

A Sermon Preached by Gregory Hall at Clarence Presbyterian Church on June 19, 2022

WALKING ON WATER

Jesus said to Peter, "Come." So, Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. Matthew 14:29

Today we recognize ten young people who will be graduating from high school this year. This marks both a beginning and an end for these young people. While it marks the end of high school, it also points to new experiences and responsibilities. Many of these young people will soon leave the security of the familiar to go to places such as the University of Pittsburgh, Elon, Emerson, Lebanon Valley, D' Youville, UB, New Paltz and Penn. State. They will enter these larger systems to begin a new chapter in life. It takes courage to take the risk of that first step into the future.

Our core story from Jesus' life for today speaks to taking the risk of stepping into an unknown future. In today's reading from Matthew's Gospel we find Peter attempting to walk on water.

In 1965, when I was about ten years old, my Uncle Don bought a powerboat. One Saturday he took his son Kevin, my father and me out to learn how to water-ski on Long Island Sound. I had never water-skied before and I was a little nervous. As we motored out from the dock we noticed that the surface of the water seemed to be covered with jellyfish. When we got out some way from shore my cousin got into the water and demonstrated how to ski. After his turn, which lasted maybe a half hour, it was my turn to try and ski. I do not know what scare me more, the possibility of being stung by the jelly-fish or landing with my face in the water at high speed. I really was hoping that I could just skip my turn. Then my uncle said, "Get out of the boat." So, I forced my legs up over the side of the boat and got into the water.

This experience has often been in the back of my mind when I read our Gospel lesson for this morning. In many of the commentaries I consulted on this passage of Scripture, the writers focus on Peter's lack of faith. Peter gets out of the boat, but the wind scares him and he begins to sink. Many commentators highlight Peter's being distracted and full of fear. I think that these experts miss something. When I read this passage, what surprises me is Peter's faith.

The disciples are in a boat on the Sea of Galilee. A storm has come up and the boat is rocking. The winds are blowing and waves are breaking around them and the boat is some distance from the shore. Then an apparition appears before them, which looks somewhat like Jesus. A short dialogue takes place and then Peter gets out of the boat to walk towards Jesus.

It is Peter who had the faith to get out of the boat. None of the other disciples followed him. They were not that crazy. They were not about to take a risk. It was Peter who had the faith in Jesus to lift one leg and then another over the side of that boat.

Peter teaches us a fundamental truth about life and faith. Jesus calls on us to **get out of the boat**, for real growth comes from taking risks.

We know that this is true in business. Our economic system is based on risk taking. Those who risk their capital in new enterprises fuel real economic progress. Capitalism rewards those who are willing to risk their time and money and are successful. If you take a risk and are unsuccessful you lose. So, the system encourages people to risk by making the rewards high.

I personally did not have much use for Ross Perot as a politician, yet he was successful in business. He began his career working for IBM in 1957. He was one of their most successful salesmen. Perot could have stayed on at IBM and had a safe, secure and prosperous future. Yet he wanted his own business so in 1962 he took a chance and left IBM and started his own company. This company EDS became a great success story. It was this company that set up the software that processes the Social Security system.

Sam Walton could have worked for his father-in law. Yet he too had a dream for retail stores. He risked all of his money and time in starting what became Wal-Mart. While not all risks pan out, the engine of our economy is risk taking.

I use these two successful businessmen because they were Presbyterians. Presbyterians who got out of the boat.

If you do not take risks you will not grow. One of the problems with some of the great American industries during the sixties and seventies was they stopped taking chances. The major auto companies became risk averse. In failing to take risks they were unable to prepare for a changing world of global competition.

I believe that capitalism is the most successful economic system that human beings have devised because it is consistent with a basic truth of life. All real progress and growth comes from taking risks in life. It comes from acting without knowing exactly what the outcome will be.

Just think for a minute about these young people leaving for college this summer. Most have lived their entire lives in this community. They have their own bed room, their usual habits. Their parents are around to give them guidance and grief. Soon they will be moved into a strange dorm to live with people they do not know. The parents will leave them trusting them to make good decisions. Everything that first semester is new. It is a risk.

