

Scripture:

1 Kings 19:9-18

Matthew 14:22-36

“With faith anything is possible.”

In 2001 John Ortberg wrote a book ---- “If you want to walk on water, you’ve got to get out of the boat.”

“If you want to walk on water, you’ve got to get out of the boat.”

And in his book he basically interprets our gospel passage today in the most basic and simple way possible.

And far from being alone in his approach --- many have looked at this text and drawn some of the exact same conclusions as he has.

And his approach goes something like this.

Peter was being a good disciple ---- in thinking about getting out of the boat ---- and “stepping out in faith.”

And similar to Peter we’ve all likely experienced Jesus calling out to us in our lives --- saying “come follow me ----- step away from what you’re doing and come to me.”

And like Peter we are best to follow this invitation --- find the courage to step out of the boat and onto the waters.

Because if we do ---- then we walk to Christ trusting Him to help us do great things for God.

But --- we also have to be weary of fear and doubt.

We have to put out of our minds the winds and waves and stay focused on Christ.

For when we do stay focused on Christ we keep on walking along faithfully --- and the minute we don’t -- we fail and begin to sink down.

Peter failed to have enough strength and faith and we musn't do the same ---
- we must do better and be better.

So --- when we are faced with challenges --- like sharing our faith ----
seeking new direction in our lives ----- having to make tough decisions ----
we have to have the courage to get out of the boat --- to take risks in faith ---
-- to put all our trust in Jesus and then walk on the water --- walk into the
unknown --- new experiences in Christ

This is Matthew 14:22-36 ----- 101.

The most common --- well known ---- time tested approach to Jesus walking
on water and calling Peter to do the same.

But as faithful as this interpretation may be ---- there is a whole lot more
richness to the passage as well.

I believe ----- this is less of an event that is about stepping out in faith.

I believe this is less an event about ---- “Step out in faith and walk to Christ
amidst the storms of life never looking back and never doubting and God
will do great things with you.” --- and ---- “Have more faith than Peter so
that you won't begin to sink.”

And instead ----- I believe this passage is more about Jesus forever and
always near us ----- it is more about Jesus saying ----
“It's me my child --- here I am ----don't be afraid.”

“It's me --- I am here for you my child ---- you don't need to be afraid
anymore.”

Yes there will often be circumstances in life that overwhelm and surround
us.

Yes we will begin to loose faith and have serious doubts ---- when we see
that the odds seem to be stacked against us --- but it is then that we must
remember Jesus calling out to us saying ----- “It's me --- here I am ----you
don't need to be afraid anymore.”

It is precisely when we are surrounded by challenging circumstances --- feeling all alone ---- odds stacked against us ----- turbulence all around us --- ----- that we must listen to the voice of Christ.

Peter goes to Christ all alone ---- he doesn't invite others to step out of the boat with him ----- when we try to go it alone and step away from our faith community it is a sure thing that our faith will falter ----- when we feel all alone --- with none of our supporters there to help us ----- we must listen to the voice of Christ most clearly and most carefully.

When the circumstances are stacked against us we do best to tune in to Christ.

All the circumstances were stacked against the disciples on this night.

Not only were they in a wind storm ----- but they are in a boat during a wind storm --- and not only are they in a boat in a wind storm ---- but it is night time --- and not only are they in a boat ---- in a wind storm --- at night --- but they are far from the shore.

In a boat ----- during a wind storm --- at night --- far from shore ---- that's a lot of circumstances stacked against them.

It is precisely then that they must listen to the voice of Christ faithfully.

Notice Jesus doesn't call Peter right away --- in fact Peter is the one who first suggests going to Christ.

In verse 27 when Jesus first appears He says ----- "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

And then in verse 28 Peter replies --- "Lord if it is you, "tell me to come to you on the water."

And then in verse 29 Jesus says ----- "Come."

Perhaps Jesus never intended for Peter to ever step out of the boat ---- maybe Jesus had planned to walk to the boat and calm the storm and teach the disciples something else other than ----- "If you want to walk on water you have to step out of the boat."

Maybe it was Peter's idea and his only ---- to walk on the water like Christ.

Maybe Peter took things a step too far and wanted to walk on the water like Jesus for all the wrong reasons --- to be more like Christ to look miraculous like Jesus and so on.

It seems a bit curious to me that Jesus walks on the water towards the boat -----
- says ---- "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." ----- and Peter then says -
--- "Lord if it is you, "tell me to come to you on the water." ----- Peter then
walks a bit on the water before beginning to sink --- and then both he and
Jesus end up in the boat anyway --- precisely where Jesus was headed in the
first place.

Maybe it's just me but if I was Peter I would be less inclined to want to do
as Jesus was doing --- and more inclined to just be thankful that He was
there to help out and save me from the calamity of the storm.

But I digress ----- sort of.

The miracle in the story isn't Jesus walking on water.

The miracle in the story isn't Peter walking on the water.

Perhaps the miracle in the story has more to do with the disciples
worshipping Jesus and coming to the realization as they did in verse 33
when they say --- "Truly you are the Son of God."

The miracle might just be that the disciples believed like never before.

The disciples were called to believe that there was nothing to be afraid of ---
and that there is great reason to take heart.

Sometimes it's a miracle to simply believe in light of all the circumstances
around us.

Sometimes it's a miracle to believe despite what is all around us ---- Gaza
the Ukraine and so on ----- that God is in control of the fate of the world ---
His creation is still firmly in His hands.

Sometimes it's a miracle to believe that despite all that happens in the world ----- war --- rape --- famine ---- floods --- starvation for some ---- great excess for others ----- that ---- "I am who I am" ---- is still calling the shots.

