

**“How to Walk on Water: Step One”  
Matthew 14:22-33**

**22** Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd.

**23** After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone,

**24** and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

**25** Shortly before dawn 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.”

**Introduction**

Peter was among many biblical figures who got to take a walk in the telling of God’s redemptive plan. Abraham and Isaac walked up the mountain to have Father Abraham’s faith tested. Moses, Miriam and the Israelites walked the path through the Red Sea. Joshua and the people walked around the walls of Jericho. Saul the Pharisee walked his way to Damascus and became Paul the apostle. And the most important walk was along the Via Doloroso, “the way of sorrow” that Jesus walked to the Cross. Each one was a real-life faith experience that required trust in God’s promises and purposes.

Over the next few weeks, we are going to look at the amazing, fearful faith-walk that Jesus invited Peter to take with him on the Sea of Galilee. Much in these sermons is based on a book with a great title: “If You Want to Walk on Water, You’ve Got to Get Out of the Boat” by John Ortberg. It’s in our library. But, as you will see, I think a more accurate title could be, “If Jesus Invites You to Walk on the Water with Him, You Have to Decide to Get Out of the Boat.”

**I. Go On Ahead**

So, put yourself in the Matthew 14 experience. Maybe you’re Joanna, one of the many women who accompanied Jesus and the Twelve. Maybe you’re Bartholomew. Who? Yeah, Bart was one of the Twelve. Matthew 14 begins with Jesus hearing that his cousin John the Baptist was beheaded by Herod. How do

you feel as you watch Jesus mourn? It says, “Jesus withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place” somewhere along the Sea of Galilee.

Then, people sought and found Jesus in this remote place. And a large crowd showed up to meet with him. It says, “He had compassion on them and healed their sick.” How would you feel when the Lord is attending to their needs instead of his own? Then comes the miraculous feeding of the five thousand. As evening approached, the disciples came to Jesus. “It’s getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go buy some food.” What do you think when Jesus tells you to provide them with the evening meal. You can read about the details of these important events in Matthew 14.

Then it says, “Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat (presumably the one he used to get there) and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd.” Don’t miss this detail: Jesus made them get into the boat and go on ahead of him. How and when would Jesus catch up with them? Did Jesus know a sea rescue would be needed?

“After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray.” Finally, it says, “Later that night, he was there alone.” Now certainly, if Jesus needed to pray all alone through the ups and downs of life, how much more do we? You and I are afforded the gift of prayer. Do we use that gift?

## **II. Come Down, Out of the Boat**

“The boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.” Peter, James and John had spent many years fishing at night. They knew boats and were used to the weather on the Sea of Galilee, also called Lake Gennesaret. This night their boat was “tormented” by the waves (that’s the word Matthew used – tormented). The disciples were riding it out even holding on for dear life.

Psalms 107 captures the sense of peril in a storm. We read it: “Some went out on the sea in ships... They saw the works of the Lord... For he spoke and stirred up a tempest that lifted high the waves... In their peril their courage melted away... they were at their wits’ end.”

“Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. ‘It’s a ghost,’ they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: ‘Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.’ Difficult to translate, but the Greek literally says, “Courage, ἐγώ εἰμι (I AM), Never be afraid.”

Becoming a Christian, living as a disciple-follower of Jesus doesn’t save us from the storms, the problems, the challenges of life. But, Jesus is the great “I AM,” the God who ever was, is and always will be. Jesus called out to the storm-tossed boat: “You can trust me. You can have all the courage and confidence. The great ‘I AM’ is right here with you.”

Isaiah 41 has a memorable, important promise of God. “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand... For I am the LORD your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you” (Isaiah 41:10-13).

You’ve seen the Marines, Army, Navy and Air Force ads and recruitment posters. They usually emphasize “seeing the world” or getting financial help with college, and other benefits. In high school, son Mike did well on the ASVAB, a military aptitude test. A Navy recruiter made an appointment to come by the house and talk up the Navy. After about an hour, Mike looked up and said something like, “I’m not really wild about boats!” Thus ended the Navy recruitment.

