



TRIETSCH

## STUDY GUIDE & DAILY READINGS

Sunday, May 3, 2009

Fearless (*Week 2 of 3*)

# Hope

### **Matthew 14:22-27**

*Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." Jesus said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus.*

*But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink and he cried out, "Lord, save me!"*

*Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"*

*When they got into the boat, the wind ceased.*

*And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."*

*The Word from the Bible*

### **Fearless**

In this sermon series we are focusing on the story of Jesus calling Peter to walk on water. Two weeks ago, we dealt with the fear of the disciples, who were literally terrified during the storm on the sea. We looked at the nature of fear in the Old and New Testament in comparison to the fears we face today. We looked at the power of Christ that is sufficient when we are afraid in order to live a fearless life.

Last week, we looked at the courage of Peter. Peter is one of the early leaders of the church – martyred for his faith. While we see this fearless Peter in some circumstances, we also see the Peter who is rebuked by Jesus and the Peter who loses his faith in denying Jesus the night of the crucifixion. Peter is flawed, and yet Jesus calls to him, empowers him, and uses him for the glory of the kingdom of God. Is there a Peter inside each of us?

Today, we will look at the grace of Christ that reaches out to Peter as his faith fails. In the touch of Jesus, Peter is restored and joins Jesus in the boat with the rest of the disciples as the winds and storm ceases. The courage of Peter was not enough to overcome his fears. Only the presence and touch of Christ was enough.

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### **Walking on the Water**

Jesus' authority extends not only to the sin and sickness of the world, but to the forces of nature as well. We saw his power over nature when he created bread to feed the multitudes, and we see it again in his walking on water. God's power rules over the whole of the creation, not merely the world of humans.

The account of the storm in Matthew is full of vivid detail about **the boat...beaten by the waves** and **the disciples, who were terrified**. Jesus' response to the terrified disciples that night — **"Take heart. It is I; have no fear,"** is just as meaningful to today's community of faith. The intention of the story is made clear in verse 33, where Jesus is acclaimed as the **Son of God**.

### **Crying Out – Admitting our Need for Christ**

Has there ever been a time in your life when you tried to get God's attention? Has there ever been a time when you were faced with an overwhelming obstacle?

So often in life, we'd rather fail instead of admitting our need for God. There will be times in our lives when we won't be able to achieve and accomplish those things we want until we cry out to God and ask for help. Only when we cry out to God, will we get closer to God.

When Jesus called Peter to walk out on the water, he never said it would be easy. Even though Peter had confidence and courage to get out of the boat, God quickly reminded Peter that it's not about him. Our reliance on God is greatest when our faith leads us into the unknown. In those moments, we realize it's really not about us.

## ***Expect the Unexpected***

Matthew 14:30 says, ***“But when Peter saw the wind he was afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried out ‘Lord save me!’”*** Storms seem stronger when we are alone. When Peter stepped out of the boat, he stepped away from his friends. Now the sound and fury of the winds and the waves were magnified by his individual efforts. Peter is alone, isolated and exposed, while his greatest fears close in around him.

Peter was not prepared for the unexpected isolation of his faith decision. The wind and the waves were the same, but now they were magnified because Peter was facing them alone. Our experience is the same. We expect the storms to get easier when as we take a step of faith. But the first steps of faith expose our extreme need for God. The storms seem stronger the further we get from the boat. The greater the faith risk, the further we step out on faith for God, the harder it gets. Know that as we pursue God, the storms will come. Jesus said in John 16:33, ***“In this world you will have troubles (in this world you will have some storms) but take heart, I have overcome the world.”***

Matthew 5:45 says, ***“God rains on the just and the unjust.”*** Nobody is exempt from storms. Nobody is exempt from dealing with the troubles in our lives. But Jesus said, ***“Take heart. I’m always with you.”*** With every new level of expectation, there is always a new level of frustration. God wants to do great things with our lives, but we have to expect the unexpected.

## ***Reach out***

Matthew 14:31 says, ***“Immediately, Jesus reached out his hand and he called to him. He said, ‘You of little faith. Why did you doubt?’”***

***Availability*** — As soon as Peter cried out, Jesus reached out and caught him. Most commentaries say that Jesus was able to catch Peter because he simply grabbed his hand. But the action of Jesus is dependent on the availability of Peter. Unless the hand of Peter was ***available***, Jesus could not grab his hand to answer Peter's cry.

