

The Walk of Faith

Reformation Sunday

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Bible Text: Matthew 14:22-33
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Our Scripture reading this morning comes from the gospel of Matthew 14:22-33. Listen now as I read for this is the very word of God.

22 Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. 23 And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, 24 but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. 25 And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. 26 But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." 28 And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." 29 He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. 30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." 31 Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" 32 And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 33 And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

May the Lord bless to our hearts and minds the reading of his word.

You may be seated.

What a joy it is to be here with you again and to share in God's word. The word of God has been read in our hearing, let's pray that God will make it effectual in our hearts this morning.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we do thank you this morning for your graciousness and your goodness to us. We pray that the same Holy Spirit that inspired your word would come now and

touch our hearts and open our eyes and open our minds and our hearts, illuminate that word for us that we may behold Jesus in all his majesty and glory, and that in looking into your word with the help of the Holy Spirit, Christ would become even a new Christ to us as we adore him once again and find our faith resting in Christ and Christ alone. This is our prayer this morning. We pray in Jesus' name. Let the church say, amen.

If I might tell you a little bit about myself, I mentioned that I was born and raised in Michigan. Indeed, it was a rural part of Michigan, it was that part of Michigan where there were not many paved roads and most of the roads were dirt and most of the roads were gravel, in fact, my mother still lives on that narrow dirt road on which I was raised. Being raised in that setting, most of our travel was by way of foot. Oftentimes we would have bikes if we could get our hands on one that was in repair, some people managed to get their hands on a motor one, but most of us when we walked around the area, we traveled by foot. We walked. We walked short distances. We walked long distances. We walked to school uphill both ways in the snow. We walked.

For me as a boy, walking was a necessary and, indeed, an important part of life, and if that was the case for me growing up in rural Michigan, how much more so was it for the case in the days of our Lord upon this earth, for we are reminded that he and his disciples basically walked everywhere they went. Walking was an acceptable and necessary part of life at that time, and therefore it should not surprise us, then, that the word or the idea of walking is a popular and consistent metaphor for the Christian life in the Scriptures. Often in the Scriptures we are told to walk and walking carries with it the sense of understanding of not being in a hurry but moving at a steady and even pacing, not hurried, nor worried, not running, but walking. And so we see this in the Scriptures, do we not, in 1 John 1:7, we are told to walk in the light. 2 John 1:4, we are told to walk in the truth. Colossians 2:6, we are told that we are to walk in Christ. Galatians 5:16, we are reminded that we are to be walking, we are to walk in the Spirit.

Walking, scripturally speaking, is a popular way of speaking about the Christian life, in fact, the life of faith, the Bible tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:7, plainly is a walk, "for we walk," the Bible says, "by faith and not by sight." It's a life of faith that Jesus, this life of faith that Jesus was impressing upon the disciples everywhere they went. As they were walking, he was encouraging them to trust in God and ultimately then trust in him for this walk of faith. Jesus wanted to impress upon them the need of a life of faith, a need to walk by faith, and our text this morning is an excellent illustration of that, beloved, that walk of faith that Jesus was impressing upon his disciples and therefore impresses upon us this morning.

The context is a familiar one, it's a simple one. Having just miraculously fed over 5,000 people from a young boy's picnic basket, our Lord was weary. He's tired, wanted to spend some time in meditation recuperating and praying and, therefore, the Bible says that he sent his disciples away. He sent them away in a boat that they would go unto the other side of the sea of Galilee while he got away for some time of personal reflection and prayer. And no doubt what the disciples thought would be a routine boat ride, the Bible tells us that by the wee hours of the morning had turned into a distressing and stressful

venture. In mid-trip, the Bible says, the wind and the waves turned against the disciples, and they found that they were not making the headway and the progress that they should, and Jesus seeing the disciples struggling in the midst of the sea, determines that he would go out to them. But how does he go out to them? Does he rent a boat? Does he charter a vessel that he might navigate through the storm? No, Jesus does what he always did, he walked. He walked.

