

Peter

(Asking No Questions)

Isaiah 26:3-4

Matthew 14:28-30

Scripture Lesson from the OT: “The steadfast of mind Thou will keep in perfect peace because he trusts in Thee. Trust in the Lord forever, for in God the Lord we have an everlasting rock.”

Scripture Lesson from the NT: “And Peter answered Him and said, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.” And Jesus answered and said, “Come!” And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water toward Jesus. But seeing the wind, he became afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, “Lord save me!”

This is the word of the Lord for the people of God.

There is a story told about the answer given by a young child when asked, “What is faith?” Her reply to this question was, “Doing God’s will, and asking no questions.”

“Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.”

Let’s picture together the story painted by these words, shall we? Here is a little boat in the midst of a storm on the Sea of Galilee. A dozen sailors are manning the oars as they struggle against the raging tempest. It has been some time since they left the safety of the shore, and they are far out on the waters. It is now past 3:00 AM, and land is still nowhere in sight.

I can well imagine that they are tired and worn out from all their efforts, and no doubt somewhat discouraged by their lack of progress. I can imagine too, how more than one of them has said to the others, “I only wish the Master were here. If He was with us, we would know what to do.”

And then suddenly, He appears walking from wave to wave toward them over the sea. But they do not recognize Him. They think they are seeing a ghost and as a result, they are cry out in fear.

We may think this to be an altogether unusual experience that was unique to the disciples alone. But this is not necessarily true. Many times, Jesus comes to us as an unwelcome ghost walking through the storms of life demanding things of us which we do not wish to give up.

Sometimes He asks us to give up certain sinful pleasures with which we have indulged ourselves. Sometimes He asks us to render services that we have no desire to give. Sometimes He demands that we surrender our pride to do His will.

It seems that the disciple's first emotion was fear. This emotion is certainly not unique to humans either. As I thought on this, it occurred to me that the Bible has been written in a large measure for just the purpose of stilling the many fears in the timid hearts of men and women.

Over and over its message to us is: "fear not." And here again we note that Jesus calmed their fears saying in vs. 27, "Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid." And once again, fear was driven from their hearts by faith in Him.

"Lord, it is You," shouted Peter, "command me to come to You on the water! It is very clear in this text what effect the presence of Christ had upon Peter. As soon as he recognized Jesus on the water, his fear diminished, and his hope increased.

As soon as he saw the presence of Christ, he let go of his doubt and despair and began to believe again. The presence of Christ always increases our faith and hope. The conviction was now firmly established in Peter that because Jesus had come everything that was thought to be impossible was now a possibility.

In Mark 8:29, Jesus had asked the disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" And it was Peter who answered Him and said, "You are the Christ." Jesus later said of Peter that his name meant "rock," and on this rock He would build His church.

"Command me to come to You on the water!" You will notice by the language here that Peter had made no plan of his own to go for an early morning swim! But if Jesus was present on the water, as He appeared to be, then the impossible was now possible, including walking on water! And Peter, filled with a beautiful and reckless faith in his Lord and friend, was willing to risk everything to be wherever Jesus was.

You know friends, Jesus has always inspired reckless faith and trust in the hearts of those who truly know Him. It is for this reason that I preach the absolute necessity of having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Nothing pleases Jesus more than the kind of faith that is willing to risk everything for Him.

You will notice that there are no stories in the Bible of Jesus praising a prudent and conservative person of faith. The story of God's love in the bible is always about the reckless abandon of concern for one's life. All of the applause of Jesus is for them that are willing to lose their lives for their friends (John 15:13).

Did you know the woman with the issue of blood as she was going out to meet Jesus? Well, it is probably better that you didn't know her because you would have most likely discouraged her in taking such a bold approach to solve her problem, as would have I, had she met me.

"Sarah," I would have said, "Are you going to ask Jesus to heal you?" "Are you going to ask Him to lay hands on you?" "No," she would have answered, "I'm not going to ask Him to do anything for me. I'm simply going to slip up behind Him, and when no one is looking, touch the hem of His robe."

At this preposterous suggestion, I would have thought, "Well, she'll never get cured that way!" When did Jesus ever say that He would heal an illness in such a way as this? I've never heard of such a thing! Well, thankfully, you and I were not there on that day to throw cold water on her ardor. So, she went on in her own way asking no questions, and wonder of wonders, she was miraculously healed.

"Lord, command me to come," said Peter. And what did Jesus reply to him? Did He say, "Peter, I'm surprised at you thinking you can do this insanely impossible thing! Don't you know the storm, the wave, and the water are all against you? Don't you know that the law of gravity defies your thinking?"

Don't you know the experience of every man and woman who has lived before you has been one in which people do not walk on water? You have lived by the sea your whole life, when have you ever seen anyone walk across its surface?

Why then do you ask to do this absurd and impossible thing now? But Jesus did not say these things to Peter. He told this one single trusting heart who had put his dependence on Christ for his all, that this request, even this one ridiculous request was possible through the power of God.

Jesus had once before said that “All things are possible for him that will believe” (Mark 9:23). This statement ever attacks the doubts of men and women at the very point of their greatest impossibilities. But was not the attack against the doubts of men and women the reason why He came in the first place?

And thus, He calls on the selfish man to be more generous by loving his neighbor as himself. And He calls the crippled man to rise up from his mat and walk. And He calls the blind man to wash the mud from his eyes so that he might see again.

And never does He refuse and rebuke the man who dares to throw his cares blindly upon the power of God, no matter the degree and nature of them. So, instead of refusing Peter’s outrageous request, Jesus approved it and encouraged it all the more, saying one simple word in response, “Come!”

Now, I am quite sure if I had been there, I would have wanted Him to say a whole lot more than that! I would have wanted first a clarification of whether I understood what He was saying. And then I would have wanted Him to explain how He planned to uphold me on the water while I was walking.

I would have said, “Lord, I’d like to come to You. I sure wish I could come to You. I’ve always wanted to do something great like that for You. I mean, I know that to be a Saint of God should do something to increase my faith.

And since you’ve invited me personally, I’ll give it serious thought and who knows, maybe some day I’ll even give it a try.” That’s what I would have done. But not Peter. The invitation to come, just that one word, was enough for Peter!

Peter always was made of more heroic stuff than most other people. He had a spirit of adventure that surpassed all of the other disciples put together. “Come” said Jesus to them all, and Peter was the first to drop his oar and put his foot in the water. Some of the more practical biblical commentators of our time have been very hard on Peter for being so bold and foolhardy.

Some have even gone so far to deny that he ever in fact actually attempted such foolishness, that it was all a later written gloss to the story in the attempt to enlarge the divinity of Jesus. I must say that as for me, I like this portrait of Peter.

I suppose that most of these critics would have hunkered down and sat very still in the boat. Perhaps they might have put a restraining hand on Peter. In fact, it would not surprise me if some of his fellow disciples tried to do the same thing.

I can imagine his brother Andrew taking hold of him and saying, "C'mon now Peter, be sensible. The boat can hardly stay afloat, how can you expect you will be able to?" And old doubting Thomas would have questioned him, "What, are you crazy man? That's impossible, no human can walk on water!"

But Peter would hear none of it, and so he said, "I cannot do this myself, but by the help and support of Christ, I will!" And with the wind and rain in his hair and the light of Christ in his face he pushes the boat away from under his feet. So, casting aside all doubts and fears he steps out onto the stormy sea.

It does all look like madness doesn't it? And I well know that by simply telling Peter's story I will not succeed in convincing you to do the same thing when Jesus summons you. And yet, if we look at our own circumstances, we will see that it only looks like madness to us because of our own blindness and sinful unbelief.

Track with me now. What did Peter and the other disciples have under them when they were in the boat? What were they trusting to save them when they were in the boat? Just a few water-logged planks of wood, and that is all.

What was Peter trusting in when he stepped out of the boat? He was trusting in the eternal word of God. Let's see, a few water-logged planks of wood, or God's word, what will it be, a few pieces of timber assembled together by the hands of men, or the everlasting arms of the eternal Lord who holds the strength of both wood and water in His hands?

Friends, what we forget or may not have realized is, as mad and crazy as this story of wind and wave and water may seem to us, through his reckless faith in God, Peter was never safer in all his life! Pile upon him all the rocks in the world, and he will never sink to the level of wetting the bottoms of his sandals as long as he walks on in the everlasting promise of Christ!

Jesus said. "Come!" and Peter did then that you and I can do right now. He said, "Yes, Lord" and went to Him! And what happened when he did? Let's have a look!

In Matthew 14:29 we read, “He walked on the water and came toward Jesus.” Peter did what was and still is humanly impossible. He did what no human can do without the power of God! It must have been a thrilling experience for him. He was a joy to himself and a joy to his Lord, all at once!

I can only imagine the look on the faces of the other disciples as their fear and terror gave way to wonder and gladness as they said, “Well, well, what do you know? He is doing it after all!” Yes, Peter walked on the water. Let us never allow any of our own failures to blind us to the reality of this blessed truth!

I know, I know, he didn’t walk very far, but that was not the fault of his invitation nor the foolishness of his undertaking. Peter would have walked the distance had it not been for the one fatal mistake that was his undoing. And what was that mistake?

In vs. 30 we read that, “He saw the wind, and seeing the wind, he became afraid...*again!*” What is the meaning of this? What has happened to the bold adventurer? Where has the steely man of faith gone? This is the place that the critics of Peter make their case and take their stand against the truth of this story.

Friends, we must understand that the wind was truly strong, and the waves were really high, but Peter did not see them at first. He only saw the Lord. He recognized the sovereignty of His Lord over them and that was enough for him.

It was only when he began to think about what he was doing by taking those things into account that he again became afraid and began to sink. What he forgot was that had it been the Lord’s will for him to walk on the bottom of the sea instead of the top, he could have done that too. Yet, he could accomplish neither without his continuing recognition of his Lord’s power over them.

Friends, I have said this before, I will say it again, do not enter into a debate with God concerning His will for you. If you debate for even one second when God has spoken to you it is all over. Never align yourself with the critics who ask, “Well, was it really God that spoke to you?” Be reckless in your faith as Peter was and willing to risk everything by doing as He says “casting your every care upon Him”

It will only be by the complete abandonment of yourself and your circumstances to Him that you will recognize Him walking on the waters of life.

I read a sign on the wall in the hallway of a school recently that proclaimed to the staff and students that, “Failure is not an option.” While I do not think this notion to be the best example of a middle school grading policy, I would affirm this as a perfect truth when we are standing on the promises of Christ.

So, what happened to Peter when he looked away from Christ to the wind and waves? He did what we all do when we take our eyes off Christ, he began to sink. And not merely to sink by himself, but sadly in the very presence of his Lord. I can imagine the unbelievers sitting smugly in the boat at last having their “Aha, I told you so” moment as they watched him disappear under the waves.

Have you ever had that experience? That sickening feeling in the gut that comes to one who is sinking in their faith? Do you know the feeling of losing your grip on God, losing your faith in the power of prayer to save you as you helplessly watch the winds and waves overwhelm your little boat?

Is someone here, or someone you know sinking down in the storms of life? Is there someone out there losing faith in God because they are out there all alone in the deep waters of life where all fine Christian ideals must be put to the test?

You, young people out there, are you sinking down in your faith little by little as you yield to the world by letting go of your grip on God’s word that was your strength in earlier years?

Business and professional man and woman, you who are encumbered with many toils and snares as you live in the thick of the struggle to survive. Are you keeping to the straight and narrow in Christ, or are you wobbling a bit off to the side?

What was the issue with Lot’s wife in Sodom? Why did she feel the need to look back from where God was leading her? Why, because for too long she had been leading a sinking life that would cost her dearly in the end! My dear Friends in Christ, your lives will count for nothing to God as long as you are living a sinking life.

But that’s why I love Peter so much here. Because even in his sinking failure he delivers a buoyant message of hope for us.

When Peter realized he had failed his Lord and was sinking down into the water, he did not try to cover up his sin. Instead, he threw himself on the infinite

strength and good will of God's everlasting arms. And just how did he do that he prayed, "Lord save me!"

That prayer was a confession of his defeat and his failure, and also a confession of his need of God. Some men would have been too proud to have prayed that prayer, and would have rather died in their sin than make that prayer.

In 1 John 1:9 we read, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

That prayer, prayed in faith, was Peter's salvation. He blurted out the whole thing at once and threw himself completely on the mercy of Jesus. And "immediately, Jesus stretched forth His hand and took hold of him" (vs. 31). "Come," said Jesus, and Peter, asking no question, instantly obeyed.

Dear Friends of God, is not this response the very thing most needed in our church today? Is not the greatest need of any church the willingness of its members to walk by faith rather than by sight? Is not the reason the modern church has become irrelevant in the world the lack of any of any real faith in God among its members?

What the church needs most is real faith in God, a faith of the kind that dares to do something in the world that cannot be done by human effort alone. A faith that dares to be different in a world of conformity. "Come," said Jesus, and Peter, asking no question, instantly obeyed.

May you and I be as wise as this great man of faith, for our Lord has set a table before us today. He says, "Are you hungry for the true Bread of Life? Come and eat! Are you thirsty for the Living Water? Come and drink! Are you tired of lifting burdens that you have carried for too long? Come, and I will give you rest! Do you desire to serve Me for the cause of heaven? Come, and out of your life will flow rivers of living water.

Friends, when will we ever learn that Jesus, and Jesus alone will meet our every need? When will we ever learn that God's grace is always sufficient in Christ Jesus? Today, He is calling you to walk across the waters to Him. Will you come?