

Walking on water: Reflections from a first-timer

A Sermon for August 13, 2017

Matthew 14:22-33

Lansdowne UMC

Thanks for inviting me here this morning. This really is a very interesting building you have here. We don't really have anything like it where I'm from. Sometimes we meet in people's houses, but a lot of the time we just meet outside. You look confused. Of course, I should introduce myself. My name's Simon-- well it used to be Simon, but now my name is Peter. I'm a disciple of Jesus. He gave me that name. It means Rock! I think he calls me Peter because he knows my faith is rock solid! Well, at least most of the time.

I don't take many speaking engagements, what with all the kingdom of God work we're doing around Galilee. Besides, I'm not that great of a speaker. I'm just a fisherman after all. Well, at least that's what I used to be until I started following Jesus. He just came to me and my brother Andrew one day while we were at work. He told us if we'd follow him, he'd teach us how to catch people instead of fish. So that's what we've been doing.

I was asked to come here today to talk to you about something that happened just a few days ago. You're gonna love this. I mean, we've seen at a lot of amazing things since we've been following Jesus, but so far, this one takes the cake, if you ask me.

I'll just cut to the best part: I can walk on water. Well, sorta. I did it for a little bit-- I can't really remember how long. But I did it! I'm sure that as time goes by, people are probably just going to remember that I sunk at some point. They'll probably make fun of me because of how little faith I have. But when they do that, just ask yourself something:

how much water have they walked on? Don't get me wrong, I made some mistakes, and I understand some things now that I didn't a few days ago when this happened. With that knowledge and experience, I think I can help you to walk on water too! So that's my goal for today. After I'm done talking, you should all be ready to go for a walk-- because I'm going to give you "Peter's 7 Simple Steps to Walking on Water."

Step number **[1] Realize that you can't walk on water.** Not even a little bit. This isn't the power of positive thinking. You really, really, really can't do it. In that way, it's not that different than all of the other stuff that we do with Jesus. Jesus sent the twelve of us out to cast out evil spirits and cure sickness. Well, do you know what? I can't cast out evil spirits. I can't cure sickness. But Jesus gave us authority to do those things. And so we went out and did them.

Let me give you a little back story about the day before I walked on water. We'd just gotten the really bad news that Herod murdered John the Baptist, as I'm sure you've heard by now. That hurt us a lot, since we're all in the same business of proclaiming the kingdom of God. Maybe that's why it seemed to hit Jesus pretty hard. When he heard about John he had to go away to a deserted place to pray. We tagged along, of course, as we usually do. Jesus prays all the time, but he seems to take special time away to pray by himself right before he does something particularly amazing. I've been doing it a lot more myself, lately. I'm not where I need to be yet, you know? But I know I'm a lot better off than I used to be.

So Step 1 is realize that you can't walk on water. Step **[2]: pray.** We face a lot of obstacles in doing our kingdom work. We butt up against the impossible pretty quickly. God is the only one who can truly do the impossible. Everything is possible for God. And so if God is

going to use us to do the impossible, we have to pray. That seems pretty basic, doesn't it?

In any event, the crowds followed Jesus to the place he'd gone to pray. Well, he starts healing the people, and after he's been at it for a while we realize how late it is. The people are hungry and we didn't have anything more than 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. I guess you've probably heard this story by now. We ended up feeding more than 5000 people. I don't know how it happened. All I know is that when we pray and Jesus is involved, the impossible becomes possible and the supernatural becomes normal... well, almost normal.

Ok, Peter's third simple step to walking on water: **[3] Do what Jesus tells you to do.** I have to admit, I'm still learning to just do what Jesus says and not ask questions. After everyone from that crowd had eaten and we had collected all the leftovers, Jesus had me and the other disciples leave him and go to the other side of the sea of Galilee while he dismissed the crowds. Actually, I didn't say that strongly enough. He *made* us go to the other side.

Look. I'm a fisherman, as I told you. I looked at that sky that evening, and I smelled that air and I said, "No way am I going out on that water tonight. It's going to get nasty out there. The wind is probably going to pick up right about when we get half way across and we're going to be in for a battle." I knew it. I went to say something to Jesus about it, but he read my mind. That's why I said he *made* us go to the other side. I'm learning this lesson over and over again. I've gotta stop thinking that I know better than Jesus. I'm learning to trust Jesus. Isn't that what faith is, after all? He puts me in a lot of situations that I never would have been in if it weren't for him. He sent me out traveling with nothing but no money, no change of clothes-- not even a staff. We were totally at the mercy and the hospitality of those who would receive our

message about the kingdom of God. The results were amazing. I'll tell you what, before I met Jesus, I didn't really have much faith. But once I started actually doing what he told me to do, my faith grew. You know why? Before I wasn't doing anything that required faith. If I couldn't do it, I didn't do it. But now, I'm stepping out in faith more and more and finding that Jesus' words are always true.

