

## **Walking on Water, August 7, 2011**

All over the world, today, preachers are admonishing the faithful to be more so! To get off the shoreline into the boat, to get out of the boat and onto the water, to ignore the waves at their feet, and, above all, to keep their eyes on the Lord. And they'll say it, or anyway folks will hear it, in a scolding tone. Like,

“All you mere humans of ‘little faith’! Man up! Venture forth! Forget the water, forget yourself! Look at Jesus. Keep your eyes on Jesus!” Well, isn't that the point of this story? In the storms of life, you, too, can walk on water, if you'll just keep your eyes on the Lord!

But we don't. Even in this story, we don't.

In fact, we mostly look at Peter, not Jesus, because Peter's so much like us and Peter, we “get”. Of course he'd remember the water, and, looking down, of course he'd sink. Peter, and we, are intractably sinkable.

Once again, Peter's failed at faithfulness, like we've done, over and over! And he's sinking like we are, and he, and we, should do better, should have more faith, should keep our eyes on the Lord, should be able to walk on water, if only we kept our eyes on Jesus.

But what if we did? What if we looked hard at the Jesus of this story, what would we see?

First of all, a savior who comes for us out on the stormy sea. He didn't have to that day. He could have done a different miracle, just guiding the boat safely to the other shore from his mountaintop retreat. Heck, he could have stilled the storm from way up there without ever even getting his feet wet.

But instead, he leaves the quiet safety of that lofty, desperately needed, well-deserved solitude, and walks into the watery chaos, for them. Because that's who he is and that's what he does.

He comes for us. He walks into the storms, weathering with us, and beside us, the chaos raging all around us and within us. He comes for us. He comes for us. That's what “incarnation” is - the God who comes for us, though he could have stayed above it all-distant, removed, safe and dry, like a god has every right to do. But our God came into the storm of human life, for us. Imagine the love in that.

Second, looking at Jesus, we see a Lord who hears our uncertain plea, “Lord, if it's you.... If you can hear me, if you're there, if you love me....If it's you, bid me come to you on the water. If it's you, bid me ‘Come’.”

“Come on, then,” says the Lord.

There's so much in that little exchange. There's a regular human who can't always recognize Jesus, even when he walks on water to save us.

"Is it you, Lord? Would you really come into this mess for me? I've seen you do so a thousand times before but I'm a slow learner and even after all you've shown me and done for me, I'm still not sure. So tell me, is it really you?"

And there's a Jesus who could have scolded, or ridiculed, or ignored Peter, but who, instead, lovingly meets Peter where he's at, a jumble of courage and fear, just like you and me.

There are days I would say that, "If it's you, bid me come!" and I would. There are some few days I'd leap without even asking, so sure in my faith, I could even walk on water. And there are days I would cower in the boat, hiding, quivering, just hoping it will all soon blow over.

Jesus knows that, he knows us. He loves us in those moments we'd risk it all. He loves us when we waver and hesitate. He loves us when we cower and hide. He loves and hears us always, and gives us what we most need, always. He hears our hearts and answers them. That's who he is and that's what he does.

That day, Peter needed to try walking on water, so his Lord helped him do it, and he got to walk in utter faith, if just for a moment before he looked down and sank, and Jesus reached out and saved him.

Which brings us to the third and best thing we see in the Christ of this story – a Jesus who reaches out and grabs us, just in time, every time. Who knows how sinkable we are, and reaches for us, so we won't go under. Who wants us, and needs us, walking on water with him. What good would we or Peter be to a world in need, lying at the bottom of the sea, drowned and waterlogged?

Jesus wants to lift us, needs to lift us, can lift us, and will lift us, up from every watery chaos. Because that's who he is and that's what he does.

*There was a very devout abbot who left his monastery for a long retreat on a remote island in the middle of a lake, where he stayed for six months, all alone. One day, some of the brothers, standing at the shoreline saw him coming home, walking on the water, and complained to each other,*

*"Can you believe that? After all these months at prayer, he's still as stingy as ever. There he is walking on the water when he could have taken the ferry for only 25 cents!"*

Like those monks, sometimes we miss the point.

Yes, the gospel story today is about us and our faith - the faith to leave the shore and get into the boat in the first place. The faith to sail out to deep water, where the fish and

adventure are. The faith to say, "If it's you, bid me come." The faith to climb from the safe and solid things we know, out onto the wild, crazy, impossible unknown.

But even more, it's about Jesus, the pioneer and source of our faith. Jesus, the reason for our faith. Jesus, who creates and sustains and renews and upholds our faith. Jesus who comes to us when faith is lost. Jesus, who loves us through great faith, weak faith, or no faith, and who always, every time, reaches out to save us.

*That's* the miracle. Not that he walked on the water, but the great love for us which caused him to. That he came, that he always comes, for us, whether or not our eyes are on him, because his eyes are always, always, fixed upon us.

So close your eyes, now, and listen. Whoever you are, wherever you are in your life, whatever you've done or not done, whatever faith you have or don't have, see him now, coming for you. See him seeing you, just as you are, and loving you anyway. See him knowing what you need-courage, hope, rescue, rest - and wanting to give you that very thing.

And feel him, right now, reaching for you. Feel the strength of his hand as it grabs for yours, the firm hold that will never let go, the safety and love in that grasp. Hold on tightly to his hold on you.

And feel him lifting you, and saving you, because it's him, it's Jesus, it's your Jesus, it's our Jesus. And that's who he is, that's what he does.