But the harsh truth is that enlistment in the military carries serious risks. Just last Monday, the Associate Press reported the killing of a U.S. soldier by a member of the Afghan national police. Command Sgt. Timothy Bolyard, 42, from Thornton, WVa, died of wounds sustained from small fire arms. According to the Pentagon, at least 500,000 Americans killed or wounded in combat in both Iraq and Afghanistan were victims of IEDs, improvised explosive devices. It’s amazing how many Americans choose the high risk of service.

Dare we in America present the Christian faith like a recruitment poster that talks about the “perks” of being a church member? Christians all around the world know that one’s life is on the line for actually following Christ.

So, Peter had a decision to make. Joanna, Bartholomew – what did you think he would do? “Lord, if it’s you, tell me to come to you on the water.”

What would you say is your boat? Ortberg’s book asks, “Would your job be at risk if you followed Jesus there?” Is your boat a relationship you’d be too scared to step out of, even when commitment is ambivalent? Perhaps your boat is a secret... like addiction to pornography... afraid to admit it, afraid to get help? Your boat could be pleasing your dad, always seeking his approval. Or success like the “rich, young ruler” who went away sad because he just couldn’t leave so much to accept the Lord’s invitation.

Would you or have you said, “Lord, if it’s you, tell me to come to you on the water.” Or, not? And Jesus said to Peter, “Come! Trust me and step down out of the boat.”

### **Conclusion**

Harriet Tubman escaped from slavery in 1849 from Maryland through Delaware to Pennsylvania. She reportedly said to herself, “When I found I’d crossed that line, I looked at my hands to see if I was the same person. There was such a glory over everything; the sun came like gold through the trees, and over the fields, and I felt like I was in Heaven.”

Harriet immediately became involved in the abolitionist movement, organizing meetings and

speaking against slavery. But that wasn't enough; she returned to the South to help other slaves find freedom. If she had been caught, she would have been thrown back into slavery or killed as an example to other runaways. "There was one of two things I had a right to," she explained, "liberty or death; if I couldn't have one, I'd have the other."

She walked back to the South nineteen times to rescue some three hundred fellow slaves. Each trip became riskier as slave catchers became more aware of her. But each time with God's help, she said, she evaded the authorities.

Most of us won't have a Harriet Tubman experience (or Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Miriam, or Peter). Yet, the Lord wants each of us, all of us to have a get-out-of-the-boat, trust in him experience. It could be walking with a man or woman in prison; meeting one, developing a friendship, helping with the struggles of being incarcerated. It could be literally helping a frail, elderly person in assisted living go for a walk outside – however briefly. Maybe your prayer-life is lagging or non-existent; then, commit yourself to spend the time and learning for prayer 10 minutes, then 20, then 30 first thing in the morning or before bed. There's injustice (racial, social, economic, relational) all around us; with Jesus, you can make a difference. There are many needs in church or community that you have the gifts, abilities and time to meet. On Sunday mornings here at 1<sup>st</sup> Pres, for instance. Shall I go on? Pastor Chris and I can help with information, suggestions, direction as we push you overboard.

So, with God's people in all times and places, look for Jesus showing up in the storm, listen for his voice saying, "Come!" and make a decision, take the risk. "Take courage, I Am, Don't be afraid." Let us pray with and for one another.

### **Psalm 107:23-31**

Some went out on the sea in ships; they were merchants on the mighty waters.  
They saw the works of the LORD, his wonderful deeds in the deep.  
For he spoke and stirred up a tempest that lifted high the waves.  
They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths; in their peril their courage melted away.  
They reeled and staggered like drunkards; they were at their wits' end.  
Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress.  
He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed.  
They were glad when it grew calm, and he guided them to their desired haven.  
Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind.