

Introduction

Everyone has fears. I have a very rational fear of spiders because my parents were kind enough to let me watch Arachnophobia, a movie about killer spiders that are the size and look like ordinary house spiders, all throughout my childhood. It's a great movie; it's also a great way to have an intense fear of spiders. Some people are afraid of tight spaces, or clowns, or the dark. I'm going to admit something to you. I have a very irrational fear, considering where it is that I live, and I cannot easily explain why. I have a fear of open water. There's not even a name for it, but it would fall somewhere between agoraphobia, which is the fear of open spaces, and hydrophobia, which is the fear of water, or rabies apparently. I don't know exactly how this came about; it's not like I've ever even been in open water before. I've watched Shark Week, and it always makes me a little nervous. The vast emptiness of the ocean is just terrifying. And I always get a little tense in movies when they show someone's car run off of a bridge into a river and the people try to get out while the water rushes in. One time, when Erin and I were in high school, we were on our way to a concert when it just started pouring down rain. Buckets and buckets of rain were falling onto my car and onto the road. I couldn't see more than a few feet in front of me, and what I saw was distorted by the downpour. We were lost, and we determined that in order to get to where we needed to be we would have to turn around. I pulled over into a gravel driveway which had, what I believed to be, a large graveled area to turn around in that was covered with a little bit of water. As I began to pull past the driveway and into this graveled area I realized that it wasn't a parking space covered by water, it was somebody's pond. I was probably less than a few feet from driving into the water, and suddenly

images of what could've happened flashed into my brain. It was not good.

Transition

Today we're going to talk a little bit about open water. The passage of Scripture that Rod read is a fairly well-known story about Jesus walking on water. What I want to explore with you today is why Peter was called out of the boat and why he sank. I believe there is a common way in which we discuss this passage, namely, that if Peter truly had the right faith, then he wouldn't have sunk. So we say "just keep your eyes on Jesus and you can do anything." After all, as Jesus says, if we have faith even the size of a mustard seed, then we can move mountains.

But I'm not so sure that that's what we are supposed to learn from this event.

John Ortberg wrote a book a few years back called "If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat." He makes the statement that "I believe there is something-Someone-inside who tells us there is more to life than sitting in the boat. You were made for something more than merely avoiding failure. There is something inside you that wants to walk on water-to leave the comfort of routine existence and abandon yourself to the high adventure of following God." He then asks the question, "What is your boat?" In the Scripture read today, Peter's boat was literally a boat. He could've avoided failure, which would have been drowning, by staying in it. Instead, he decided to embark on Christ's adventure of obedience, even though that obedience could have led to drowning and death.

God calls all of us to something great. He wants us to leave the safety and security of our lives and to step out on faith. In order to do so, we need to get out of our own boats. Maybe those boats are comfortable jobs or family or our homes and possessions.

And so let's say we do get out of the boat. Then what? As I said earlier, traditionally we would say that we need to have faith and focus on Jesus, and we can walk on water. But remember, Peter couldn't walk on water. And Peter was a big deal. He knew Jesus intimately. Jesus told him that he was going to be the one to start the church. So why exactly would we think that we could walk on water when Peter couldn't? Maybe some of us could do this miracle, maybe, but certainly there isn't a broad lesson that we should all be able to walk on water if we only focused enough. And even if we could focus for a while and continue to balance out onto the waves, eventually we would get distracted and begin to sink too. So maybe the lesson isn't about faith at all.

Big Idea

Here's the point: Jesus calls us all to walk on water, to step out towards Him in faith. But we were never meant to walk on water, on our own. We cannot rely only on ourselves, our faith, our righteousness, our purity, our goodness, to keep us above the waves. Instead, it is only with Jesus that we can walk on water.

Ancient Context

Last week we looked at the miracle of Jesus feeding the 5,000 people with just a few loaves of bread and fish. If you recall, he had just heard the news that his friend and cousin John the Baptist had been killed and

was seeking some alone time when the crowds began to flock to him. Rather than turn them away, Jesus instead healed and taught, even miraculously multiplying the meager amount of food that the disciples had to feed everyone so that they could continue to spend time with him. Today's Scripture directly follows this event. Jesus, still needing that time alone with His Father, begins to disperse the crowds. He had spent all day performing miracles for them, and he feared that because of all that they'd seen they might try to forcibly make him a King. Jesus knew that this was neither his time nor the way that he was going to reveal his power, and so he needed the crowd to break up and leave.

He then compels the disciples to get into their boat and go across the lake and goes up on top of the mountain to pray.

At some point during their journey across the lake, the wind and waves began to pick up. Matthew says that the boat was being "tortured" or "tormented" by the waves. It seems that he intentionally used a word that would traditionally be ascribed to human torment or torture. The entire scene was symbolic of intense trouble and distress. In the Psalms, water, storms, and nighttime represented death, darkness, dread, panic, etc. In Psalm 18:16, the psalmist writes about God drawing him out of the depths of the water. In Psalm 91:5 the psalmist writes that, "You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day." The disciples found themselves in an extremely terrifying situation, both in a very physical real sense, but also in that Biblically this was always seen as bad.