***Immediately*** — As soon as Peter called God's name, God immediately reached out. Jesus proved to Peter, and even to us, that he is a present help in times of trouble. When we reach out our hands and call on the name of the Lord, God will ***immediately*** respond to us. Help is always here.

Imagine the picture of Peter after Jesus has pulled him back into the boat. Peter is drenching wet, cold, shivering and speechless. Jesus looks at him and says, ***“What were you thinking? How could you get to a point in your life where you lose faith? I was there all the time. Why would you doubt me?”***

Peter doubted Jesus because he allowed the physical evidence of the winds and the waves to overwhelm his faith. Hebrews 11:1 reminds us, ***“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for—certain of what we cannot see.”*** Fear tells us that should be discouraged by what we see. Faith tells us that we should be encouraged by what we don't see.

## ***The Presence of Christ***

When Jesus got into the boat, everything changed. The storms immediately ceased. The chaos was immediately replaced with peace. When Jesus comes into our lives, everything changes.

Jesus wants to come aboard with us. But he will not enter into our lives uninvited. Peter realized that he couldn't accomplish his life's purpose apart from God. Peter realized that he needed Jesus on the boat for everything.

In order for us to be intimate, in order for us to be closer to God, we must invite God on board—not just here at the church on the weekend — but we must invite God passionately into our lives every day. We must invite him into our work, into the classroom, into our homes, into every relationship.

Notice the focus of the disciples when Jesus and Peter get into the boat. Their focus moves from the wind and the waves to the presence of Christ. The winds died down, but it really did not matter. Jesus was there to bring strength and

courage in spite of the storm. Sometimes when we invite God into our lives, the storms continue. Yet, God will calm us in the midst of the storm.

### ***The Importance of Worship***

Then those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, ***“Truly you are the Son of God.”***

Matthew 14:33 says that as soon as Jesus got into the boat with the disciples, the disciples knew that they had witnessed an awesome miracle, and they immediately began to worship.

They said, ***“Truly you are God.”*** They worshipped God for what they had witnessed. When we confess with our mouths and trust God in our hearts, when we say ***“Truly you are God in the flesh,”*** then God can begin to work in our lives.

### ***Notes***

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# Daily Readings

*Please note: This week we continue our study of the book of Acts. Read and reread each passage to get a sense of the total dependence these early followers gave to the Holy Spirit.*

**Monday, May 11** — *Read Acts 5:17-32.* The teaching of the disciples continues, despite the threats of the Jewish High Council. This section is rather interesting as each time the disciples are arrested, they are freed by angels. The council seems clueless as to what is happening. In what ways are you being used by God in spite of the threats of those in authority? What is God calling you to do this week?

**Tuesday, May 12** — *Read Acts 5:33-42.* A Pharisee named Gamaliel convinces the High Council to let the disciples go. His argument is that if Jesus is truly the Son of God and the messiah that there is nothing they can do to stop his disciples. If Jesus is not, then their efforts will die on their own. The Council agrees, flogs the disciples and lets them go. Notice in verse 41, where the disciples rejoice and celebrate their suffering as a sign of God's favor. How have you suffered for the faith in your life? Do you see suffering for the gospel of Jesus as a privilege?

**Wednesday, May 13** — *Read Acts 6:1-7.* Luke reports further organizational structure developing in the early church. Here there is a question of the distribution of food. Rather than the disciples handling everything, they select and commission deacons to carry out this task. In what ways do we organize our church to carry out the work of God? How are you involved in this work?

**Thursday, May 14** — *Acts 6:8-8:1.* This is a very long section in the book of Acts. It is very difficult to divide because it includes the High Council charges against Stephen, the sermon he preaches in his defense, and the stoning and execution of Stephen. Verses 7:54 – 8:1 have particular interest for the reader because they include the words of Stephen as he asks God to forgive his accusers. These verses also include the introduction of the apostle Paul (before his conversion) as the merciless Jewish prosecutor of the Christians. How do you respond to the words of mercy and forgiveness from Stephen as he dies? How would you treat your accusers? Are you willing to show mercy where mercy is not deserved?

**Friday, May 15** — *Read Acts 8:1-8:3.* These verses close the first section of the Book of Acts. Saul (who will become the apostle Paul) is now arresting, executing and imprisoning Christians. Reread the first 8 chapters of the book of Acts. How does your faith compare to the faith of the early followers? If you have trouble measuring up to the early leaders, what do you need to help your faith grow?