

I Dare You! Matthew 14:25-31

Good morning! I want to talk with you today about walking on water. Now, I say this, realizing that many of us have probably used the phrase, "I don't walk on water, you know!"—as if this really needed to be said.

But in our text for this morning, I hear Jesus saying, "I dare you to do it. I dare you to trust me enough to get out of the boat and walk on the water."

Most of us know the story--that Jesus walked on water; and Peter did too, at least for a few steps. Do you think this story is included in the Bible to encourage you and me to do a little water-walking--not literally--but in the sense of stepping out on faith and doing something we previously thought to be impossible?

Granted, life is easier...safer...and perhaps less stressful if we avoid such situations, but it can also be rather dull, uneventful, and...unproductive.

What I want us to see this morning is that it's the very nature of faith to take some risks, to face some challenges, and even to be open to the possibility of failure; but it's this kind of faith that leads to a life that is exciting, fulfilling, and worth the risk!

Of course, you may want to point out about now that there are certain benefits to living within a normal, manageable routine. Safe, secure, and conventional lifestyles involve less stress and are far more predictable.

When it comes to our spiritual lives, though, Jesus seems to be telling us that we cannot afford to live too comfortably. We shouldn't allow our spiritual routines and traditions to bind us and prevent us from living a lifestyle of bold, adventurous faith.

And this is true for churches too. Our congregation needs a lifestyle of faith—some occasional risk-taking that gets us outside the boat and onto the water, if you will. As an example, this church has started eleven mission churches over the years. Each of these new church starts involved putting a few toes in the water.

Mission Anderson and our four Habitat Houses did too. Mentoring at-risk children is a bit "out of the boat" for most of us, but we do it. Our Wilmary Ministry, Saturday Servants, the New Year's Day meal, and now, Family Promise—inviting homeless families into our church and caring for them—a

whole lot of churches would elect to stay in the boat on that one—but we're out there!

And let's not forget that person who decides to teach a Sunday School class for the first time, or serve as a Deacon, or keep the youth in their home for Disciple Now, or maybe do a little diaper duty in the nursery.

Or tithe—just the thought of that causes some Christians “to mess in their diapers.” None of this sounds so risky, really; but I promise you...there are lots of Christians who've never tried it.

Anything that stretches our faith, that moves us out of our comfort zones, and forces us to really rely on God...counts as a positive response to Jesus' “I dare you!” So today, let's try to move beyond ordinary faith to the kind of faith where we have to courageously step out and begin walking toward Jesus Christ and His will for our lives.

We probably have at least three distinct groups of people with us today. Some may feel so distant from God; they can't imagine ever being close to Him. You can't fathom that there's a God who loves you, and is reaching out to you, and wants to be in relationship with you.

If this is where you are today, I hope you'll find the courage to open your life to God. There's not a person on earth who doesn't matter deeply to Him.

Many of us, though, are already in a relationship with God. We've trusted Jesus Christ as our Savior and want Him to lead our lives. Still, we've never experienced the thrill of stepping out of our spiritual comfort zones. We listen to others talk about their adventures of faith, but so far, we have no stories of our own.

There may be a third group here today—Christians who have stepped out on faith so many times that you're just looking for the next available boat to take you out to sea, so that you can try walking on water again. You've learned through experience that that's where Jesus is, and that's where you want to be.

So, which one is you? Reflect a bit on that question as we take a look at this familiar story in Matthew's Gospel. It takes place right after Jesus feeds five thousand people with five barley loaves and two fish. Jesus needs some time by Himself to pray, so He sends the disciples across the lake by boat.

But remember that little storm we had a week ago last Tuesday? Right in the middle of our church golf outing! Well, the weather was something like that on the Sea of Galilee as we pick up the story in Matthew 14:25-33:

²⁵During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. ²⁶When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

²⁷But 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. ³⁰But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and 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."

This is a great story of faith, but the only ones who can share the story, at least from a participant's point of view, are Peter and Jesus. The others were "just watching."

Imagine being one of the eleven disciples and seeing Peter step over the side of the boat. And later when someone asks you what it was like to be there, all you can say is, "Well, yea, I was there, but I stayed in the boat. The water looked deep and dark and...wet. Besides, it was three o'clock in the morning, and I was tired, not to mention scared. Frankly, we thought Peter was crazy for getting out of the boat; so we just watched."

The only thing that distinguishes Peter from the eleven boat-potatoes he left behind was faith. He exercised his, the others didn't. And we can see the very same patterns and tendencies among Christians today! There are those who work and serve and attempt great things for God—and those who let them!

Faith emboldens us for a life of adventure. Fear paralyzes us, leaving us with missed opportunities and regrets. Every human story, ours included, is about the struggle between faith and fear.