Matthew records that Jesus appeared to the disciples during the fourth watch of the night, which would be somewhere between 3:00-6:00 AM. Numbers are a big deal in the Bible. The authors use them

symbolically, such as the number seven and twelve being good numbers. This doesn't always mean that there were 7 or 12 of whatever the person was talking about; it was more important to the authors of that time period to express the holiness of the objects or events through numbers than to be numerically accurate. The fourth watch is found elsewhere in Scripture and was the time of God's helpful intervention. In Exodus, it is during the fourth watch that God sends down a pillar of fire to confuse and disable the Egyptians as they were chasing the Hebrews through the parted Red Sea.

So what's the deal with walking on water? It's not something that happens today; it's not really something we think about or talk about. But what about during the time of Jesus? In antiquity, walking on water was actually something interested people. It was found throughout many different ancient myths and was the subject of people's dreams. Only gods were able to walk on water. So those present and those who would hear about this event would definitely connect Jesus walking on water with divinity.

I want you to really imagine what happened here. Close your eyes and picture what exactly this would have been like for these disciples. You are on a small boat with some of your closest friends, crossing a lake that you have crossed hundreds of times. It should've been a quick and easy trip for everyone, but instead, as the sun set and your vessel made it to the middle of the lake, a storm broke out. But this wasn't just a small storm. This was a powerful, capsize-your-boat sort of storm. The wind blew harder and harder and the waves grew larger and larger. This continued for hours, and you and your friends were doing their best just to keep from falling out of the boat. Around the fourth watch, let's say at four in the morning, you looked out across the water, and

what appeared to be the silhouette of a man was walking ON TOP OF the water towards the boat. As the figure got nearer and nearer you were able to confirm that this was definitely a man. But wait, men cannot walk on water! This must be a ghost! Or an angry sea god!

The disciples, upon seeing this strange person-whatever it was-walking on water, respond by being afraid. Well of course they would!

Jesus immediately calms them by saying, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." In saying, "It is I," Jesus is recalling how God spoke to Moses from the burning bush and told him his name, "I am."

Peter, hearing his friend's voice, wanted confirmation that this was actually Jesus. So he says, if you truly are Jesus, tell me to come out to you on the water. Notice that Peter wants Jesus to "tell" him to come out onto the water. Jesus then gives the command for Peter to walk out on the water. It is only by this command that Peter is able to do this miracle. It was not as a result of his own faith/ability, it was based on his obedience to Jesus' call.

But something was wrong. Peter realized that he was no longer in the safety of the boat. He was no longer in charge of his own well-being. He looked at the surrounding large waves and wind and began to fear. He forgot that it was Jesus who was sustaining him on top of the water, and instead focused on the largeness of the dangers around him. And so Peter began to sink.

But in the midst of the storm, Jesus reached out his hand and pulled Peter up out of the danger.

In spite of Peter's doubt, Jesus still reached out to Peter. What does this say about doubt? In one sense, I believe that it gives some license

to doubt. Jesus did not strike Peter down; rather, he worked past Peter's doubt and reached down to help Him.

Jesus then tells Peter he had "little faith," which may not have been the worst thing; after all, he did get out of the boat.

Though we may never actually pull a Criss Angel and levitate on water ourselves, there is personal application to be found in this passage.

Big Idea

Again, Jesus calls us all to walk on water, to step out towards Him in faith. But we were never meant to walk on water, on our own. We cannot rely only on ourselves, our faith, our righteousness, our purity, our goodness, to keep us above the waves. Instead, it is only with Jesus that we can walk on water.

Modern Application

I believe that God is calling all of us, no matter where we are at in our faith journeys, whether we have been raised in the church or we would rather sleep in on Sunday. And God is not small; he gives us large, great things to accomplish. If we are wanting and searching after things that he would want us to do, then we should really be prepared for Him to respond. And like we talked about last week, he's probably going to ask us to do something that is inconvenient for us. We don't place a lot of space in our schedules and lives for the spontaneity of God, and so anything that he calls us to will be inconvenient.

I want to quickly touch on something that can often be an obstacle to our following after God. There is a sin that we all have and that I believe can be one of the most difficult to let go. It is the sin of self-

sufficiency. We want to be in control of our own lives; we don't want help, we can take care of it. It is a sign of weakness to need other people, so we stay in our own bubbles, leery of anyone that would pass by. But the strong message in this passage is that self-sufficiency and control do not work. Peter would have drowned if it weren't for Jesus. His faith could only hold him up so long; he was not a god and could not transcend the laws of the natural world. And so he needed a hand to pull him up.

We cannot do this thing called life alone. We were never meant to walk on water without Christ.

Big Idea

But, Jesus calls us all to walk on water, to step out towards Him in faith. But we were never meant to walk on water, on our own. We cannot rely only on ourselves, our faith, our righteousness, our purity, our goodness, to keep us above the waves. Instead, it is only with Jesus that we can walk on water.

Conclusion

We must get out of the boat; we must risk it all to follow God's calling. But just because Jesus is with us does not mean that the Christian life is going to be safe and easy. Every so often, people drown in Indian Lake because they get out of the boat. In many places, the water is only five or six feet deep, with bottom of thick, deep mud. And so when people jump out of the boat and straight down into the water, they get sucked into the mud and drown. Nobody said that getting out of the boat was easy or safe. People die every year because they are willing to share their faith in countries that do not accept it. We are all called out of the

boat, we are all meant to step on the water, but we will not be doing it alone. Jesus Christ is with us, ready to stretch out his hand.