So like I was saying, Jesus *made* us go out on the water so that he could really really get alone to pray. I can't remember another time since we started following him that he wouldn't even let us stay near him. Part of it was that he understood how much he needed to pray. But I think he also sent us ahead across the lake to teach us that he'll never abandon us, you know? Because, what'll you know, we'd been rowing for hours and the wind started to pick up. Guess where we were? That's right-- right in the middle of the sea. It was hard to trust Jesus then, I'm not going to lie. I mean, the last time we were caught on the sea in a storm, at least Jesus was in the boat with us. But this time, it seemed like we were all alone. And the hours passed and I started thinking to myself, "Where is Jesus?" So here's step 4 to walking on water: **[4]. Know that Jesus hasn't abandoned you on the water.** We went to cross over the sea as it was getting dark. It wasn't until the 4th watch that there was any sign of him-- I think you'd call that somewhere between 3 and 6 am. Jesus must have been praying by himself for, I don't know, 6 or 7 hours.

One thing that I learned that night is that if you believe that Jesus won't abandon you, it means that he can show up at any time, and probably in lots of ways that you're not expecting. It was after 3 in the morning when we saw him walking toward us on the sea. I wish I could tell you that I immediately knew it was him. But honestly we were all terrified because we thought he was a ghost. I bet they heard our screams from the shore. As soon as we screamed, though, Jesus spoke to

us and told us not to be afraid. “It’s me,” he said. That’s actually related to simple step number **[5]: get to know Jesus’ voice**. Again, I’m still a work in progress. I was pretty sure when I heard his voice that it was Jesus, but you know, sometimes you just need that extra confirmation. I know it seems like Jesus is hard on us disciples sometimes, but he’s really so patient. I’ve been walking and talking with him for over a year now and even I have trouble recognizing his voice sometimes. He’s so patient that he lets me ask for confirmation. I just want to be with Jesus so badly, and I figured, “He’s usually got me walking to some place that I’d never want to be if it weren’t for him. It would be just like him to call me out on the water, with the wind and the waves being what they are.” And so I said to him, “Lord, if it’s you, command me to come to you on the water.” When he said, “Come,” I just knew it was him.

Which brings me to step 6 to walking on water. I think you could say that it’s the most important step. **[6] Get out of the boat**. That’s one step, literally one step, that will change your life. I’m following Jesus because I don’t want to live a life that’s safe for the sake of safety itself. I want to be living boldly. When you’re on the water and there are troubles all around you, it can be really really tempting not to step out in faith. But once Jesus has called you to something, if it’s really Jesus calling you, you’ve just got to do it-- no matter how crazy it seems. Even if you feel like it’s probably going to fail from the start. But do you know that that step out of the boat was not a failure. Neither was step 2. Past that, I can’t remember. The other disciples say that I walked on water, which I figure means I took at least two steps. And I know that I was far enough away from the boat that I couldn’t grab it to save my life.

Which brings me to step 7 of Peter’s 7 Simple Steps to Walking on Water: **[7] keep your eyes on Jesus**. This has probably happened to you

before, the word and the gaze of Jesus draws you to step out in faith to be with Jesus where he is. But then you lose your focus. You forget about the one who is holding you up and you focus on the impossibility of the task. Maybe it comes back to to step 1, knowing that you can't walk on water even a little bit... unless the power of God is with you. Well that's basically what happened to me. I told you, I'm still a work in progress. After I took a few steps, I got scared and I started to sink. I might not be the smartest person out there, but I'll tell you this, when I get into trouble, I just call out to Jesus. Like the prophet Joel said, "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Well, that's exactly what happened. No sooner had I opened my mouth to call out to Jesus was he right there at my side, lifting me up.

When we got back into the boat, I thought about Job's description of the Lord God as the one who "trampled the waves of the Sea." This Jesus... can there be any doubt who he is? And so right there on that boat the Twelve of us bowed down and worshiped him. We had all come to the same conclusion. And so we said to him, "You must be God's Son."

I have a feeling he's going to be calling me out on the water again soon. In fact, I think all of us are getting called out on the water. You might have realized this by now, but my 7 simple steps aren't just steps for walking on water. They're steps to a faithful journey as a disciple of Jesus. Every single day that we follow Jesus, we face tasks that are impossible without God's help. And let's just be honest with ourselves: if we're not bumping up against what seems impossible, we're probably not really stepping out in faith. Let's go over those simple steps again.

1. Realize that you can't walk on water. Not even a little bit.
2. Pray
3. Do what Jesus tells you to do

4. Know that Jesus hasn't abandoned
5. Get to know Jesus' voice
6. Get out of the boat
7. Keep your eyes on Jesus.

You know that I'm no one special. I'm just like you. But by following these simple steps, I've been able to do some amazing things. Without Jesus, I'd run away from dangerous situations-- and dangerous people. But I know that Jesus is never going to abandon me in the place where he tells me to go.

So may you obediently step out of the boat into the impossible situations into which Jesus is calling you. May you fix your eyes on Jesus, the one through whom all things are possible. And may you trample on all the chaos in the world with faith that overcomes, for the glory of God. Amen.