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Walking on Water Requires a Leap of Faith

by Pastor Clarissa Martinelli

Matthew 14:22-33 (NIV)

²² Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. ²³ After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, ²⁴ and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

²⁵ Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. ²⁶ When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

²⁷ But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

²⁸ "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

²⁹ "Come," he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

³¹ Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

³² And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. ³³ Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

TOPIC: WALKING ON WATER REQUIRES A LEAP OF FAITH

Opening prayer: In the quiet of these moments of worship, we pray that your still, small voice will speak to our hearts. Accept the gifts we bring and shape in our hearts a new joy in loving and serving you. May the word of my mouth and the mediation of my heart be accepting in thy sight, oh Lord, my strength and my redeemer. Amen.

At the climax of the movie *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, Indiana has to pass three supreme tests to reach the Holy Grail and save his father, who is dying. The first test is “The Breath of God.” As he walks down a corridor, Indiana must bow down at precisely the right moment to keep from having his head cut off by large, revolving metal blades.

The second test is “The Word of God.” He must walk on just the right stones – the ones that spell God’s name in Latin – to keep from falling through the floor to his death.

The third test, “The Path of God,” is the most difficult. Indiana comes to the edge of a large chasm – about a hundred feet across and a thousand feet down. On the other side of the chasm is the doorway to the Holy Grail. The instructions say, “Only in the leap from the lion’s head, will he prove his worth.”

Indiana says to himself, “It’s impossible. Nobody can jump this.” Then he realizes that this test requires a leap of faith. His father says, “You must believe, boy. You must believe!”

Even though every nerve and fiber of his being screams that he must not do it, Indiana walks to the edge of the cliff, lifts his foot, and steps out into thin air. If you have seen the movie, you know what happens next. Indiana does not plummet to his death, but is upheld by an invisible force. How much faith was required to take that first step?

Indiana Jones can have doubts – a whole cavern full of them. He needs only enough faith to take a step – to put his life on the line. He has to take the step first. If he does not take the step, he will never know that the invisible bridge is there. Living by faith is trusting Jesus enough to move toward him. Our gospel Scripture is an intriguing story of Jesus interacting with his disciples and particularly Peter. Like the disciples, are we terrified of the storm and the ghost we see walking toward us? Are we like Peter? Have we heard the loving caring voice of God calling? Are we willing to step out in faith to move toward Jesus?

Or are we like Peter when he begins to sink beneath the waves? The strong winds of problems, struggles, stresses, situations overcome our faith, and we just sit cautiously in our comfortable boats and watch as others walk on water. Or are we like Peter and the disciples that, once Jesus saves Peter from his moment of lost faith, they all eagerly want to get out the boat and walk on water? We have experienced salvation and proclaim to Jesus, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

As Peter climbs out of the boat to walk toward Jesus, Jesus tells the disciples, “Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid.” Peter responds, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” Jesus replies, “Come.”

There are three key factors you will experience when you get out of your boat and walk towards Jesus:

1. Walking on water means facing your fears and choosing not to let fear have the last word.
2. Walking on water means discovering and embracing the unique calling of God on your life.
3. Walking on water means experiencing the power of God in your life to do something you would not be capable of doing on your own.

It’s really all about freedom, the freedom to live our lives trusting in God, with utter abandon, and complete joy, that is, living life to its fullest and without fear.

Is it any wonder that the most common command in the Bible is, “Do not be afraid,” nor that it occurs some 366 times? We are a fearful people. God knows that, and God wants to do something about it in order to set us free from our fears, our anxieties, and our worries. God wants to give us the courage take a step of faith – a baby step if need be – get out of the boat of our comfort zones, and walk on water, fulfilling the unique calling God has on our lives.

And why can God say that with such confidence? The prophet Isaiah tells us how, in Isaiah 43:1-5 where God says:

*Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not
consume you...
Do not fear, for I am with you.*

Jesus calls to us, “Come! Leave your fears behind and find in me that perfect love that casts out all fear and will never let you go.” (I John 4:18)

“Take courage. I AM here. Do not be afraid.”

Put yourself in Peter’s place for a moment. Here is the Rabbi – teacher - that you have seen performing multiple miracles, and you are witnessing yet another impossible feat. Jesus is walking on water right in front of you. Having a little doubt about what he was seeing, Peter asked – possibly in a somewhat sarcastic voice - “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” Without hesitation Jesus answers, “Come.” Jesus is inviting Peter to step out of the boat and have a life-changing experience – walk on water. Can you hear the Savior beckoning you to step out of your boat and have a life changing adventure? A life altering adventure!

But at the same time, you are scared to death. What will you choose – the water or the boat?

The boat is safe, secure and comfortable.

