

Who Will Get Out of the Boat?

[Matthew 14:22-33](#)

Today's scripture lesson is one that may be very familiar to most of you. It is a story of faith, trust, and courage. If we go back a little, I'd like to review the events leading to this passage.

The disciples had to deal with the task of burying John the Baptist. Jesus tried to take them away for some rest and relaxation but was confronted by a large crowd. The disciples were called into duty again to assist with distributing food to a large, hungry crowd while witnessing Jesus perform countless miracles of healing and abundance. The crowd was fed to satisfaction from a small lunch of two fish and five loaves of bread. But the disciples still had not rested and were most likely exhausted.

We can only run on adrenaline for so long. It is at times like these that we can try to deviate from God's will. Instead of accepting God's will for us, we may try a different course entirely. We may think we know better than God who is our constant, steadfast beacon. There is a story of a correspondence that was received between the United States and Canada from a US naval battle ship traveling north along the east coast toward Nova Scotia. The captain of the battle ship notices a strange light approaching his vessel and initiated the communication.

United States: This is Captain John Williams. We are on course to Nova Scotia. Recommend you divert 10 degrees west, over.

Canada: Acknowledged. However, we recommend you divert 10 degrees east to continue to your destination, over.

United States: Again, I say we are on course to Nova Scotia. Divert 10 degrees west to allow passage, over.

Canada: Acknowledged. We strongly recommend you divert 10 degrees east to continue, over.

United States: This is the USS Aurora, a US navy battleship. Divert, over.

Canada: Acknowledged. This is a Canadian lighthouse – your call.

God really does know what is best for us! So the disciples needed rest and Jesus set a plan in motion. He sent the disciples on a boat ahead of him while Jesus handled the task of sending the crowd away, then he too went off for a time of rest and prayer. He retreated to the mountains overlooking the Sea of Galilee. From any point in those mountains Jesus could probably see the disciples in the boat – he was watching over his followers.

Sometime during the night a storm comes up to challenge our experienced fishermen. They were rowing against the wind and making little to no headway. But Jesus was watching over them. Finally, Jesus goes out to the boat which is being tossed about in the middle of the

lake. Jesus was walking on the water and appeared like a ghost. This is the part in the story when the disciples must have thought things had gone from bad to worse.

But Jesus says, “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” It seemed as if the disciples couldn’t believe him. Consider the facts – they were tired, it was the middle of the night, they were fighting wind and waves to stay afloat, and some Being approached them walking on the water!

In steps Peter. You have to like Peter because he at least had enough faith to see that it was possible it really was Jesus. And when Jesus called him here’s the big surprise, Peter stepped out of the boat. None of the other disciples even considered this. Peter wanted to be where Jesus was. He didn’t expect Jesus to come to him – Peter stepped out of his safe haven and went to Jesus. Peter was the one who let go of his security blanket and stepped into

the unknown, but with his eyes focused on Jesus. What an incredible testimony of faith. How many times have we decided to trust Jesus on a matter, only to take it back the second we end our prayer? We have to literally let go of our own comforts and give in to God's will – that's tough, especially when God gave us our free will to make choices and decisions as independent beings. There's a popular song out now by an American Idol winner (Carrie Underwood) called 'Jesus Take the Wheel'. In the story of the song a woman has had a tough year and is driving home for Christmas when she hits a patch of black ice. She throws up her hands and says, "Jesus take the wheel." While she does survive the potential accident, the song goes on to explain that she was not just asking Jesus to help her out of this situation, she was asking him to take control of her life. Clearly she was not doing a good job on her

own without looking to God for guidance, so she takes a profound step and turns her life over to God. (I would strongly recommend we don't literally release the wheel of our car while driving to say this prayer – I've said many prayers while gripping the wheel! I believe the message of the song is focused on turning one's life over to Christ.)

Jesus recognized Peter's faith and commitment and called him out of the boat – and Peter walked on water with his eyes focused on Jesus.

What areas of our lives are we struggling to maintain control of and not ask God for help? Sometimes we may feel there are other issues and problems bigger than ours for God to be worried about. There are others that are sick or dying, others with no food or shelter, others with pain and suffering that far exceeds our problems. God is bigger than our problems – all of them. We need to remember that we

cannot put God in human terms – nothing is too big or too small for God. And just as Jesus could see the disciples in the boat from his vantage point in the mountains, God sees everything we are going through.

I remember praying for God to use me in some way, and while praying I thought perhaps that meant some small way at my home church. Perhaps there would be some additional help I could lend to the youth group or music programs I was already involved in. I had no intention or could even fathom the possibility of filling the pulpit – be careful what you pray for! So Peter said, “Lord, if it’s you tell me to come out to you on the water.” I wonder if Peter fully expected Jesus’ response when he said, “Come.” But Peter took the leap of faith, got out of the boat and walked on water with his eyes focused on Jesus.

There is more to the story and we need to look at that as well. While Peter's eyes were fixed on Jesus he was doing the impossible by human standards, but as soon as Peter started to look at the circumstances around him, he lost his focus on Jesus and began to sink. I think we too can get caught up in our circumstances and lose our focus on Jesus. It's no secret that our economy is in bad shape. Everything seems to be measured in gallons of gas these days. The real estate industry that was literally booming just a few years ago has fallen dramatically to the point where in the 20 minute ride I have coming from Mount Airy to Etchison there are no less than 10-12 houses for sale that remain unsold. Everything seems to hinge on the value of the American dollar. Where is God in all this? How can God allow the storms to rage on and not step in and help his people? I had heard a statistic concerning

charitable giving. It seems that the highest percentage of charitable giving in this country occurred during the Great Depression when most people had little or nothing to give. God doesn't always solve our problems the way we think they should be solved. Sometimes God strengthens us to weather the storm and come out with increased courage, determination, and raw faith. As parents, what happens to your children if you give them everything they want the second they ask for it? They become spoiled. They expect more and more and they also expect you to provide for all their wants even if it means sacrificing your own needs. What happens to your children if you are there to provide for their needs, but you help them develop good skills of saving and earning money, and working hard to obtain their treasures? They grow in every way.

God does not expect us to be spoiled children, nor does God expect us to be so beaten down by life that we cannot go on. God remains our beacon, our constant. If we stay focused on God, we can weather the storms of life and still be walking on water. There is another popular contemporary Christian song that says, “Sometimes He calms the storm, and other times He calms His child.” If we lose sight of God we will surely fail, but if we stay focused on our steadfast beacon of light, we will overcome and continue to walk in the presence of God.

I think the best part of this story is Jesus’ reaction when Peter started to sink. Jesus immediately took hold of Peter and guided him back to safety. Even when we lose focus on God, God is ready to reclaim us as his children when we call out for help. Let us stay focused on God as we move forward to better serve God in this community,

but know that if we lose our focus, God is ready to bring us
back on course when we ask for help. Thanks be to God.

Amen.