He walked to them because this is what Jesus does. You know, the Bible never records for us Jesus running. He never seems to be in a hurry. He takes his time. Even in distressing times, Jesus walked. Even on stormy seas, Jesus didn't run, he walked. It reminds of the song, "He walks with me and he talks with me, and he tells me that I am his own."

Jesus walks with his disciples but before he walks with them, in this instance the Bible says that he walks to them, and in Jesus walking to his disciples upon these stormy seas, he teaches us some important lessons about the walk of faith this morning that I want to highlight and point out to you. He reminds us that we see that in this walk of faith there is a fight. We see that in this walk of faith there is a foundation. We see in this walk of faith that there is a focus.

What is the fight within this walk of faith? Well, our text reminds us that that fight is fear, that fight is doubt. There is a fight within the walk of faith, and our faith has an enemy and that enemy is fear. Notice what it says in verse 26, "But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, 'It is a ghost!' and they cried out in fear." The disciples were afraid and in my opinion, beloved, they had reason to be. Someone once called me and said, "Pastor, do you believe in ghosts?" And I said, "Well, that depends. Do you mean Casper or Holy?" Whether or not I believe in ghosts, apparently the disciples believed in ghosts. The disciples believed in ghosts because the only explanation that they had for something or someone walking across the water as if on dry land, could not be human. This had to be an aberration. This had to be some noncorporeal being. Most of us are afraid of what we think is in the darkness, the disciples were afraid of what they actually saw in the darkness and to them, it was a ghost, and the Bible says they were sorely terrified.

Fear is real, beloved. It is real. It eats at our faith. It undermines our convictions and there are ghosts all around us of which we are afraid. The Bible speaks in Proverbs 29:25 of the fear of man. In Matthew 6:34, we are reminded of the fear of tomorrow. In Mark 4:40, we see there the fear of storms. We fear. We fear the unfamiliar. We fear the different. We fear different people and different customs and different culture and different ways. A lot of the racism and the racist conversations that we have today are rooted in ungodly fear. We fear others who are not like us. We fear others who do things the way that we don't do them, others who don't look like us and don't dress like us and don't talk like us. We fear that they will infringe upon our way of living and our customs and our culture. We fear that they will invade our comfort zones. Fear, ungodly fear, and what becomes an even greater problem in this fear is that we respond to this fear, we respond out of fear and then we sin. We sin. We sin because we are afraid that God is not going to do what

he said he would do. We sin because we say things that we shouldn't say because we fear that God won't speak up for us. Sin out of fear because we do things that we shouldn't do, because we fear God will not provide for us.

And yet here is the mercy and the grace of God. In the midst of our inclinations toward fear, the comforting command in Scripture is always the same, "Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid. Fear not," God says throughout the Scriptures. It seems that he understands that he has given himself to a people who are given over to fear and trembling every step of the way. It's amazing how often God has to say to his people over and over again, "Fear not." That's what he says to Abraham in Genesis 15:1, "Fear not." It's what he said to the children of Israel in Exodus 14, that God has brought them out of Egypt by the power of his own hand and they're standing with the Red Sea before them and Pharaoh's army behind them and God says to Moses, "Fear not." That's what he says to Joshua when Joshua is poised to enter into Ai in Joshua 8:1, "Fear not." That's what he said to Gideon in chapter 6 when Gideon is going to take on the Midianites with a reduced army of significance and God says to Gideon, "Gideon, do not be afraid." That's what he says to Jehoshaphat, doesn't he? He says this to Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 20:17 when Jehoshaphat is about to take on the great army of the Ammonites the Moabites, and God says to Jehoshaphat, "Jehoshaphat, do not be afraid." That's what he says to Mary, doesn't he, in Luke 1 when Mary is tasked with this big and heavy burden bringing the Lord Jesus into the world, and a custom that would look down on her with shame, the angel says to Mary, "Mary, do not be afraid." That's what the angel says to the shepherds in Luke 2. Remember they're out there on a Judean hillside and they fear for their lives at this grand heavenly light show, and the angel appears to them and says, "Shepherds, do not be afraid." That's what the Lord Jesus says to John in the Revelation as John is out on the isle of Patmos in Revelation 1 when he sees the resurrected Jesus in all of his glory and he fears for his life, at the majesty of Christ, and Christ says to John, "John, do not be afraid." From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is full of this strong encouragement to God's people, "Fear not. Do not be afraid."

It is the encouragement to fight against doubt. When our children were small, they would often come and cry in the middle of the night saying, "Daddy! Daddy! Daddy! There's something in the closet! There's a monster in the closet!" We'd have to go in their room and try to comfort them. What they didn't realize is this, beloved, is that if there actually was something in the closet, daddy was not going to be much help to them. But daddy understood that there was nothing in the closet and so daddy could say to them, "Fear not. Fear not."

There's no ghost coming across the water, it's only Jesus. Don't fear the monsters under the bed, call on Jesus. Have a little talk with Jesus, tell him all about your troubles. He will hear your faintest cry and he will answer it by and by, and what you find is that there's no ghost, there's no monsters, there's just Jesus walking to you in the midst of the storm.

There is a fight within the walk of faith, there is a fight against fear, but that fight has a foundation too, beloved, and that foundation is the word of God. Faith is not wishful

thinking. Biblical faith, beloved, is not empty-headed, it is a firm foundation and it's firmly grounded and it's deeply rooted, it is grounded upon the assurance and the conviction of the word of God. You see what it says in verse 28, but once the shock of the moment is over and Jesus reassures them that it is only him, Peter gets it. He gets it and Peter says, the Bible says, "And Peter answered him, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.'" And Jesus said to Peter, "'Come.'" So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus."

Now beloved, what would make you or me step out of that boat onto the water? What would make a person believe that they could step out of that boat and to walk upon the sea as if walking on dry land? Let me tell you: nothing. There is no way I am getting out of that boat and supposing to plant my feet upon the water. What would make a person do that? What would make a person do something that they would not normally do? Nothing except the word of Christ, for when Peter stepped out of that boat, he stepped out because Jesus said, "Come." And at that moment, Peter was not standing on the water, he was standing on the word of God. He was standing on the word of Christ. And those who would dare stand against the odds and dare stand in this world and walk the walk of faith, will do so from the firm conviction that God's word is true.

This has always been the case, beloved. This has always been the case. What would cause Noah to build this monstrosity of a boat when most of the people probably living around him had never seen a boat before? He had the word of God. What would make Abraham leave everything that he had ever known, his life and his family and his culture and his comfort zone, and set out for a land that he knew not? The word of God. What would make Gideon believe that he could take on the mighty army of the Midianites with only 300 or so soldiers? He had the word of God. What would make Paul give up everything that was dear to him, everything that he had lived to build his life upon, everything that his family and culture told him was important for establishing a life and a legacy in this world? What would make the Apostle Paul give it all up? The word of God. What would make a German monk by the name of Martin Luther think that he could stand against all the political and ecclesiastical authorities of his day and dare to denounce them and call them to reform and correct, except that his conscience was held captive by the word of God.

Brothers and sisters, there are no extraordinary men and women, there are only men and women who dare believe the word of an extraordinary God, and those men and women do extraordinary things. They walk on water. Has God said to you this morning? Believe it. Has he promised to save you? Believe it. Has he promised to keep you? Believe it. Has he promised to defend you? Believe it. Has he promised to go with you? Believe it. Has he promised never to leave you or forsake you? Believe it. "How firm," the songwriter says,

"How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in his excellent word!
What more can he say than to you he has already said,
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?"

"Peter, come." And Peter walked on water because he believed the word of God.

That brings us to our last point this morning: the focus of our faith. The foundation points us to the focus, the object, and that object is Jesus. Yes, he is the focus of our faith and we see that in verse 30. The walk of faith not only has this foundation but it must also have an object. Our faith must have an object, it must have a focus, and our text this morning reminds us that Jesus is the object of our faith in the midst of stormy seas. The challenge of faith is to keep your eyes on Jesus. Keep your eyes on Jesus. Verse 30, "when [Peter] saw the wind," the Bible says, "he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, 'Lord, save me.' Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, 'O you of little faith, why did you doubt?'"

