

February 8, 2009 Temple Baptist Church, Jamestown, ND

TITLE: FAITH: GETTING OUT OF THE BOAT, Matthew 14:22-33, *Growing #5*

It isn't a very convenient time. They are grieving the death of one close to them. Already stressed by the demands that come with *success* and the resulting popularity, the leader of the little group decides **a much-needed break is in order**. But like media and paparazzi descending upon a Hollywood entertainer, hundreds of people follow. The deserted location they choose for their quiet place is overrun by people with more questions, more requests, more demands.

What do you do when the stresses of life continue to pile up? What happens when it goes from everyday stress to more stress? What happens when your very success brings so much that you find it hard to even stop? What happens when all of your careful planning is turned on its head? What happens when you are reeling from grief? What happens when the economy acts like a black hole in a science fiction movie, sucking everything near it into its vortex? What happens when you lose your job in a time like that? What happens when your health or that of your family is in jeopardy? What happens when the specialists don't seem to be able to treat your condition? What happens if it is not just a physical condition? What happens when people say an overwhelming YES to something, but then many don't communicate how they will be a part of making it a reality?

All of these are situations that people in our TBC family are facing right now. I don't mention these to make us gloomy. On the contrary, I invite you to relive a well-known Bible story, its implications and its significance for us today.

Please turn with me to Matthew 14. John the Baptist, the famous and eccentric prophet, who baptized people as an expression of God's forgiving their sins and their preparation for the coming of Messiah, is dead, beheaded through a cruel scheme by Herod the tetrarch's wife.

Read 14:13-16. How many are fed? Over 5,000! It is now late in the day. The parallel account in John 6 says that the people decide this must be Messiah. *Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.* John 6:15

Jesus needs to pray. He and his disciples have already delayed their much-needed rest from the crowds. Mark's account says that Jesus sends his disciples to wait for Him at a place called Bethsaida, while He dismisses the crowds and then spends some time in prayer. When He does not come, the disciples decide to cross to the other side of the lake, likely the prior arrangement. But things don't go according to plan. Read 14:22-33.

It says in verse 22 that Jesus *made (constrained in KJV)* the disciples to get in the boat and leave. **Jesus knows the disciples must separate themselves from this crowd and their intentions immediately.** Does he suspect that they would become part of the clamor for a political Messiah? Remember that **the disciples do not understand Jesus' identity at this point.** The gospel accounts reveal that they grow ever more aware of Who Jesus is, but it is not until after the resurrection and even the ascension that the implications begin to become apparent.

It's now somewhere between 3 and 6 a.m. They are in the midst of a storm out on the lake and have been attempting to reach the other side for hours. Many are experienced fishermen and they know the dangers of being caught in a storm on the Sea of Galilee in the middle of the night. As they are rowing against the wind and essentially going nowhere, what happens? They see something walking on top of the waves. What is their assumption? It's a ghost. They cry out in fear.

What does Jesus do? When? Immediately. Notice the three things He says to them. *"Take courage. It is I. Don't be afraid."* They go together. *Take courage (Be of good cheer, KJV)* has the root meaning, *be bold.* Jesus tells the paralytic to be bold because his sins are forgiven (Matthew 9:2). He uses the same word with the woman with the bleeding disorder (Matthew 9:22) who touches His cloak, adding, *"Your faith has saved you"* (usually translated, *healed you*). He tells Paul while in the Roman barracks in Jerusalem to be bold, because Paul will testify about Him in Rome (Acts 23:11). When Jesus calls for blind Bartimaeus, the disciples tell him to be bold and stand up, because He is calling him (Mark 10:49). One of the most significant passages is the night before Jesus' arrest when He tells His disciples: *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."* John 16:33 (cf. Hebrews 13:6; 2 Corinthians 5:6, 8)

The reason **we can take heart**, be of good courage or bold is **rooted in Jesus' next words: "It is I."** Literally the words are *"I, I am,"* recalling the words of the LORD to Moses in the burning bush. *God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" Exodus 3:14* (cf. Isaiah 43:10; 51:12; John 8:58-59) **I AM is the personal name of God**, sometimes referenced as Yahweh, a name so revered that Jews wouldn't even use it. In the Old Testament it is printed as LORD (all caps), while Lord (capital L, small letters after) often translates the Hebrew word Adonai, the title Jewish people use out of respect for God. I said the understanding of the disciples as to Jesus' identity is growing. When Jesus says, *"I, I am,"* it could mean a couple different things, but **suggests that Jesus is using the personal name of God for Himself. He is drawing His disciples to His true identity.**