Yet this risk leads to growth, education and exploration. If the child stays in the safe cocoon they will never develop. It is taking the risk to go out in the world that allows real growth to occur.

The same is true in human relationships. If we are to grow in love we must take risks. During the next several months in every Church in our nation men and women will stand before God and witnesses proclaiming their commitment to each other. When a couple stands in front of this sanctuary and promises that they will care for each other until death, they take a great risk. They do not know their partner fully. They do not know what the future will bring. They take a risk. They step out in faith to promise love to their spouse.

Yet it is the risk of commitment that enables love to grow.

This is also true in our relationship with God. Faith means taking risks.

Think of Abraham in our Old Testament Lesson. He was living comfortably in his home in Haran. Then God came to him and promised to make him a great nation. Abraham was told to gather together his family and possessions and head out to a promised land.

Abraham was not given full information about where he was going or how he would get there. Abraham made the decision to take the risk of following God's promise. He gathered Sarah and the rest of his family together. They packed up their goods and took off to claim the promises of God.

Abraham got out of the boat.

Think of Moses. Moses was out one day minding the sheep. He came across a bush that was burning but not being consumed. There was a voice which spoke to him out of the bush that told him that he had been chosen by God to go to Egypt to lead the Hebrews out of slavery.

Moses was not thrilled with this news. He was comfortable in the life he had made for himself in Midian. He had no idea how a shepherd was going to go up against the power of Pharaoh. Moses found all kinds of excuses why he should not be the one God wanted to use.

In the end, after God told him not to worry, just trust in him, Moses does travel to Egypt. He took the risk and he was able to bring his people to freedom.

Moses "got out of the boat."

What about you? I believe that each day God is calling us to step out in faith in some way. Each one of us is being called to do something that will help us grow towards Jesus.

For some it might mean a matter of seeking reconciliation. You may have offended some one. Or maybe you have done something to another person that you are ashamed of. The anger, hostility and guilt have separated you from that person. God may be calling you to seek to be reconciled to that person. Yet you are afraid to approach that person.

Fear of rejection,
fear of anger,
fear of confessing your fault
keeps you from acting to overcome the past.

Today is the day to get out of the boat in faith and begin the healing process.

For some it maybe how you use money. Christ may be calling you to be accountable for the way you use your material resources. The Bible calls us to proportional giving. To those to whom much has been given, much is expected. Yet you have never been concerned about how your faith affects your use of money. You may be fearful of how giving might affect your lifestyle.

Today is the day that Jesus wants you to get out of the boat in faith and begin to give.

For some it is giving up some destructive habit. You may abuse drugs or alcohol or act irresponsibly sexually or perhaps overeating hurts your health. These are forces that control your lives yet they provide some form of comfort. You are afraid that to give these up would leave an emptiness in your life. Yet Jesus is calling you to a more whole life.

Today is the day the Jesus wants you to step out in faith and begin a new pattern of life.

For some it is the fact that they have not used their God given talents to their fullest. You may feel bored with your job because it does not make full use of your gifts and talents. Jesus may be calling you away from your present employment to a new vocation. Maybe you are to return for more schooling. You are fearful because you do not know what it might mean financially. Yet Jesus is calling to make full use of your gifts.

Today is the day that Jesus wants you to get out of the boat and begin to plan for a new vocation.

For some it might be prayer. You have not really tried to talk to God on a daily basis. God is now prodding your spirit to begin setting aside some time each day for seeking God's presence in prayer. You have ignored that nudging. You are worried that nothing may happen.

Today is the day to get out of the boat and begin.

I could go on and on with this list.

For Jesus calls each person differently.

He calls each one of us in unique ways to come closer to him.

It is up to us to respond.

Faith is not an assent to a proposition.

Faith is not merely believing in God.

Christian faith is responding to the call of Christ in our lives.

Jesus called Peter to get out of the boat and come to him.

He continues to call you and me out of the boat and to come to him.

Today is the day for us to begin.

Get out of the boat for you can walk on water.

Jesus said to Peter, "Come." So, Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus.