

WALKING ON WATER

A SERMON FOR ORDINARY TIME
SUNDAY, AUGUST 10, 2014
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
MARIANNA, FLORIDA
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MATTHEW 14:22-33

This week, we continue to look at the miracles of Jesus. If one were to list all of the miraculous things Jesus did, walking on water would have to be near the top of the list. Of all the things that He did that defied logic, reasonable explanation, even the laws of physics, this is the most remarkable.

One doesn't just walk on water. It is impossible. All of those folks who take their time trying to explain away the miracles of Jesus, to find "holes" in the stories as told in the Gospels, to come up with a way to rationalize what happened, can't get past this one miracle. I looked at the original Greek text this week, just to see if there was a gap, a loop-hole there. You see, if the preposition had been used, that little word can be translated on, in, by, or through. But that isn't the word Matthew chose. He used *epi*, and that word has one main meaning: upon. Its secondary meanings include over, on top of. Jesus wasn't wading. He wasn't strolling by the sea-shore, through the surf. He was out there on the stormy sea, walking on water.

Now I don't think Jesus was walking on water to show off. He was moved with the plight of His disciples. He had sent them ahead, so that He could spend time praying and pondering, mourning the death of John the Baptist, reflecting upon His future, His own fate. He had just fed the five thousand, plus, and had sent them away. He'd gone up on the mountain to pray, and the boat had been pushed far from the shore by the wind. The disciples were frightened, no doubt. Some of them were experienced boatmen, but the fishermen of the Sea of Galilee stayed in the shallows near the shore for the most part. They were being pushed out into the deeper waters, being battered about by wind and wave.

And then here comes Jesus. Head held high. Walking on water. Striding across the sea. What an awesome sight that must have been. But instead of being inspired, uplifted, comforted even, the disciples were terrified, and that it was a ghost or a spirit of some sort coming at them across the waves. No ordinary man could do that!

Enter the ordinary man.

If there were ever a man who was just one of the guys, just as ordinary, as normal as could be, it was Simon Peter. A fisherman. A fighter. Quick to speak his mind, quick to defend his leader, Simon Peter was always shooting his mouth off, and then not living up to the words he'd spoken.

He does it again here. He “Peter’s” out. Ever wonder where that old expression comes from? For someone or something that starts out strong, and then dwindles away to nothing. Well, here is the prime example: Peter is walking on water. And then He realizes what he’s doing, gets scared and sinks.

Paul “Bear” Bryant, the late football coach at the University of Alabama, may be the last person on earth to be believed to be able to walk on water. Back in the sixties and seventies, when his teams were winning half a dozen national championships, folks at the University of Tennessee stadium, which is located on the Tennessee River, used to line up on the bank, expecting to see “The Bear” come striding up from Chattanooga, wearing his trademark checkered fedora .

I know some folks expect their pastor to be able to walk on water. Let it be known: I can’t even water ski. I can tread water. And do, quite frequently.

That Jesus could walk on water is a maybe not a miracle. He was, after all the Son of God. That Jesus could call forth to Peter, and that the big fisherman could start out walking to Him across the waves, now there is your miracle, folks.

That Jesus can give ordinary folks the faith, the confidence, the grace, to do extraordinary things, that is a miracle.

Miracles are often only seen through the eyes of faith.

I believe that we live in a day and age of miracles. I see miracles happening all of the time. The birth of a healthy baby is a miracle. When I see the pictures of a human heart, arteries clogged, muscle dying, and then see pictures after the bypass surgery, with blood flowing and strong muscle pumping, I’ve seen a miracle. When I see a stroke patient go into a physical therapy center in a wheel chair, and come out three weeks later walking without a cane, that is a miracle. When I see a family cope with the loss of a loved one to cancer, and grow stronger, closer to each other and to God during the months-long process, I see a miracle

Maybe you don’t. Then don’t try to walk on water.

But if you believe in miracles, if you have faith that God is calling you to do anything, even to walk on water, step out in faith.

Fear is the opponent of faith. Peter was doing fine until he saw how the wind was blowing, how the waves were white-capping around him. And when he gave in to his fear, he was sunk.

Jesus had told them, “Take heart, it is I; don’t be afraid.” And for a few moments, for a miraculous time, Peter overcame his fear, and walked on water.

And after he sank, Jesus chastised him, saying, "Why did you doubt, on you of little faith?"

But you know Peter got one thing right: when he began to sink, he cried out to Jesus, "Lord, save me!"

And Jesus did.

When our fears and doubts are about to sink us, when we are about to drown in the seas of life, Jesus is the one that saves us.

We used to sing the old hymn, "Love Lifted Me." It had that marvelous chorus, that we played with and parodied, but the verse tells the real story: "I was sinking deep in sin, far from the peaceful shore, very deeply stained within, sinking to rise no more. But the Master of the sea, heard my despairing cry, from the waters lifted me, now safe am I."

When nothing else could help, love lifted me.

There are times when I feel like I'm drowning. Drowning in death and despair. Drowning in sin and stupidity. Drowning in aging and infirmity. Drowning in bills and debts. Drowning in self-pity and shame.

And when I am just about to sink beneath the surface, when I am just as frightened as I can be, when I have lost all faith that things will ever be better, I cry out, "Lord, save me." And He does. Every time. I can count on Him being there.

Why can't I get it through my thick skull that He is always there? Why can't I understand that if I will just trust in Him, just have a little faith, I could rise above it all and walk on the water? How about you? Got your feet wet yet?

Let us pray.

Lord, we walk by faith, whether it be on dry land or storm tossed sea. Help us to reach out to you in faith, to take your hand, and accept the salvation that you offer us, through faith and by your grace. Amen.