

<b>Series:</b> Lent: The Power of the Gospel	<b>Reference:</b> Matthew 14:22-33	<b>Title:</b> Get Out of Your Boat	<b>Date:</b> 03.27.2022
<b>Website Writeup:</b>			
When Jesus walks on water & invites Peter to do the same, He proclaims He's the Son of God and, in so doing, strengthens the faith of His disciples. Practicing our faith in new uncomfortable ways forces us to set our fears aside & put our trust in Jesus. We can trust that Jesus is the Great 'I am' who comes to us through the darkest storms of life.			

## COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES

Turn with me to Matthew 14:22-33 on p668 of your pew Bibles, the story of Jesus walking on the water.

Let me preface by saying, when Jesus walks on the water & invites Peter to do the same in this story, He proclaims He's the Son of God. And, in doing so, He strengthens the faith of His disciples.

Practicing our faith in new uncomfortable ways forces us to set our fears aside & put our trust in Jesus. This story immediately follows the miraculous moment of the feeding of the five thousand. These disciples had just seen Jesus do something wonderful, their faith bank should be at an all time high!

But...as fickle as humans are, we see the bank is depleted quickly in the face of personal risk & danger.

It says...

*Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat & go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. <sup>23</sup>After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, <sup>24</sup>and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.*

*<sup>25</sup>Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. <sup>26</sup>When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. <sup>27</sup>But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."*

*<sup>28</sup>"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water.*

*<sup>29</sup>"Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water & came toward Jesus.*

*<sup>30</sup>But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" <sup>31</sup>Immediately Jesus reached out his hand & caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"*

*32And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. 33Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."*

When Jesus walks on the water, we know from a former story where He calmed the storm & seas that He possesses the power to control the natural world & its laws. The disciples had already seen that power in Matthew 8, and they'd just seen Him feed five thousand with only a few fish & loaves, not to mention all the other miraculous acts He'd performed outside of those two events. These guys should be giants of faith by now...

Now they're in a boat in the middle of a storm with Jesus coming to them on the water. They're seeing in this instance the power of God & the power of Jesus to be inextricably one & the same. They should know this already from previous experiences. But we find... people are fragile in faith, that faith is built one experience at a time of seeing Jesus work through the difficulties & storms of life. That we quickly forget what He's done before. That like the other man in Mark 9:24, we say... *"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"* We are to be obedient & choose to believe even when we have a hard time with it, and much more importantly when we face the storms of life. It's easy to say you have faith when things go well, but what's truly in us comes out when we are under pressure.

Paul Tripp gives a great illustration to this end when he takes a water bottle & shakes it. The water spills out, and he asks, "Why did water come out of the bottle?" And everybody answers, "Because you shook it." And he changes the intonation of his question to ask, "Why did WATER come out of the bottle?" Because water was in the bottle. And that is us. When things go well, we can easily say we have faith, and disregard addressing what is really in us. But as soon as a storm comes up, what is really in us comes out - and we find that the storm reveals that, and we have more work to do. We find we need our storms to further our spiritual growth & development.

Jesus' own choice of words in v27 points to the reality of His complete power, which you may not notice in a cursory reading without understanding the original languages of the text. When He states, "It is I," that statement is actually translated as, "I AM." *If you're at all a Bible reader, you'll note this statement echoes the language of Moses interaction with God in Exodus 3:14 when God said to Moses... "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"*

*When God gives Moses a name for which people were to refer to Him, the name God gives conveys His dominion over all things, the source of His power & His eternal nature: I AM - the self-sufficient, self-sustaining God who was, who is, and who forever will be, LORD over all creation.*

*God had commanded Moses to go & speak to the Israelites in Exodus. If you remember they were in the storm of slavery, and God was going to use Moses to rescue them, to call them out to freedom. And Moses asked, "Suppose I go to the Israelites & say to them, 'the God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?'"*

*Then what shall I tell them?" (Ex 3:13) God answered, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (V14). We notice in our Bibles that name's written in all caps for a reason - it was God's sacred name.*

Now, in Hebrew that statement I AM is EhYeh which means, I WILL BE. Meaning God is the one who was, is & forever will be. In other words God's existence doesn't depend on anything or anyone else, He simply IS - the beginning & end of all things. But Moses couldn't say EHYEH in the first person, so God gave him the form he was to say it in which is 'He WILL BE' or YAHWEH in the third person, a name which occurs over 6,500 times in the Old Testament.

This name was so sacred that out of respect the Israelites actually stopped using it, replacing it with the Hebrew word ADONAY which means LORD. That is the name we now often use in English - but LORD in the sense of Lord of all things. But the Israelites went further, not wanting anyone reading Scripture to accidentally say this sacred name YAHWEH out loud. They took the consonants from it, YHWH, and replaced the vowels A-O-A from ADONAY in it to create a hybrid word, which was YAHOWAH. This was a word which no one actually ever used, it was just a visual reminder in the text not to say YAHWEH out loud, but to say ADONAY instead. Christians come along, not realizing at first that YAHOWAH was an artificial word, so it eventually entered into English as JEHOVAH in translation.

It's important also to remember there were two words for Lord as well. One in all caps LORD, which is in reference to ADONAY or YAHWEH, God of all things. Then lord, or ADON, which is used for people of authority over another. So when we see Jesus as the LORD of lords, we know what that means.

So, Jesus here in Matthew 14 is saying, "Take courage! I AM, I am the LORD of lords, the one who was, and is, and forever will be - the one whose existence is not dependent on anyone or anything else - the God of the universe! Do not be afraid!"

We also remember Jesus made seven "I am" statements in John.

6:48...I am the Bread of Life.

8:12...I am the light of the world.

10:9...I am the gate.

10:11...I am the good shepherd.

11:25...I am the resurrection & the life.

14:6...I am the way & the truth & the life.

15:5...I am the vine.

Jesus is making clear through these statements exactly who He is to the world & to these disciples directly. Thus, when Jesus declares, "Take courage; it is I. Do not be afraid" (Matthew 14:27), He's saying the courage He calls us into isn't rooted in ourselves, our abilities to withstand the storms of life, our own strength in the seemingly hopeless times when we see no way out! It's rooted in the growing knowledge of who Jesus is.

He's saying, "Take courage, I AM. God of the universe. Do not be afraid! I've got you in the storms of life."

We sometimes find ourselves in a storm of life which seems absolutely hopeless. The darkness surrounds us, the waves overwhelm us, the winds buffet us. Maybe that's a marriage having difficulty, or some other relationship you cannot seem to salvage, the loss of a loved one, school or work overwhelming you, they come in many forms. But especially when our most intimate relationships seem hopeless, it rocks us to the very core. The fear in those times is absolutely paralyzing.

"Buffeted" in v24 is more literally translated as *tormented*, a word that elsewhere can refer to demonic hostility against people (Matt 8:6; Rev 9:5) the spiritual battles of life. So, whether your situation is literal & physical, as it is for our brothers & sisters in the Ukraine right now, or it's of an emotional or spiritual nature - we are at times buffeted or tormented by the storms of life! By the darkness which surrounds us on all sides when we can't see the safety of the shore.

Normally the disciples would've crossed the lake easily by now, even if they had waited a little while for Jesus at Bethsaida (cf. Mark 6:45). The "considerable distance" of v24 is, literally, *many stadia*. One *stadium* equaled approximately six hundred feet. John says they have rowed twenty-five to thirty stadia (three to four miles), and the lake was approximately four to five miles wide.<sup>1</sup> So, they're in the middle of this storm at least a mile from the shore with the wind against them. They cannot see the shore, and without any chance other than Jesus.

And that seems to be where He wanted them...to learn this lesson! Maybe they had remembered Matthew 8, lamenting that He had not been in the boat with them now to speak a word & calm the seas. To take away the storm. But He wasn't, He'd been off praying someplace! Thanks a lot Jesus, now we have to rely on ourselves! He's not here to take away my suffering!

But...Jesus, the Great I AM, comes out of the darkness of the storms of life when we think He's nowhere to be found! It's before dawn, still dark. Jesus comes out of the darkness walking on water, and their first reaction is that He's a ghost & they're terrified. When Christ comes to us in our darkest hour, when we are overwhelmed & He speaks to us, at first we are afraid of Him! And even more so, we may be afraid of what He asks of us in that moment! We just want the storm gone, but He invites us right out in the middle of it - to leave the only safety we know of...our little boat.

Get out of the boat, step into the stormy sea with Me! I'm sorry Jesus, but that's crazy talk - I'm not sure I would've been as brave as Peter in this instance - I would've stayed in the boat shouting, "NO way Jose', You come here!"

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<sup>1</sup> Craig Blomberg, [Matthew](#), vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 234.

I don't care if Peter started sinking, to his credit at least he got out of the boat! Then... like us all, attention is diverted from the gaze of Jesus to the storm swirling so violently around us & like Peter...we begin to sink... All the while the Great I AM is calling us further into the storm! To face it in faith.

My daughter in law is a counselor for girls who've been abused. She states that the way to get someone past trauma is to make them retell their difficult story in a variety of ways. The retelling of a fearful story eventually makes it innocuous. Modern psychology has finally learned in recent history what God has said all along, the way to freedom is not avoidance, but straight into the darkness & storm hand in hand with Jesus.

He sometimes calms the storm as He did in the other account, but more likely He takes us by the hand in our weak faith to lead us through it. Sometimes, we need to go through the pain of facing the storm in the confidence of the Great I AM who calls to us out of the darkness. And when we falter, He is patient & simply takes us by the hand leading us through the waves.

As elsewhere, the disciples often fail to recognize Jesus's power available to them with His divinity on full display, sharply contrasted with the fearful humanity of Peter & the others cowering in the boat. In these defining times of trial in the storms we face, we often doubt the all surpassing power of Christ...

In Matthew 14:31, "doubt" is the word *distazō*, an unusual word in the Greek. It suggests wavering, vacillation, unsureness, or unsteadiness, but it appears only one other time in the New Testament, in Matthew 28:17, when Matthew acknowledges the presence of doubt even after many witnessed Jesus's resurrection.<sup>2</sup> Right up to the very end some are plagued with doubt. But despite that fact, Jesus still gives His followers the Great Commission. *Let's read that quickly, Matthew 28:17-20...*

*"When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup>Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

After all the miraculous signs, and Him rising from the dead, clearly standing before them, having eaten with them after the resurrection, some still doubt! Such is the state of the human heart, we struggle to believe even while choosing to believe! We question our belief, even while choosing to believe what we question. Doubt is clearly not prohibitive. Followers of Jesus can still follow Him, even in the midst of their doubt & He will walk to you on the waves, take you by the hand, and lead you through it.

This scene results in the first proclamation by the other disciples that Jesus is the Son of God (Matthew 14:33). In this proclamation is the acknowledgment that Jesus is who He

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<sup>2</sup> (Strong's Greek Lexicon [KJV], s.v. "G1365, *distazō*," <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong's=G1365&t=ESV>)

says He is. The Great I AM -YAHWEH! The disciples' faith is strengthened by His strength.

In a recent interview, shock rocker Alice Cooper describes his return to the Christian faith after years of alcohol & drug addiction.<sup>3</sup> That was the storm of his life, a situation which he & his wife saw no way out. Cooper describes growing up in a religious home, his father a preacher. But soon, he'd become the Prodigal Son, battling alcohol & drug addiction, which he believed would surely kill him before the age of thirty.

Reflecting on his decision to get clean & in reference to 12 Step groups, he says now, "I don't have a sponsor; I have a Savior." Alice benefitted greatly from the support of his wife, Sheryl. God uses the community of believers around us in the storms we face. With Sheryl, he established the Solid Rock Teen Center in Phoenix, Arizona. It was actually Sheryl's faith which demonstrated the power of a "little faith" in God to transform our lives. She said, "In the midst of that dark valley, I had to believe him when he said I'm done. I'm done with all this.' I didn't have a lot of faith that this was actually so, but I said, 'Let's try this on these conditions,' because I believe marriage is forever." Even her "little faith" made the difference - the kind of "little faith" Jesus hopes for in His followers.

When Jesus walks on water & invites Peter to do the same, He proclaims He's the Son of God. And, in doing so, He strengthens the faith of His disciples.

God the Father declared Jesus as His Son at the baptism (3:17; 17:5). Jesus had already been recognized as the Son of God by the devil himself (4:3, 6) and also demons (8:29). The disciples were astonished at Jesus when he calmed the storm (8:27), but here they worship Him. Jesus has been worshiped already in the Gospel (2:2, 11; 8:2) but this is the first time the disciples do so. They'll do it again at the close of the Gospel (28:17). But here, they declare Him truly the "Son of God." This is the first instance of any human recognizing Him as the Son of God. Peter will echo this confession again in 16:18.<sup>4</sup> They're learning through experience that Jesus claims of Himself were true, and they respond accordingly through worship.

Practicing our faith in new uncomfortable ways forces us to set our fears aside & put our trust in Jesus. Lent is a season of preparation for the celebration of Easter. It's a great time to step out of our boats & experience new spiritual practices which will challenge us. What's your storm right now, maybe Jesus won't calm it, but walk you through it. How do you answer Him in faith, keeping your eyes on Him despite the darkness, wind & waves of it? We learn here that He's able to lift you up in your doubt, but we also learn that increased faith will enable us to walk through these things because the Great I AM is calling us to Himself within that storm.

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<sup>3</sup> ("Alice Cooper Opens Up about His Journey to Finding Faith," The Today Show, December 17, 2019, <https://www.today.com/video/alice-cooper-opens-up-about-his-journey-to-finding-faith-75208773841>)

<sup>4</sup> Douglas Mangum, ed., *Lexham Context Commentary: New Testament*, Lexham Context Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), Mt 14:27-33.

God works through others, do you have trusted discipleship relationships with other Christians who can remind you to keep your eyes on Christ? To remind you of a God who raises the dead, heals & has conquered sin & death in life through sacrifice. Who calls us to lay down our lives for others? Do you listen & obey even when your emotions say you should run & hide in fear - knowing that courage is facing fear, not the absence of it. Jesus is in the storm, He will walk out of the darkness bringing you safely through it, you need not be perfect in that response, because you have a perfect God.