

#2: Water Walking

Series: Peter's Progress

Matthew 14:1-11

Dr. Matt Cassidy --- June 20, 2021

Good morning, Grace. Boy, I hope that song sounded as good at home as it did here. Wow! That's a powerful word in music, right?

Well, it's happy Father's Day, and at our house for thirty years our family (my wife, mostly—it's her fault—and the children) get me really ugly ties. And this year they're sending a message. Besides it being awful and ugly, this is the Three Stooges playing golf—okay, Larry, Moe, and Curly. I get it. I'll pick up my socks. You win. You win, baby! I'm one of the Stooges. I can't imagine you guys hearing a word that I say when I'm wearing this tie, so I'm going to put this over here. How come there's no trash can on this stage? Where it belongs. [groaning from audience.] Oh, yeah, she paid two dollars for that tie.

All right, let's get going with our learning time. Why don't you turn to Matthew chapter 14? I'll meet you there.

Introduction

Nothing is so much to be feared as fear.

---Henry David Thoreau

Here's a great quote from Thoreau. "Nothing is so much to be feared as fear."

Fear can rule your life like very few oppressors. John Lloyd Ogilvie was a scholar's pastor, and he asked an insightful question. He said, "What is the most frequent command in the Bible?" What would you think it is? Love more? I mean, the greatest of these is love. But it's not. Hate not is not the greatest command. How about be humble? Almost every sin has its origins in pride somewhere, so be humble. Don't be proud. That's not it.

In the Bible, you'll find, like no other command, simply these two words: "Fear not." "Lo, I am with you." "Be strong and courageous." "Do not be afraid." "Trust me."

As a matter of fact, Ogilvie says that, apparently, we should hear "Fear not" at least once a day, because there's a suspicious 366 times that it's mentioned in the Bible. That's one for every day and on Leap Day year. Three hundred and sixty-six times it says, "Fear not."

Why Does God Command Us Not to Fear?

And why would this command be so common in the Bible? *Fear not, don't be afraid.* It doesn't seem like it's one of the top five vices. I don't think we've ever asked someone to leave our church because they live in fear. It doesn't appear to be something that's right up there. God doesn't say "Fear not" because He wants us to live comfortable and safe and emotionally tranquil lives; as a matter of fact, usually you see "Fear not" right after the Lord sends somebody into something that's fearful. *Go do something fearful. Fear not.*

Here's the reason He says "Fear not." Fear is the number one reason that we use to keep from doing God's will in our lives. Fear is the emotion that keeps us from trusting God in new ways, transforming ways. Here's the thing: if you truly want to have intimacy God, if you want to know Him and enjoy Him, you have to overcome fear in order to do that. When you trust God in new ways, it is in trusting Him in new ways that you come to know what He's like; you come to have an experience with Him; you feel His presence in that.

In other words—let me say it this way—fear blocks the intimacy that God wants you to have with Him. And so, if you look at Jesus' curriculum for discipleship, He's just constantly putting His people, those who call themselves followers of Jesus, in places of fear so that they will overcome the fear and enjoy a new revelation of who He is and what He's like. Obedience doesn't spare us from difficulties a lot of times; it actually leads us to difficulties. It leads us to places of a raised heart rate. God wants us to obey, not just so we will be moral, so we could reflect Christ in our lives. He wants us to obey because to obey is to be with Him.

Where's God? Where is God? Uh, He's over there in the scary stuff. If you want to be with Him you're going to have to get in the fear of it.

Matthew 14:22-24

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. When evening came, He was there alone,²⁴ but 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.

Case in point: Matthew 14. Let's read it together. I'm going to start in verse 22. And this is just after they had fed 5,000. And by the way, that was kind of a scary thing. They figured their way out of that with a miracle, knowing Jesus. And then immediately after, "Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, while He dismissed the crowd. And after He had dismissed them, He went up to a mountain by Himself to pray. When evening came, He was there all by Himself, all alone, but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, and the boat was being buffeted by waves because the wind was against them. Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake."

He made the lake, He can walk on it if He wants to. That's what happens when you're God.

Matthew 14:26

When the disciples saw Jesus walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

Verse 26: "When the disciples saw Jesus walking on the lake, they were terrified. 'It's a ghost,' they said, and cried out in fear." They were terrified, and now they're crying out in fear. They were out in a storm that was causing them to work hard to just navigate—that's a fear that they did understand. Now they've entered a fear they don't understand. Now they're talking about a ghost.

