

Don't Look Back Mathew 14:22-33

Simon Peter's reputation preceded him. We know from the Scriptures that he was a fisherman, people sometimes known to stretch the truth. He was also boisterous, outspoken, carried a sword and at times had a fiery temper. It seems he may have been one of those people you just would not want to tangle with. Do you wonder why Jesus chose him to be one of his disciples? Perhaps even more puzzling is why Jesus chose him to build His church.

A few hours before Peter walked on water, Jesus and the 12 fed 15000 people with 5 loaves and 2 fish. Immediately after gathering up 12 baskets of leftovers, Jesus commanded Peter and the rest of his disciples to get back into their boat and head to the other side of the sea where He would catch up with them later. Apparently, they did not want to go. Some of them were seasoned fishermen, and even those that weren't knew that the dark clouds they saw in the distance meant a storm was brewing. The Sea of Galilee was no place to be caught in a storm, for the waves could quickly come crashing over the sides of their small boat and sink it. Even so, Jesus would not take no for an answer. The Bible says He made them get into their boat and head for the other shore. Do you think Peter had some things to say once they were out of earshot?

Some hours later, maybe 1 or 2:00 in the morning the storm they saw in the distance earlier in the evening had now kicked up around them. Can you see Peter looking back with regret? I knew we shouldn't have left. I've been fishing here all my life and I know a storm when I see one. There they were, caught in a storm, huge waves all around them, their boat tossed about like a cork in the ocean, and the whole time they were looking back, wondering why Jesus would force them out into such conditions. Wouldn't a man who had the ability to bring sight to the blind, heal the sick, raise the dead and feed 15000 people with 5 loaves and 2 fish know what the weather was going to be like?

Just then, right in the middle of the Sea of Galilee miles from shore, Jesus appears to them amid their fear and uncertainty. His timing was perfect. The incredible thing is that He is not in another boat; he is not swimming but walking on the water. They thought they were seeing a ghost. Jesus recognized their fear and doubt and called out to them. "Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid". Peter had a hard time believing his eyes and ears. Lord, is it really you? Lord, if it is you prove it. In the excitement of the moment he had forgotten Deut 6:16, that rule that said you must not put God to the test. Or else in his heart he didn't really believe that Jesus was Lord. Maybe there was a bit of resentment there. You are the one who told me to get into this boat, so command me now to get out.

Peter had two choices- he could stay in the boat and hope that it would help him survive the wind and the waves, or he could leave the boat and reach for the hand of Jesus. The truth is that the storm was raging both inside and outside of the boat, but even 3 feet of concrete would have been less firm than the water than Peter was walking on when he had his eyes on the outstretched hand of Jesus.

For a fleeting moment, Peter did the impossible. He walked on water. He was able to do all things through Jesus Christ who strengthened him, and at this moment all things included defying the laws of physics. Like the OT prophet Elisha, he became a holy lawbreaker, doing the miraculous. The thrill must have been exhilarating. And then it happened. Like Lot's wife, he turned back to where he had been, he turned back towards the boat and said: "hey guys look at me". As soon as he took his eyes off Jesus, he found himself right back where he was before, afraid of drowning in a storm on the Sea of Galilee.

Folks look around this morning. This church building is like that boat that Peter loved to stay in. Even though we clearly hear Jesus calling us, sometimes we are afraid to venture out, believing it is better to remain here than it is to go and meet Him out there. Fear and doubt are part of life, but faith overcomes them. With faith, we need not fear trying the impossible. We can't do wondrous and amazing things, we can't walk on water, and another way of saying that is we can't be like Jesus, until we are willing to get out of the boat. We need to get out of the boat, and keep our eyes on Jesus once we do.

On those occasions when we do venture out, perhaps even accomplishing great things, we tend to believe that we are walking on water through our own strength and effort. Invariably we look back towards the boat, to our place of comfort and security, and then everything changes. So don't look back. St Paul had a few things to say about that when he wrote to the church at Philippi. ¹³ Brothers and sisters, I myself don't think I've reached it, but I do this one thing: I forget about the things behind me and reach out for the things ahead of me. ¹⁴ The goal I pursue is the prize of God's upward call in Christ Jesus.

If we aren't careful, our past victories and our past failures will hinder us in accomplishing our mission- holiness and Christian perfection. It sounds impossible, but they will come if we grab the hand of Jesus and refuse to let go. What fears and doubts are keeping you from doing the miraculous? What storms are raging in your life? What boat are you seeking refuge in? For some it may be health concerns. For others it may be a broken relationship or a financial struggle. Still others dwell on the failures of the past rather than the glorious possibilities of the future. If you find yourselves in the eye of those kinds of storms, listen for the words of Jesus- "It is I- do not be afraid" and seek His hand. You can trust Him to be there when you do. There is no need to hear those words spoken to Peter-O you of little faith, why did you doubt?

Shall we pray? Lord we thank you for calling out to us as we brave the storms of life. Help us to be willing and obedient people, teach us to get out of the boat, brave the storm, walk on water, don't look back and take hold of your hand. Amen