

## Matthew 14:22-33

The Christian faith is often misunderstood. Critics say that faith is a fantasy, that faith is a figment of our imagination. Karl Marx once commented that “Religion is the opiate of the people.” But those with faith believe in the reality and power of faith!

This morning, we will look at this text from Matthew's Gospel to see what it might say to us about faith. And the first thing I think it says is that FAITH DOESN'T MEAN EASY.

As our lesson begins, Jesus has just fed a crowd of over 5000 people. The disciples are told to go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee by boat. Finally Jesus was alone. You may remember that Jesus' original intent in crossing the lake was to spend some time recharging his own physical and spiritual batteries. The crowds had followed him, but now Jesus was alone, and again took up His original intent. He went up on the mountain to pray.

Jesus had a healthy rhythm to his life, not unlike breathing in and breathing out. He spent time in prayer and then spent time in servant ministry. There was time with God and then time with God's people.

I'm sure as the disciples set sail that evening, they were expecting a safe, comfortable trip. They had seen the power of their leader. He had just fed five thousand people with five loaves and two fish. Now this same miracle-worker had told them to go to the other side of the sea so they naturally assumed it would be an easy trip.

We forget, sometimes, that obedience doesn't always mean “easy,” and neither does faith. Obedience to God and faith in Christ makes things POSSIBLE, but not necessarily EASY. Even when we are obeying God, even when we are doing our best to serve God,

there will still be times when it will seem that everything is going wrong!

It was that way for these disciples. They were by now quite some distance from shore, heading toward the other side of the lake. The first thing they noticed was the wind beginning to blow a little stronger, and the waves are getting choppy. Dark, angry, storm clouds have blotted out the moon and stars. The rumble of thunder is heard. Lightning crackles above their heads. The first drop of rain, and then the storm is upon them in full, frightening fury! Their boat is being beaten by the waves. The disciples are in trouble! They are rowing against the wind, straining every muscle; written across each face is the fear of the storm and of drowning.

And add to that scene the disappointment they must have felt. This trip was made at the command of Jesus. He told them to go. So why the storm? Why the trouble? Does that question sound familiar? In the midst of the storms of our lives, we often say, “Why? Why me, Lord? What did I do wrong? What did I do to deserve this?”

And as the storm rages around them, things suddenly go from bad to worse! “It is a ghost!” one of the disciples gasps. “A ghost? Where?” And every eye strains through the darkness, and they see it coming too, right over the top of the waves, wearing a white robe; coming nearer and nearer. No wonder Matthew said, “And they cried out with fear.”

I can't blame them for crying out, can you? Remember that these men are not sissies; but like most everyone else in the ancient world, they believed in ghosts. Now they are seeing one! They are rowing with all their might, trying now, not so much to escape the storm, but to escape the ghost that is coming closer and closer. And then, above the lightning and thunder and the roar of the sea, they hear this ghost speak. But that's strange. It is a voice like sweet music; warm and comforting and yes, familiar — it is the voice of the

Master: "Take heart, it is I, have no fear."

And with the sound of that voice, the storm is ended. Oh yes, the storm at sea continued a little while longer. It was the storm in their hearts that was stilled. Jesus said, "It is I. Take heart, have no fear!"

Jesus really does come to us in our storms, you know. We absolutely DO NOT walk alone when the crises of life are upon us. Never, never does the Bible say that if you have faith, life will be easy. The fact is, LIFE CARRIES WITH IT THE LIKELIHOOD OF DIFFICULTY. We could send a greeting card to the whole human race saying, "I'm thinking of you in your time of trouble." They may wonder how you found out about their problems, but every person would know what we are talking about! Jesus told his disciples honestly, "In this world you will have tribulation." That's the way it is. Never does Jesus say that we will not encounter another problem or a storm. But He does say, "I will be with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matt 28:20) Jesus is with us. We will never have to walk alone again.

That's why the storm, the difficulty, is almost better than having smooth sailing all the time. There is something about the struggle that, knowing Christ is with you, that makes you a better Christian. E. Stanley Jones once said, "Christ is always closest when the cross is heaviest." I think he is saying that it is better to have a storm with Christ, than to walk in the sunshine without Him. FAITH MEANS WE NEVER HAVE TO BE ALONE AGAIN.

AND FAITH BELIEVES THE IMPOSSIBLE. I'd better warn you, though. Anytime you try to believe the impossible, there will always be those who think you are crazy! You see, our world has conditioned us to believe only what we can see, what we can understand, what we can explain. The motto of the state of Missouri is, "I'm from MO, me you've got to show!"

The truth is, THAT IS THE MOTTO OF THE WHOLE UNBELIEVING, WORLD: “Seeing is believing.” But the Christian, with the writer of Hebrews, affirms that “believing is seeing.” “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” When things look impossible, faith says, “Don't throw in the towel of surrender.”

