

An Invitation to Walk on the Water - Notes From After The Sermon

Among other things, the Bible is a list of unforgettable walks. Jesus walked joyfully with Adam and Eve in the Garden; Abraham took a hard walk with his son Isaac to Moriah; Moses and the Israelites took a liberating walk out of Egypt to the Red Sea and then walked right through it; Moses and the Israelites also took a frustrating walk in the wilderness for 40 years. There was Joshua's triumphant walk around the city of Jericho; the disciples' illuminating walk on the way to Emmaus; Paul's interrupted walk to Damascus. Then there is possibly the saddest and yet holiest walk of all time – the walk of Jesus from the Praetorium to Golgotha called the Via Dolorosa – the way of great sorrow. Often on these walks the people thought they were walking alone, only to find God walking with and among them.

But this morning, as you heard from the Scripture reading, we are going to talk about one of the most unforgettable walks of all time, Peter's walk the day he decided to get out of a boat and walk with Jesus on the water. And this morning I want to invite you to think of Peter's walk as an invitation to you, made by Jesus, to take a walk with him, to take a step of faith and to experience the power and presence of God.

As John Ortberg notes in his book "If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat," there is a consistent pattern in Scripture to walking with God:

- First, there is always a call. God calls out to an ordinary person to engage in an act of extraordinary trust, that is, to get out of the boat.
- Second, there is always fear. It's hard, isn't it, to get out of the boat. Perhaps it's a fear of the unknown. Or it might be a fear of giving up security or a feeling of inadequacy, or perhaps a fear of failure, maybe it's a fear of what God might be really calling us to do.
- Third, there is always reassurance. God promises his presence and promises to give you the gifts necessary to fulfill his assignment.
- Fourth, there is always a decision. You can say yes, you can say no, or you can stick your head in the sand – but it's still a decision.
- And finally, there is always a changed life. Those who say yes won't suddenly be perfect as we will see through Peter, but they will learn and

grow. And those who say no are changed too. They will become a little harder, a little more resistant to his calling, a little more likely to say no the next time.

Peter and his friends got into a boat on afternoon to cross the Sea of Galilee. To set the scene, if we look a little further back in Matthew 14, Jesus had wanted to be alone but was pursued by a large crowd, some 5000 men, plus an unknown number of woman and children. Matt. 14:14 tells us that he had compassion on them and healed their sick. Evening came and the crowd was still there and everyone including Jesus and the disciples were getting hungry. The disciples encouraged Jesus to send the crowd away so that they could go into the village and get something to eat. Jesus instead told them the crowd didn't need to leave, but that the disciples should feed the crowd. Can you the disciples' response? I bet they kind of just stood there looking at each other, shaking their heads. Didn't they just say they would have to go into the village to buy food for themselves? How were they going to feed a crowd of well over 5000? And I can see Jesus smiling a little to himself – because, of course, he knows there isn't enough food, this is a teaching moment. So Jesus has the disciples bring him all the food that was there – 5 loaves and 2 fish. And, what happened? The people may not have known exactly what Jesus did, but the disciples saw!

So now we come to our Scripture for this morning. Jesus has to be tired, but he has another lesson for the disciples. He tells the disciples, in v. 22, to get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side (of the Sea of Galilee) while he dismisses the crowds. Now I would think, if I were one of the disciples, I would say something about this idea. Many of them are fisherman, Jesus isn't. It doesn't appear that they have more than one boat. But if they do have more than one, shouldn't at least some of them stay behind and help get Jesus to the other side of the sea? After all there are no boat motors in these days – you had to row for the most part. If all of them go to the other side, how exactly is Jesus supposed to reconnect with them? Maybe they had this conversation and it isn't recorded. Maybe they were just too tired to think and got in the boat. We don't know. What we do know is the disciples took off in the boat and Jesus stayed behind and according to v. 23 went up to the mountain by himself to pray.

Now when the boat was far from land, in John 6 where this story is also told it says the disciples had rowed 3-4 miles out, a storm comes up. One of those famous Sea of Galilee storms – the Scripture says the boat was “battered” by waves. Some other translations use the word “tormented.” As Gilligan's Island

would say, the tiny ship was tossed. It's now the middle of the night. Then suddenly one of the disciples notices what appears to be a ghost walking on the sea towards them. And v. 26 says they were terrified and cried out in fear. In hindsight, we wonder how they could have failed to know it was Jesus. Who else could it be? But were they seeing in fear or in faith? And what was Jesus doing? This was a clear notice of his power, of his divinity. Only God can walk on the water.

And now we get to the call. Jesus speaks to the disciples, reassuring them that they are to take heart and not be afraid. This wasn't just a comment of reassurance; this was an invitation. And of all the disciples in the boat, only Peter gets it. So Peter says, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." This isn't a story about risk-tasking, it's a story about obedience. Peter wants to be sure of God's call – is Jesus simply demonstrating his power, or is he calling for a response. There is a big difference between faith and foolishness. So Peter asks, and Jesus confirms the call and says, "Come." That's the invitation to come for a walk, that's the call.

I think about now I might be saying something along the lines of "Why did I ever open my mouth?" Nobody else said anything, but here I go again. And he said, "Come." So now I have to decide to get out of the boat. Sure I'm in the storm and maybe my boat is being tossed, but the boat is at least a place of safety and security. In the boat I have something to hold onto. The water is rough, the waves are high, and I know I can't walk on water. What is your boat? Your boat is whatever represents safety and security to you apart from God himself. What do you put your trust in if not in God? Money, your job, your spouse, your family, yourself, your success. Whatever it is, is it holding you back from getting out of the boat and taking an incredible walk with God?

Peter gets out of the boat and answers the call. But then he turns his focus away from Jesus, notices the wind and the waves, and gets scared. And when that happens, he begins to sink. And still, Peter knows Jesus is his strength. In that moment of panic, he calls out to Jesus, "Lord save me." And immediately comes the reassurance. Jesus reaches out his hand and catches Peter. Jesus then speaks privately to Peter asking him, "Why did you doubt?" Jesus was reminding Peter, and us, that while he doesn't promise life will be easy outside of the boat, he does promise to be with us and to hold us up. And our Scripture says that Peter and Jesus walked on the water together and got into the boat.

Imagine being one of the other disciples at that point. It says that they then worshipped Jesus saying, “Truly you are the son of God.” But do you suppose, in the back of their minds, they were saying “That could have been me? I could’ve walked on water too – if only...” And maybe they even looked at Peter a little differently after that. See, they too had a decision to make. And they decided to stay in the boat. There’s no shirking the call – to ignore it is to say no. And every time you say no, the voice gets a little quieter in you. And then, finally, you might not hear it at all.

Of all the disciples in the boat, only one speaks, only one gets out of the boat, and only one walks on the water. Eleven disciples sat in the boat and watched. Millions of people go to church every Sunday, millions sit in the pews. The eleven disciples gave up something of themselves to be with Jesus, just as the millions of church goers who give of their time and their money. They believed in Jesus, they followed Jesus, they worshipped Jesus.

But only Peter experienced the joy of being the one to step out of the boat in a storm and walk on the water with Jesus. It wasn’t a long walk, it wasn’t a walk for life, but it was an experience of a lifetime. I don’t know what God is calling you to do, but what I do know is that as Christians, God has a call on our lives.

So I invite you to go for a walk. On the water. With Jesus.