Sometimes it's a miracle to believe that in the midst of all of this --- God is still in control --- His creation is still firmly within His grasp ---- providence is providence ----- and all is happening in accordance with God's will.

Perhaps this is less a story about stepping out of the boat ---- thinking outside of the box --- attempting radical ---- unheard of things.

And more a story about focusing on Christ Himself taking care of the out of the box ----- radical ----- unheard of things ----- and our need to trust Him ----- believe in Him ----- and listen to and for His sometimes still small voice.

His ---- "gentle whisper" ----- as verse 12 from our Old Testament reading today says.

Mark Lewis --- former moderator of our church --- and minister at St. Andrew's in Kitchener once said ----- "A powerful argument is still powerful even when it's whispered."

"A powerful argument is still powerful even when it's whispered."

Sometimes it's a miracle just to be able to be discerning enough and focused enough to hear the still small ----- sometimes whispering voice of Christ amidst the tumult of the world.

I can't help but think about the fact that Jesus didn't call Peter initially.

In verse 28 from the gospel today Peter said --- "Lord if it is you ---- tell me to come to you on the water."

"Lord if it is you ---- tell me to come to you on the water."

Not necessarily a bad or horrible thing to do --- to say to Christ ----- "Lord if it is you ---- tell me to come to you on the water."

But maybe Peter got all caught up in the turmoil at sea and wanted to take things into his own hands a bit instead of just listening to Christ when he saw Him.

Sometimes it's best just to listen to Christ --- and let Him do the calling or not.

In the Old Testament lesson Elijah had to really listen in order to hear God.

God calls Elijah to go to the mountain in verse 11.

And then a great and powerful wind tore through the mountain and shattered the rocks ----- but that wasn't God reaching out.

There there was an earthquake --- but that wasn't God reaching out to Elijah either.

And after the earthquake then there was fire in verse 12 ---- but that wasn't God's way of reaching out to Elijah either.

“And after the fire came a whisper.”

“And after the fire came a whisper.”

In the whisper God reaches out to Elijah --- and speaks to Him.

Jesus had already spoken to the disciples saying --- “Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.” ---- before Peter suggests stepping out of the boat.

Yes sometimes we may be called to make a daring response like Peter does -- and when we do if we slip up and begin to sink down a bit it is a sure thing that Jesus will secure our faltering faith.

But it's also true that we are often called see beyond the dramatic --- like Elijah did ---- look beyond the storms at sea ----- the great winds and fire ---- and pay attention to the voice of God in Christ.

Sometimes we are called to set aside what we might think is the thing to do ---- and listen to and for ---- that still small voice ----- that whisper ---- of God in our ear or heart.

“Take courage ---- it’s me ---- God. -----Don’t be afraid my child ---- I am right here with you ---- it’s going to be all right --- hang in there no need to be afraid --- I’m not finished yet.”

As Christians we are called to live and trust in the great promises of God --- remembering that they are true and will come to pass --- and that God will never forsake us or leave us wanting.

But we also have to remember that such faith is also forged in the midst of a broken world ---- in experiences where it sometimes feels like God is absent.

And we have to remember that like the first disciples in verse 33 today -----
- we are called to proclaim ---- “Truly you are the Son of God.

The challenges of life still lurk all around us.

The world still heaves in deep groans.

But we trust in providence ---- God’s will --- even when it is difficult to understand it.

The good news of Jesus Christ is that God dwells in the quiet sometimes hidden ---- off to the side places --- where we may not always notice or hear Him.

The nature of our hope --- the nature of our faith --- is that because of Christ ---- anything is possible.

The very nature of our hope in Christ and our faith in Christ is such that it defies mere observation of human circumstances.

God is active in ways that defy common sense ----- cynicism ---- and sometimes even Christian imagination.

God’s redemptive purposes ---- His great rescue plan ---- are not just mysterious ---- but they are also in fast motion even now as we gather.

And when we believe in this and have faith in this ---- we soon come to realize that anything is possible.

We come to realize that ----- amidst the rock shattering wind --- the ground shaking earthquake --- and the blazing fire ----- there is still ----- and always will be the gentle whisper of God --- guiding --- directing ---- sustaining and saving us.

Amidst the windy storm --- at sea ----- at night --- far from shore ----- there is --- and always will be ---- Jesus Christ coming for us ---- reminding us to have courage ----- and be not afraid.

With faith anything is possible ---- and yes --- we may be called to step out of the boat and walk on the water ---- we may be called out of our comfort zone ----- we may be called to do something a little bit radical from time to time.

But more likely --- and certainly more often than these kind of dramatic steps ----- we will be called to hone our focus ---- set our hearts ----- and be discerning and faithful enough to listen to and for God's voice amidst the tumult that sometimes is our lives and culture ----- resting assured of His protection and his saving --- loving ----- compassionate grace and mercy.

The truth is --- in our walks of faith --- our Christian discipleship ----- our faith will very often call us to listen for the whisper of God.

And --- in our lives --- as joyful ----- and as challenging as they may be at times ----- we will be called upon to have faith in what that whispering voice may have to say to us.

We may have other ideas --- we may not always like what it is the voice of God may direct us to do ----- but we are called to have faith in it ---- give way to it --- and make it the fulcrum around which our lives revolve.

As we just sang ---- Jesus calls us over the tumult of our life's wild restless sea --- day by day His voice still calls us saying ---- "Christian follow me."

And as we will sing shortly ----- In Christ alone.

In Christ alone ----- we have faith.

When we have faith in Him --- we soon come to realize that because of Him ---- anything and everything is possible --- regardless of the circumstances we may find ourselves in.

And this is the great hope --- and the great assurance ---- and the great faith of life in Christ.

To God be the glory --- now and forever.

Amen.