Matthew 14:27

But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

And then Jesus interrupts them. “But Jesus immediately said to them: ‘Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.’” There it is—don’t be afraid. Take courage. You don’t need to do this.

This is the theme here. This is the theme of this whole story here. Why not be afraid? How does faith or trust quench this fear that they’re involved in? Well, Jesus arranged it. Jesus is the one who sent them out on the boat. Jesus is the one who sent the storm out on the lake. Jesus is literally the one who is with them right here. This is a sovereign act, and when you understand the sovereignty of God and the way He works, you can realize that He’s there with you.

Matthew 14:28

And Peter answered Jesus, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.”

But here’s where it gets strange—you might know the story. Peter says this. “Peter answered Jesus, ‘Lord, if it is You, then command me to come out to You on the water.’” I love this guy, right? *I’m going to do something and then I’m going to think about what I should be doing later.* The story of my whole life. Ask my mom. Do, then think. No, you’re supposed to think, then do.

Matthew 14:29

“Come,” He said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came towards Jesus.

But he gets out there and Jesus says, “ ‘Come.’ Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.”

Application: Fear

Pause. Let's just look at this for a second. Let's spend a little bit of time and make it a little applicable to us here and put ourselves in this situation. There's a storm. The winds are blowing, it says so hard that now the waves are cresting, and it's so hard that seasoned professional sailors are having a very difficult time navigating this boat. It's dark. It's in the early morning. It's probably about three o'clock in the morning during a storm. Jesus calls Peter out to walk on the water. I'm not an expert on walking on water, but I'm thinking at noon on a still lake it's probably going to be easier than three in the morning during a storm. Probably just as hard, frankly, but you get the idea. I'm just thinking—water skiing, I'd rather ... anyway.

Here's the bigger point. How do you respond to this boat versus Jesus? That's what Peter's choosing between. You have a boat of relative safety, and then you get out with Jesus where it's almost a certain drowning. The problem is, if you want to ... John Ortberg wrote a book, its title is great. Here's the problem: If you want to walk on water, you have to get out of the boat. There's no such thing as walking on water and staying safe. It's not provided for us. And the bigger existential pull here is, don't you know that there's something—no, someone—don't you know that there is someone in your soul who is calling you out to live outside the safety of a boat? Don't you feel a tug from God's Holy Spirit that you were made for more than simply avoiding failure? Isn't there so much more to life, especially as a Christian? I came that you might have life and have it abundantly. And you can't have the abundant life if you're trying to live a simply safe life.

And so, the question before us as we apply this to our lives is, What is your boat? What is the place of safety or the thing of safety you appeal to? It's not hard—what represents safety and security for you? What do you put your trust in when you start seeing life storms coming your way? What keeps you in there?

Here's another way. What do you not want to give up when you feel like it's the Lord that's calling you to do something new and something scary? What do you retreat back to and say, "NO, no, no, I'm going to stay here."

What's Your Boat?

Here's another way of looking at it. You can find out what your boat is—how you desire comfort—by doing it backwards. Let your fear teach you. What do you fear losing or leaving behind if you actually lived a radical life of discipleship and following Christ? I'll bet it's not hard for some of us to find out what that is.

Look at faith in a whole different way. Watch this. I'm kind of changing the subject here. But look at faith in a completely different way. It's such an obscure word. But what do you get from having faith in God, in Yahweh? I mean, what benefit is there? If you trust in the power and the plan of God the Father; if you have assurance that His only begotten Son was able to reconcile and redeem you and make you right with the Father; and that the resurrecting power of the Holy Spirit is sealed in your soul and is available to you; Father, Son, Holy Spirit, what good is believing in a triune God?

I get to go to heaven.

Okay. That's true. But between now and seeing Him face to face, what difference does that make? Where do you use faith? Here it is. You need faith and trust in a triune God for everything of significance that needs to change in your life. You will need the power of the Spirit, the relationship with the Son, and the honor of being in the family of the Father for you to have radical life change in your life.

In other words, there are parts of our lives that we have to change, that must change, or we cannot change and we need to learn to live with that. We need to learn to live responsibly with the things that we cannot change. That radical change and that living responsibly is going to be a miracle of supernatural power. Let me just say it in our words, what we say around here: to become like Christ in all of life, you will have to face the fears that keep you from wanting to change. To become like Christ in all of life, you have to face the fears that keep you from becoming like Christ and get out of your boat of safety, or you will stagnate. You will not have a life of faith; you will have death of faith. That's how and where you trust the power and the goodness of God, to become like Christ. And we're going to have to overcome fear to have that.