But our world, our problems, our circumstances have conditioned us, to think that things will never be any better. Remember the man at the pool of Bethesda? For thirty-eight years, he had been there; helpless, getting worse, sure that things would never change. Then Jesus said, “Take up your bed and walk!” After thirty-eight years? That's impossible. But he did it, because faith dares to believe that the impossible is possible!

Well, back to our men in the boat. Peter, by faith, (or some might call it foolishness), THINKS HE WILL TRY THE IMPOSSIBLE. He said, “Lord, if it is you, bid me walk on the water to you!” Jesus takes him up on the deal and replies, “Come.” One simple word, “Come,” but it was a word of hope that said, “You can do it, Peter. You can do the impossible.”

In this narrative, we get A GOOD PICTURE OF WHAT FAITH IS. It is more than belief (an intellectual agreement with a set of ideas), although belief is certainly a part of faith. FAITH IS TRUST, the willingness to risk and to act on the basis of our core belief. Peter believed and Peter trusted. So, in faith, Peter stepped out of the boat to go to Jesus.

Regardless of what happens next, you have to give Peter a lot of credit for at least having faith enough, or maybe it was guts enough, to try. Remember that this is Peter, the fisherman. Experience has taught him that you can float a boat on the sea, you can catch fish from the sea, you can swim in the sea, but you can't walk on water! It has never become concrete beneath his feet before, so why should he expect it to suddenly work now?

But in FAITH, Peter got out of the boat anyway. He had trust in Jesus, to give it a try. Can't you see him step over the side, and attempt to take one giant step on something that has never before given him any kind of support for walking?

You'll never do the impossible, this church will never do the impossible, until we put our whole weight down on the promise of God. We've got to let go and take the plunge of faith! One foot in the boat and one in the water won't do. Half in and half out never works. Step out in faith! Sure, there will always be those who say, "It won't work." The doubters say, "Don't get out of the boat, Peter. It's never been done before." But with the optimism of FAITH IN THE GOD OF THE IMPOSSIBLE, Peter is walking on the water!

But you say, "Wait a minute, Gary. That's not the whole story." I know its not. But no matter what else you remember, keep this in mind: faith believed the impossible. Peter got out of the boat and walked on water!

Yes, verse 30 says he sank! But he was doing just fine until, like us, he started looking at things and circumstances around him. He probably heard the disciples calling out to him saying, "Peter, what do you think you are doing. People can't walk on water!" And "seeing the wind" he took his eyes off Jesus, began to sink, and cried out, "Lord save me!"

Of course, Peter SHOULD NOT HAVE looked at circumstances, but he did. WE should not take our eyes off Jesus either, BUT WE DO. How important it is to fix our focus on Jesus. The mind cannot concentrate on more than one thing at a time. Either the storm or Jesus; either faith or fear. We cannot concentrate on both at once. And Jesus reprimanded Peter for losing his focus, as He does us: "O man of little faith. Why did you doubt?" BUT JESUS DID NOT DESERT PETER IN HIS FAILURE. As a matter of fact, I believe that Peter walked on water again! Now the Bible doesn't say he walked on water

again, BUT THE BIBLE DOES TEACH THAT JUST BECAUSE YOU TRY AND FAIL, THAT DOESN'T MEAN THAT YOU HAVE TO REMAIN A FAILURE. Our God is a God of a second chance. FAITH TRIES AGAIN. Did you ever ask yourself "How did Peter get back into the boat?" Did Jesus throw him over his shoulder, walk to the boat and toss him back in? Or did Jesus say, "Sink or swim, Peter. You got yourself into this mess, you can get yourself out of it?" Isn't it more likely, and more Christ-like, for Jesus to have said, "Peter, take hold of my hand," and they walked together on water back to the boat? You see, faith gives us another chance. You don't learn all about faith in one life experience. Faith is a journey. Faith is learned day by day by day, and sometimes, crisis by crisis by crisis. Faith teaches us that we don't have to make it all the way to the shore in one leap. Faith is a step at a time — hand in hand with the Master. The God of the Second Chance helps us to try again.

Faith understands that if God does not change the problem, THEN GOD CHANGES US, TO MAKE US ADEQUATE FOR THE SITUATION. Faith knows that, in God's hands, any situation will be all right. I'm not suggesting that all the storms of our lives will subside when, by faith, we get into the boat with Jesus. But some storms will. And even the lingering storms will lose much of their terror and become manageable, when we take hold of faith. I believe that. What's more, I have experienced that! Get into the boat with Jesus, and we too can hear him say, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

**AFTER SERMON STORY:** There is a painting which shows the devil at a chessboard with a young man. The devil has just made his move and the young man is checkmated. On his face is written defeat and despair. One day, a great chess genius, stood looking at the painting. Carefully he studied the positions on the board. Suddenly his face lighted up and he shouted to the man in the painting, "You still have a move, don't give up, you still have a move!"

Christ can see your crisis, your checkmated position, and He offers you hope. Christ is saying to you today, "You still have a move! Don't give up! Have faith! Put your hand in

my hand! Believe! Pray on!" May you leave this place walking hand in hand with Jesus.  
AMEN