Take courage. It is I. Don't be afraid. **If the first phrase is linked to the second, so is the third.** Fear is connected with the uncertain. John links it with

judgment (1 John 4:18) and the lack of love. Jesus tells the women who see Him the morning of His resurrection to not be afraid. Instead they are to tell the disciples that He will meet them in Galilee (Matthew 28:10). The writer of Hebrews reminds those going through difficult times of God's promised presence, quoting from Deuteronomy (31:6). Then he adds, *So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"* Hebrews 13:6 (cf. Psalm 118:6, 7)

Why can the disciples take courage and not be afraid? **It is Jesus.** What happens next? Peter asks Jesus to call him to come to Him. **Peter needs to hear Jesus' call to him personally.** Does Jesus berate Peter for it? No. He simply says, *"Come."*

The word translated *come* is very common in the NT, but this is the only reference I could find where Jesus asks someone, *"Come."* Jesus says He comes to save sinners (Matthew 9:13) and to bring a sword even among family members (Matthew 10:34). Those who come to Him must first be drawn by the Father (John 6:44). We must be willing to come, deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him (Matthew 16:34). He didn't come to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom (Mark 10:45) for many. He wants no one to prevent little children from coming to Him (Luke 18:16). He calls us to come to Him and drink (John 7:37), to have life to the full (John 10:10). He is called the One Who was and is and is to come (Revelation 1:4, 8; 4:8). **The book of Revelation ends with the invitation of the Spirit and the bride to all who are thirsty to come** (Revelation 22:17). *Come, Lord Jesus.* Revelation 22:20

What happens when Jesus tells Peter to come? He gets down out of the boat and walks on the water to Jesus. **This is a faith check.** J. Robert Clinton defines a faith check as a challenge *in which God's reality and faithfulness can be tested and seen to be true and which forms a confidence builder for later trusting God with bigger issues.* [*Leadership Emergence Theory* (Altadena, CA: Barnabas Resources, 1989), 143] Other examples of faith checks in the Bible include **Moses** with the burning bush (Exodus 3 & 4), **Gideon** (Judges 6 & 7) and **David's** encounter with the lion and the bear before his match with Goliath (1 Samuel 17). How does Peter do? Does he *pass* the faith test, the faith check?

Yes and no. What happens? **He gets distracted by the storm.** D. A. Carson shares this observation of Peter. *His faith in Jesus, strong enough to get him out of the boat and walking on the water, was not strong enough to stand up to the storm.* ["Matthew" in *Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 8* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 344]

Peter is close enough for Jesus to reach out and take hold of him. **So close . . . but the storm.** One of the things that becomes apparent when reading Matthew is that **the closer people come to understanding Jesus' identity and the closer they come (literally) in time to the cross, the more intense is the**

opposition. Why does Jesus desire to pray after John's death? After the crowds just fed by the loaves and fish want to make Him king? Why does He send the disciples away from the crowd? What really IS the storm? Matthew shows us that **the seed of the serpent is doing everything he can to thwart the seed of the woman, including distracting Peter with the storm.**

Peter's problem is that he takes his eyes off Jesus. What does Jesus do after He reaches out and takes hold of Peter? He says. "*Little faith one, why did you doubt?*" In essence Jesus asks Peter, "*Why did you doubt now?*" This isn't the first time that Jesus saved them in a storm and it won't be the last time He questions their little faith (cf. Matthew 8:26; 16:8; 17:20). What happens after Jesus gets back in the boat? **The storm ceases.** What is the response of the disciples? **They worship Him and call Him the Son of God.** Remember last week when I said that sometimes people say things that they do not understand? This is one of those times. They are in awe. **Later they will come to understand more fully that Jesus truly is THE Son of God.** Interestingly the only other place where this word for doubt is used is in another worship scene. This time it's in Galilee after Jesus' resurrection. *When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.* Matthew 28:17

The evil one would like us to focus on the storm. Paul has some things to say about that in Ephesians 6 about our struggle not being against flesh and blood (Ephesians 6:12). He writes, *Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.* Ephesians 6:10-11 Paul says **our attention should be on God.** (Read Matthew 6:25-34.)

Let's go back to those storms each of us is facing. Take a moment to **write a word or phrase that describes that storm** on your listening guide. Now, mark the **phrase that best describes your current response to the storm.** Lastly, the words of Jesus are listed. Mark the **words that you need to hear from Him right now.** Please take a moment to tell Him. (Silent prayer.)

Conclusion. We sometimes forget that there were others in the boat. I've not read it, but John Ortberg's book sounds interesting: *If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get out of the Boat.* **So often the focus of our prayers is that the storm will end.** (Show cartoon.) (You see? Peter was really a Canadian.) **Jesus asks us to keep our eyes on Him.** We think the story is about the storm, but it's really about Jesus. (Pray.)