Personally, sometimes I feel like in my life that I'm still in junior high, because I don't want people to laugh at me. Oh, my goodness, they point and they laugh at me, maybe for wearing an ugly tie, let's just say.

No, really, in this culture, you've got to get used to getting laughed at. If you hold to the biblical view of morality and what the details of that is, you're going to be more than laughed at; you'll be mocked. Some of you may even be persecuted. But that's what it's going to take to be able to live a life fully surrendered to Jesus Christ. There is no change without fear. And you cannot become like Christ in this boat, this metaphorical boat.

So, here's what happens. Back to the story. Peter is called out by Jesus to come out on the water and he grabs the side of the boat and he steps over. If you can imagine, he steps over and the first foot plants. That must have been shocking, right? Because he didn't fall over all of a sudden. Then he steps over and he gets the second foot in. Now he's on the water, but he's holding onto that boat. There's still a lot of physics being violated right now.

Then he lets go of the boat. There he is. I mean, this is bigger than the moon landing—one great step for mankind—yeah. Because that was a marvel in engineering; this is a miracle. This is the only human human—not divine human—this is the only human to ever walk on water. And he's doing it! Like wow! He's walking on water!

Matthew 14:30

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

"And then when he saw the wind and the waves he was afraid and began to sink. And he cried out, 'Lord, save me!'" He got out into the wind, he got out there, and then he said, *Wait, what?* There he is. *Now I'm thinking.*

And what I love about this story is that it says "He began to sink." I love that because if my understanding of physics is right, he would have just splashed into the lake. But Jesus is even suspending his descent. In the glory of God and His graciousness, He gives him enough time to cry for help. So, he does.

Matthew 14:31

**Immediately Jesus reached out His hand and caught him.
“You of little faith,” He said, “why did you doubt?”**

And “immediately Jesus reaches out His hand and caught him and said, ‘You of little faith, why did you doubt?’”

I love this interchange here because it’s just between Jesus and Peter. In Matthew chapter 4, Jesus calmed the storm. Some of you might know that story. It’s a tremendous squall and He stops it. And He says, “Do you have no faith?” He said, “Where’s your faith?”

In this story, He says to Peter, “Hey, you’ve got a little faith.” Progress. Progress, right? And then He says, “Why did you doubt?”

Matthew 14:32-33

**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.”**

Only Peter gets to walk back with Jesus. Only Peter gets to have that experience. No one else does. Verses 32 and 33 say, “And when they climbed back into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, ‘Truly You are the Son of God.’”

Lesson learned. This is a very significant progression in the storyline of Matthew. In Matthew’s gospel, what we’ve seen is that the Magi have worshiped Jesus. And then a leper worships Jesus. And then a ruler will be at the temple and he’ll worship Jesus. But this is the first time that the disciples will worship Jesus. In the storm in Matthew chapter 4, they said, “Who is this man?” In this experience they say, “Truly You are the Son of God.” And it says that they worship Him. They get it. Lesson learned. Now they can progress into the fullness of who Jesus is.

Life Cycle of Faith // Life Cycle of Death

But here’s the thing. This story is a real-life parable of the life cycle of faith. I mean, would Peter like another shot at walking on water? You bet. Would he do well? I’m sure he

would. But the lesson isn't about how to walk on water; the lesson is how to live a life of faith in the context of fear; how to live a cycle of life. There's a life cycle of faith and there's a death cycle of faith.

Here's the life cycle of faith. Follow it through the outline. **The life cycle of faith starts with fear.** This how you grow, this is how you thrive. You start with fear. There's some kind of challenge, the Holy Spirit is on you, you can hear Him speak to you, He says, *Let's go do something different.* It can be something simple, but maybe not to you, like comforting a friend or confessing a sin or acknowledging an addiction. *I'm going to finally say it, right?* It could be something simple for someone else, but it is fear-driven to you.

Fear, part two. **Crash through that fear.** Realize that the Spirit of God has been haunting you long enough and resolve, *You know what? It's time to change. I can't do this. I'm going to need the power of the resurrection of the Holy Spirit in me for courage and just for the power to do it.* Then you do it. And you get out there in the middle of it, and they you say, *Wait. What?* It happens almost every time. Look at Peter's story, right? He gets out there and he sees the waves. The waves were already there. Nothing changed. He got out of the boat, he's still in the exact same circumstance he was in, but he's changed his focus from the Lord to the waves. You and I, when we do something crazy and courageous for God, we'll get out there, and when we get in it, we'll be in the waves.

