poverty were addressed. Together they developed a tortilla factory, a bakery, a child-care center, a job-training program, a class on conflict-resolution, a school for further learning, a neighborhood group to monitor and report police misbehavior, and more. It transformed the entire community. Fear was replaced by faith.

That is what happens when we join Jesus out of the boat. Once you invite Jesus into your life, He can begin to change you. We need faith to begin a relationship with Jesus but we also need faith to live in a relationship with Jesus. That means not only asking Jesus into your boat but getting out of it as well.