Friends, I don't want to get to the end of my life and know that I had some opportunities to at least try to walk on water, but I wasted them because I was too afraid to get out of the boat.

When we're content just sitting in the boat, we never realize our full spiritual potential. So, how can we avoid being stuck in the boat? Let's see what we can learn from this story.

I want to suggest to you that Jesus confronted Peter with three big "I dare you"—maybe even "double dog dare you," if you remember the movie. Applying them to our lives just might get you and me out of the boat so that we can get started on our own stories of great faith. First, Jesus says:

#1: I DARE YOU TO OBEY ME. Everyone has to start somewhere. For Peter, it meant following the words of Jesus and first getting in the boat. He's not out in the water yet. Jesus begins by telling him to just get in the boat.

This wasn't a difficult command to follow, but what if Peter had rejected the request and decided to stay on the shore? What kind of story would we be reading today if he'd opted to disobey Jesus?

One of the biggest lessons we can learn from Peter's experience is that adventures of faith always begin with obedience. And it usually doesn't start with obedience to something really big, like walking on water, but to the much smaller nudges that God gives us to just get in the boat.

Had Peter decided to skip the boat ride and wait for Jesus to finish his prayer time, Peter's walk on water would not have happened and we would not be inspired by his example today. Peter teaches us that faith isn't really faith without obedience.

#2: Next, Jesus says: I DARE YOU TO ACCEPT YOUR FEARS.

How do you think Peter felt when he finally had both feet on the water? I think Peter felt like we would--scared.

He was scared because he knew that if it were left up to him, he'd sink. But Peter also understood that walking on water was not possible because he had the ability to do it. It was doable only because he had faith to believe that Jesus could make it happen.

Peter was willing to accept fear as the price of growth. And in that moment, nothing would keep Peter from getting out of the boat—not his fear, nor his embarrassment, nor the threat of failure. Faith compelled Peter to get out of the boat, and he was willing to confront his fears in order to move closer to Jesus.

That night on the water, Peter learned--and we should too-- that it's not the water, winds, and waves we should fear, but the distance between us and

the Savior that results from choosing to stay in the boat. We must accept our fears and face them in order to move closer to Jesus. That's simply part of growing.

#3: I DARE YOU TO FINISH WITH NO REGRETS. Imagine for a moment that your life here is over, and you are led to a small room in one of heaven's mansions. There are two chairs set up in the room, one for you and one for God. There's also a TV with a DVD player plugged in and ready to go.

God walks in and puts a DVD in that has your name on the label. Underneath your name are the words "What Might Have Been." You find yourself watching all that God could have done through your life if you had let him. If you had just been willing to move outside your comfort zone and exercise your faith.

>Imagine seeing what he might have done with your gifts and talents if you had trusted him enough to use them.

>Imagine seeing what he might have done with your financial resources if you had trusted him enough to be generous.

>Imagine what he might have done in your relationships if you had trusted him enough to be honest and open.

>Imagine what he might have done with your character, if you had dared to confess your sin, resist temptation, and pursue growth.

>Imagine what he might have done with your family, if you had trusted him enough to love them as much as you loved yourself.

>Imagine what he might have done with your church if you had trusted him enough to encourage, love and serve your brothers and sisters in Christ.

>Imagine what he might have done with your life if you had just trusted him enough to get out of the boat.

The only person in the boat that night who never had to imagine what might have been was Peter. The others had no story to tell; they had no experience to treasure; no encounter with Jesus to call their own. They were just spectators, casual observers of Peter's daring step of faith.

And I have no doubt they had regrets--regrets that will be ours one day if we remain unwilling to step out of the boat and move beyond our comfort zones. The life of faith is not about avoiding failure and playing it safe. It's about the great adventure of risking something for God, knowing that you and I are here to do more than just sit in the boat.

To be honest, I've stayed in the boat an awful lot in my life. And each time I do, I'm sure God's disappointed. Is this true in your life too? Listen: the Lord wants us out on the water, because that's where He is. We have to be willing to get out of the boat.

If we respond to Jesus' dare, what do you think it will mean for us? Perhaps it will involve something we've already mentioned. Or maybe it will lead to sharing our witness with a lost friend or inviting an unchurched neighbor to join us for Sunday School and worship.

Maybe God will call us to help with the clean-up after some disaster or surrender to fulltime Christian service. It will likely be something close to home and maybe something He's had in mind for a long time, if he could just get us out of the boat!

Are you ready to take the first step—to be obedient, to accept and overcome your fears, and to see that God has much more in mind for your life? See the Lord's hand reaching out to you. If you're responding to His will, He won't let you sink. He won't let you fail. The only real way to fail is to just stay in the boat.