I'm sorry, let me say that again. Then we'll be in the waves. Now we've signed up for some kind of ministry, and now we're in the ministry, and we say, **Wait, what?** Nothing's changed—just the focus. I mean, sometimes when you get out there you think, *Shouldn't I be rewarded for trusting You and getting out of the boat?*

No, we've got a lesson to learn here.

Then you begin to sink. But you just begin to sink. God doesn't drop you. He's enjoying this journey with you. And by the way, why did Peter begin to sink? If you're thinking it's because he started to doubt, it's because you've read this story too many times. It's like, Peter began to doubt, therefore he began to sink, because doubt makes you less buoyant? I missed that part of hydrodynamics. No, he started to sink because Jesus made him start to sink. Jesus is part of all of this. And He's trying to teach him a lesson and He's trying to teach me a lesson—maybe you too. The fear is what causes us to doubt. But also, in that lesson is that faith quenches that fear. It's faith and trust in who Jesus is that quenches the fear that's brought up by doubt.

See, listen, when Jesus talks to Peter, He doesn't say, "Why did you fear?" That's important. He doesn't say, "Why did you fear?" There's a lot to be afraid of out here. Yeah, there's the wind and the waves. And you're not supposed to be walking on the water. He says, "Why did you doubt?"

Listen, friends, fear is always part of the story. It's the primary means for us to use our faith and trust in the triune of God. That's how we get there. But here's the thing. Our faith and trust make the fear like a background noise, and we're going to move along without it. Doubt—when we stop trusting and fearing—it makes fear like a deafening siren call that leads to our destruction. Fear is always a part of it. You can't run from fear, because you run away from it.

Anyway, the next thing that happens is **he cries out and immediately a hand reaches out**. That's what happens—you're strengthened by Yahweh. You're in there in the moment and then that leads to **worshiping the one true God**. After every new adventure, you're going to find yourself saying, "Wow." That's why we call it a God thing. Even the phrase "It's a God thing" is an expression of worship. *I couldn't do that—Jesus did that. I couldn't have succeeded in that context—that was the Lord working through me.* That's how the life cycle of faith works.

Did Peter Fail?

But listen, how you interpret this story is actually definitive to how you define life. How you see Peter is maybe how you might see yourself when you look at him. In other words, how do you keep score in living by faith? Let me just say it still another way. Did Peter fail? If you say, "Well, yeah, he did. He saw the wind, he took his eyes off the Lord and saw the wind and he began to sink." That's true. If that's the lesson we're supposed to learn, then we're going to find ourselves saying, "I can't trust. It's not worth living a faith-filled life. I think I'll just stagnate right here."

But Peter didn't fail. Peter learned. That's what happening in this storyline. In failure—whatever he had, whatever you want to call that—that's always part of learning. That's part of living—going out there and it not working out like you'd thought. It's not the failure that's the lesson here; it's how you respond to failure. And Peter is, for the record, not a failure, because he's the only one that walked on water. Still to this day he's the only real human to ever take three steps out and three steps back.

This is failure—the eleven guys in the boat. And the reason that they don't get much press is because, well, their failure was quiet and it was private. No one noticed. There's no shame. And they just stayed safe. Good for them.

Death Cycle of Faith

Me? I want to be Peter. Because here's the cycle of death for our faith. **Start with fear.** Two—**stay in the boat.** That's it. Nowadays it seems like you get to make fun of people that get out of the boat. Post that somewhere.

Here's the lesson today: make friends with fear. Let me quote Thoreau again: **“Nothing is so much to be feared as fear.”** Yeah, because fear has so much power. But no, because fear and doubt and failure are part of growth. And Jesus's discipleship curriculum in the lives of these twelve men and in our lives is to absolutely renounce safety as an ultimate value. Comfort is not what we are to pursue; holiness is, becoming like Christ in all of life. To get from here to there, there's fear. Every time, there's fear.

The fear will never go away, as long as I continue to grow.

--Susan Jeffers

I love what Susan Jeffers says: “The fear will never go away as long as I continue to grow.” It never leaves you if you're continuing to grow. You can make the fear stop by sitting in the boat not changing, not trying to become like Christ in all of life. You've got to make friends with fear. It's just getting used to it.

Oh, that pit in my stomach.

Oh, never mind that. That's just fear. All bark and no bite. I'm going to go do it anyway.

It's still there. It's not going away.

