

Walking On Water

1. Warm-up question: Tell us something good or bad that happened to you this week.
2. We returned to our sermon series on faith this past Sunday by studying one of the most famous stories in the Bible – a story where Simon Peter attempted to walk on water. Many of us learned the story when we were kids in Sunday school, but this is more than a great kids’ story. There are incredible insights embedded in this story about how to live by faith. Read Matthew 14:22-33, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. Somewhere in the middle of the night the disciples found themselves in a terrible storm on the Sea of Galilee, fighting for their lives. They were tired, frightened, and desperately alone. To try to imagine how they must have felt, think of a time when you’ve had to pull an all-nighter in the midst of a crisis. Describe how you felt in the middle of that night.
 - b. Things went from bad to worse when the disciples looked across the water and saw an apparition, a haunting spirit they feared to be an angel of death. Verse 26 says, “They cried out in fear.” What do you suppose they said as they cried out? What do you suppose they were asking God to do in that moment?
3. Jeff imagined the disciples saying, “God, get us out of this storm. Just make it go away! God, why won’t you deliver us? Where are you?” Then comes the answer. “Immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, ‘Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid.’” In other words, while the disciples were saying, “God, get me out of the storm,” Jesus was saying, “Find me in the storm.” From this we drew our first insight: **In the storms of life, if you want to find God, you’ve got to get out of the boat and walk into the storm.** In your life right now, what’s a storm that you just want God to miraculously make go away? Imagine God saying, “No, stop fearing the storm and embrace it. You’ll find me in the storm.” How do you feel about that?
4. When God says, “Find me in the storm,” we say, “How can I? I can’t walk on water.” But Peter was different. In verse 28, he said, “Lord, if it’s you, command me to come to you on the water.” In other words, Peter was saying, “If you’re really out there in the storm, if that’s where I’ll find you instead of in the safety of the boat, then you’re gonna have to give me the strength to walk to you on the water.” Jesus replied with a single word, “Come.”
 - a. Imagine how Peter must have felt in that moment. Jeff compared it to how he felt when, at age 10, he had to jump off a 25’ diving platform. To imagine what Peter must have felt like, remember a time in your own life when you were trapped in a terrifying moment. What happened, how did you feel, and how did you respond?
5. In the movie “We Bought a Zoo” (based on a true story), Benjamin Mee says, “Sometimes all you need is twenty seconds of insane courage. Just literally twenty

seconds of embarrassing bravery. In a moment of insane courage, “Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened. As he began to sink, he cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him. . . .” Matthew 14:29-31. In this, we find the other great insight embedded in this story. In our own strength, we can’t walk on water, but we don’t have to do it in our own strength. The promise of this story is: **If instead of running from the storm, we face it and step out in faith, Jesus will be right there beside us, lifting us, giving us a strength we never knew we had – supernatural strength.** Like Peter, we will feel Jesus lifting us. Have you ever experienced something like that – a time when you were in crisis and felt like you’d never make it through, but in the midst of the crisis you found a supernatural strength that surprised you? What happened?

6. Everything we’ve talked about so far leads us to a key question: Why did God put us in an environment down here on planet earth where we have to face so many storms? Why does life have to be so hard? Jeff suggested the answer is: Because the primary purpose of life is not comfort. The primary purpose is to grow – to become beautiful.
 - a. Read the excerpt from “The Velveteen Rabbit,” on p. 3. As you read this, what are your thoughts?
 - b. Read the excerpt from Scott Saul’s book “Beautiful People,” on p. 3. As you read this, what are your thoughts?
 - c. According to the scriptures, the primary purpose of this life is to learn, stretch, and grow our soul into something beautiful, so as to equip us not just for this life, but for the life to come when we will work in direct partnership with God. Viewed this way, each challenge in life is an opportunity to become more beautiful or to move in the opposite direction. Some people face the storms of life and turn bitter and ugly. Others face the storms of life and become more beautiful. Tell us about a storm in your life that made you more beautiful. Tell us about a time when you let a storm have an ugly impact on your soul.
 - d. Where in your life right now is God saying, “Don’t run. Don’t be afraid of the storm. You can do this. I am with you and together, side-by-side, we’ll walk on water.” Tell us about the situation you face. Like Peter, are you ready to step boldly into the storm?

Matthew 14:22-33

22 [After feeding the five thousand, Jesus] made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. ²⁵And early in the morning he came walking towards them on the lake. ²⁶But when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified, saying, ‘It is a ghost!’ And they cried out in fear. ²⁷But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, ‘Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.’

28 Peter answered him, ‘Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.’ ²⁹He said, ‘Come.’ So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came towards Jesus. ³⁰But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’ ³¹Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, ‘You of little faith, why did you doubt?’ ³²When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God.’

Velveteen Rabbit excerpt

Rabbit: “What does it mean to be real? Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?”

Skin Horse: "Real isn't how you're made. It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real. It doesn't happen all at once. You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't often happen to those who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you're Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you're Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."

Scott Sauls, “Beautiful People”

“Many of the world’s greatest souls became their best selves not in spite of, but because of their distress. The great hymn writer Cowper wrote hopeful hymns and the great artist Van Gogh brushed epic paintings both while contemplating suicide. Charles Spurgeon preached some of his best sermons while depressed. Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, and Martin Luther King Jr. each battled melancholy. The great composer Beethoven went deaf. . . . Elie Wiesel and Corrie Ten Boom survived the holocaust. Joni Eareckson Tada lost her ability to walk in a tragic accident [but through that experience has written profound books]. John Perkins endured jail, beatings, and death threats from white supremacists.

As grief expert Elizabeth Kubler Ross famously noted, “The most beautiful people we have [seen] are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss, and have found their way out of the depths. These people have an appreciation and sensitivity, and an understanding of life that fills them with compassion, gentleness, and a deep love and concern. Beautiful people don’t just happen.”