Now beloved, we don't know exactly all that Peter was thinking as he was walking on that water and we don't know all that he was thinking as he began to sink, but we do see from the text that his focus turned from Christ to his immediate surroundings. He began to look at the storms around him. He began to focus on his circumstances. He began to look down and realize he was actually walking on water. He forgot that he was actually standing on the word of Christ, but for a moment there he began to think, "I am actually walking on water, and the storms are raging all around me, and I know I can do nothing but sink in this situation." Took his eyes off Christ. He began to focus on his circumstances and how formidable it was, and how he was in a situation that no one had ever been before and no one could possibly survive, and the Bible says that he began to sink. Do you know what faith is, beloved? Faith is in the midst of the storms and the circumstances of life, keeping our focus on Christ, looking to Jesus.

And who is this Jesus of whom we are to focus? It is he who walks on the water. It is he who calms the stormy seas. What manner of man is this? The Bible tells us what manner of man is this in Amos 4:13, it is he who forms the mountains, it is he who creates the wind, it is he who reveals his thoughts to mankind, who turns dawn to darkness, and treads on the heights of the earth. It is he who is the Lord God Almighty, is his name, and we know that his name is Jesus. Jesus.

You see, for a moment here Peter became faithless, didn't he? He ceased to focus on Christ. However, beloved, here is the good news, that even in the midst of Peter's faithlessness, Christ remained faithful. Peter took his eyes off Jesus but Jesus never for a moment took his eyes off of Peter. This is so important. This is so important because if you are anything like me, then you know that every day you tend to lose sight of Jesus. The cares and concerns of this world, the troubles of our time, the news reports and all of the mayhem that seems to be going on around us as our society seems to be sinking into more and more decadence and decay, we have a tendency to focus on our circumstances and for a moment, at times we lose sight of Christ. But here is the good news: Jesus never for a moment loses sight of us.

Why? Because Jesus saves. He saves. Your faith doesn't save you. Jesus saves. Your faith doesn't redeem you. Jesus redeems you. Your faith doesn't satisfy the wrath of God on

your behalf. Jesus is our propitiation. Your faith doesn't cleanse you from all your sins. Jesus does. Jesus saves. Jesus saves and he saves by little faith. He saves. He saves by great faith. He saves. He saves. Your faith may fluctuate and my faith may fluctuate from day-to-day but the good news that the Bible reminds us is that Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. He saves.

That's why we need to keep our eyes on Jesus, keep our eyes on Jesus no matter the circumstances, no matter the clouds that are brewing, no matter the storms that are coming. We keep our eyes on Jesus no matter the monsters that may be around, or the ghosts that are around when the kids say there are ghosts in the closet. Or when the doctors will say that there's a demon in a diagnosis. Or when the spouse says that there's a phantom in the finances. Or when the elders say that there's a serpent among the saints. Who you gonna call? When there's something weird in the neighborhood, who you gonna call? When there's something strange and it don't look good, who you gonna call? Ghostbusters? No! You gonna call on Jesus, "Jesus, Lord, save me!"

This is our faith, beloved, it is calling on Jesus. This is our assurance with which we live our lives in this current world. This is the conviction with which we enter into the next life. The songwriter had it right,

"My faith has found a resting place
Not in device nor creed
I trust the Ever-living One
His wounds for me shall plead

Enough for me that Jesus saves
This ends my fear and my doubt
A sinful soul I come to Him
He'll never cast me out

I need no other argument
I need no other plea
It is enough that Jesus died
And that He died for me."

Jesus is enough. This is why we are called to keep our eyes on Christ and Christ alone.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we do thank you for the faith that you have given unto us, but even more we thank you for he who is the object of our faith, Jesus Christ the righteous, the one in whom we live and we have our being, the one who is our hope, the one who is our argument, who is our plea, the one who puts an end to all our fears. Might Christ be the portion of every soul in here this morning, this day and forever. We pray in Christ alone. Amen.