Here's a fact of anthropology, the nature of man. You become what you practice. What you practice, you become. And right now, this last week, we are forming life habits or death habits. We are forming life habits or death habits. And then we become what we practice. We have to choose between risk and comfort. And we practice those, and each of those gets better over time. If we risk and risk and risk, we get better at taking risks. If it's all about comfort,

comfort, comfort, we're going to get very good at that. Each time you get out of the boat, it gets easier to get out of the boat. Each time you choose not to ... yeah. You'll get good at that too.

That's what this lesson is. Here's the point of this story, it really is. There is a danger in getting out of the boat of comfort that you live in. But there is a greater danger by staying in that boat. That is not the way you were made. It is not part of our design. It is not the abundant life that Jesus Christ promised us and called us to.

Application

So, we have to get out of the boat a little bit every day. Just get really good at it. So, what is scary to you today? Maybe you could do something today, something simple—writing an encouraging letter, calling someone, maybe confessing a sin. You've got to practice getting out of that boat.

Look what we've done. Behind the scenes, here's the master mind behind our campaign for the next six months. We're going to have a summer of giving. We're going to work, we're going to figure out, we're going to realize that everything we have is not ours; it's on loan from God. Jesus in the Bible doesn't say we own this stuff; He says we're stewards of the stuff that God gives us—not just possessions, but our time and our skills and our wealth. So, we're having a summer of giving, which is going to be a blast, but some of the purpose of it is, for some people whose safety is wealth or their income, we're going to say, *Here's a boat you can get out of, we're going to make a game out of it, and we're all going to do it together.* So, join us in this summer of giving because it will be fun, and it's scary, and that's where Jesus is.

We're going to have a fall of serving. Why are we having a fall of serving? Because some people—like other people say, *This is my time—No, it's not*—you're going to have to go and serve. Serve here in the church, serve outside the church, do something that's not comfortable to you. Meet some more people. Yeah, get out of the boat.

We're having a big outreach on August 15. I told you, let's go, man, high attendance Sunday on August 15. We're going to bring the Gospel clear and friendly, right at them. We're asking everyone in our congregation to be a minister with the people that God has brought them to in His sovereignty.

Prayer, care, share. Why? Because it's scary. The giving and the serving and the outreach—prayer, care, share—look, these aren't programs. These aren't events that we're going

to do and say, “Well, we did that in 2021. Let’s go, let’s do something else.” These are lifestyles of walking on water. It’s a lifestyle of water-walking. It’s collectively as a team. We’re getting out of the boat every day. We’ll find something that scares you and then we’ll push you out of a boat. Come join Grace Covenant Church! (It sounded better when I wrote it down. I’ll work on that between services.)

Why would you walk on water? Because that’s when the growth happens. Getting out of the boat is where true faith grows. That’s where doubts die. You have a fear, you have a doubt about the nature of God and you go and challenge that with fear, and you go into that fear, and you realize that God is greater than the fear that you’ve been running from. Because living in fear is not living. Living for safety isn’t safe. And it’s not living. Walking on water ... it comes down to this—simply, it comes down to this.

Why did Peter get out of that boat? Because that’s where Jesus was. And he wanted to be with Jesus. In this story, there’s only one person that has a private, intimate coaching conversation with the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus says, “Why’d you doubt? You’ve got a little faith. Let’s walk back.”

You want an intimate, tender-hearted, one-on-one private conversation with the King? Do you want to have a kind of intimacy and experience, a God story, so that when your pulse finally settles down you just want to worship? You want to truly know and enjoy who He is and what He’s like? He’s out there. He’s out there in the waves where the wind blows ... out of the boat. And you’re going to know Him in a way that you could never know Him otherwise. And the best part is that it’s a very short walk from where you are right now.

What if we were a church of water-walkers? Wow. That would be a great thing to pray for. So, maybe you could join me in that. Let’s do this. Could you just close your eyes and bow your heads—that stuff? But just turn your palms up to receive something, maybe. Say, “Holy Spirit, speak to me. Holy Spirit, show me that there’s more than safety and security and calm.”

[Prayer]

Lord, I’d ask that You would turn down all the noise around me, the noise that’s fear that’s brought about because of my doubts. And I want to invite You to invite me to get out of my boat. I want to invite You to call me. Lord, I receive Your invitation for the abundant life. And I,

through fear, have chosen to have a safe life instead. And now, Lord, I'm tired of that. I want to become like Christ in all of my life. And there's only one way for that to happen, and Lord, I acknowledge now that it is transcending the fear that keeps me from knowing You. And so, I'd rather know You and have a round of fear than stay where I am. Set me free from me. Do this to Grace. Do this to our church, Lord. Set us free. Make us dangerous. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.