On the other hand, the water is rough. The waves are high. The wind is strong. There is a storm out there. If you get out of the boat, there’s a good chance you might sink. But if you don’t get out of the boat, there’s a guaranteed certainty that you will never walk on the water. If you want to walk on the water, you have to get out of the boat.

Now I want to ask you a question. Does anybody here know the name of the best-selling chair in America? La-Z-Boy. Not Risk-E-Boy. Not Work-R-Boy. La-Z-Boy.

We want to immerse ourselves in comfort. A husband and wife were sitting in the living room when he remarked, “Just for the record, I never want to live in a vegetative state dependent on some machine. If that ever happens, just pull the plug.” His wife stood up, walked across the room and unplugged the TV set.

John Ortberg author of *“If You Want to Walk on Water You Have To Get Out of the Boat”* writes that the eleven disciples in the boat could be called “boat potatoes.” They didn’t mind watching, but they didn’t want to actually do anything.

Today’s church is filled with Christians that have taken resident in their comfort-pew, but they don’t want the risk and challenge that go along with actually following Jesus. Yet Jesus is still waiting – patiently waiting for Christians who will get out of the boat and walk on water.

What is your boat? Your boat is whatever represents safety and security to you apart from God himself. Want to know what your boat is? Your fear will tell you.

Ask yourself this: what is it that most produces fear in me – especially when I think of leaving it behind and stepping out in faith?

What is your boat? It's that area of your life you are shrinking back from, and it is keeping you from fully and courageously trusting God. Fear will tell you what your boat is. Leaving it may be the hardest thing you ever do. But if you want to walk on the water, you have to get out of the boat.

In our own lives of failure and broken dreams, God brings to a complete end the old life, and begins not simply a resuscitation of the old life but a resurrection of a whole new life.

It was when Jesus was emptied that he was most full of God... and it is when we are emptied that we are most ready for God's filling of our lives. Philippians 2 says: "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross."

The humility of emptiness - that's what it takes. To let go of all our drive to be our own God and to let God be God of our lives. It is to be so emptied of oneself that we are most open to God. It is the empty soul that is ready to be filled.

Paul says, "*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.*" Emptied for the fullness of God. May God so use the times of our cavernous tombs – when we are most empty – to fill us again with the fullness of God.

I believe the Holy Spirit dwells within each and every one of us and reassures us that there is more to life than sitting in the boat. We were made for something more than merely avoiding failure. There is something inside you that wants to walk on the water – to leave the comfort of routine existence and abandon yourself to the high adventures of following God.

Because of the wind and the storm, some people decide never to leave the boat. You might as well know now, there is no guarantee that life in the boat is going to be any safer.

Ellen Guder writes *You can live on bland food so as to avoid an ulcer; drink no tea, coffee or other stimulants in the name of health, go to bed early, stay away from night life, avoid all controversial subjects so as never to give offense, mind your own business, avoid involvement in other people's problems, spend money only on necessities and save all you can. But we will all die and there's no way around that - and you will not have lived life in the abundance of God.*

Larry Laudan has spent the last decade studying risk-management. *The first principle is the simple: Everything is risky. Living by faith is trusting Jesus enough to move toward him. It is life worth living.*

President Theodore Roosevelt once said *It's not the critic who counts; The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena . . . who, at best, knows in the end the triumph of great achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly. So that his place will never be with those cold timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.*

If people of faith never got out of the boat, we would have no one portrayed in our biblical history. Not Deborah or Ruth or Sarah or Rachel. Not Lydia or Anna or Elisabeth. Not Philip or Timothy or Stephen or John the Baptist. Not Moses or Ezra or Joseph or Abraham.

For Indiana Jones, he had to take one step into the chasm. For Peter, he climbed out of the boat when he heard Jesus say, "Come." What step of faith is the Lord calling you to take today? Amen.

A Pastoral Prayer

O Living Lord of all that is, we come to you this morning seeking your presence in our lives. Not just on the surface, but deep within where the currents are strong and the shadows are dark. We pray for the inner peace only you can give.

We live in stormy times, and like Elijah of old, we sometimes feel like hiding in a cave or retreating from all the outward turmoil. We search for answers, for meaning and for understanding in all kinds of places -- but we can not find you in all these outward things. Speak to us, Lord... with your still small voice let us release fear and doubt as we get out of our boats and walk on water towards you. Help us to make room within for the work of the

Holy Spirit so that we can tell the difference between worldly *glitter* and divine *glory*.

Come to us Lord Jesus, when the troubled waters of our living are against us and the courage of our faith is threatened. Help us to know that you are near and that by faith we can overcome life's tempests. Because you bring calm to the storms and peace to the turmoil, we are strengthened in faith and worship flows from our hearts. Amen.