

If You Want to Walk on Water, You Have to Get Out of the Boat

Matthew 14:22-33

August 13, 2017

Matthew 14:22-33 (NRSV) – Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”

Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” He 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, 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.”

First it was a hardware store, built in 1947. Then it declined into a run-down storage building. Now it is a grace place. A Colorado congregation spotted this old store on the bustling main street of their small town, and immediately recognized that it had incredible community outreach potential. They were eager to reach out to their neighbors, especially those disconnected from God and the church, and so they pounced on the building as an ideal location for a café and bookstore. They turned the store into a commercial restaurant called “The Lighthouse Café,” an eatery that opens to the public six days a week, with specialty coffees, pastries, sandwiches, and soups. The café builds a bridge to the community by bringing people into the building for breakfasts, lunches, and community events. It establishes relationships, breaks down barriers, and makes it easier for neighbors to come to the church for other events.

The café also stimulates community-building within the congregation. People worship during one service and eat during the other, or they stop in for breakfast before worship or for lunch a bit later. **People have a hunger – for food and for relationships – and the Lighthouse Café has a role in satisfying both.**

‘Turning an old store into a place of grace. It is what authors Kim and Mauborgne call a “Blue Ocean Strategy.” Their theory divides the business world into red oceans and blue oceans. In red oceans, companies try to outperform their rivals through head-to-head competition. They fight like sharks for the same limited profits, and their cutthroat competition turns the ocean a bloody red.

In blue oceans, on the other hand, companies expand beyond existing boundaries, or they take their business to whole new areas. Competition becomes irrelevant because the rules of the game are still in the process of being created. Long-term success comes not from fighting competitors, but from creating “blue oceans,” – untapped new market spaces ripe for growth. Think about the Lighthouse Café. It was a blue ocean strategy – a whole new form of community outreach, ripe for growth. Instead of engaging in red ocean competition, that is, sensing that we’re in competition with other churches in our area, this congregation took its ministry beyond existing boundaries, and reached an entirely new group of people.

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Jesus employed this same strategy, you know! ‘Not in terms of selling specialty coffees, pastries, sandwiches and soups, but in terms of stepping into wholly uncharted waters. He turns away from the best practices of the scribes and Pharisees, and takes his religious business in an entirely new direction. Think about it: Jesus is anti-religious establishment, unconventional, counter-cultural, outside the proverbial box.

In the red ocean of first-century Palestine, the rule was, “**You shall love your kind and hate your enemy.**” But Jesus creates a blue ocean of, “*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.*” (Matt. 5:43-44)

Red ocean: **Blessed are the strong.**

Blue ocean: *Blessed are the meek.*

Red: **Blessed are the rich.**

Blue: *Blessed are the poor.*

Red: **Blessed are the warmongers.**

Blue: *Blessed are the peacemakers.*

Red: **Blessed are the satisfied.**

Blue: *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst.*

And the list could go on and on. The point is that *Jesus is not interested in playing the same game* as the religious leaders of his day. And as we learn by reading the gospels, Jesus has absolutely no patience with people who would rather stay trapped in tradition than tap into the power of Almighty God!

Just picture the scene: Jesus steps out onto a deep blue sea after a wild and windy night. We are in a small boat on a large lake, working to get across. The wind is against us, so we’ve been battered by waves, and we have spent the entire night straining to make progress. When morning comes, we slump over our oars, discouraged, exhausted, and perhaps a little seasick! Suddenly Jesus appears, walking on the water. We are shocked, surprised, stunned, even terrified. Is it a hallucination? A ghost? A god? What, or who, could be walking on the water? Then Jesus says, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”

Jesus invites us to get out of the boat and step onto this blue ocean with him. Now, we know what happened to Peter. The question is: What will happen to us? To succeed with a blue ocean strategy, we have to TRUST the power of God. So, how will we climb out of the comfort of our boat, and into the wind and the waves that whip around us? How will we follow Jesus in faith, trusting him to keep our heads above water?

Peter may have been the first one out of the boat. But Jesus’ invitation to walk on the water is for us all. This gospel text reminds us that when we fix our eyes on Jesus, and risk getting out of the boat in response to Jesus’ call, we can triumph over the forces of chaos and meaninglessness. It shows us how, when we create a new strategy for life based on Jesus word, his power lifts us up, allows us to weather the storms of life, and trustingly do something new. Here is spiritual courage indeed – the courage to venture forth into danger and to do what God has said can be done; the courage to risk taking a step that would be avoided by those with less trust in Jesus’ power. Walking on water means facing our fears and choosing not to let fear have the last word. It means discovering and embracing the unique calling of God on our lives and

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experiencing the power of God to accomplish what we would not be capable of doing on our own.

But most people suffer from a lack of holy boldness, a lack of courage, a lack of trust in Jesus' call and provision. For, it is much more comfortable to keep our feet firmly planted in the boat of tradition (otherwise known as "the way we've always done it!"), than to step out where the cool waters tickle that sensitive skin between our toes as we walk toward the glow of our Savior. Stepping out of the boat in faith can be the most terrifying and the most thrilling experience of life and faith. Yes, there will be times when even the most earnest believer will falter and lose faith. We lose confidence, we feel the water rising around us, and we need to plead for Christ to save us. Supporting one another by reminding each one in moments of doubt to keep one's eyes fixed on Jesus allows us once again to tap into God's power, and trust Jesus to lead us across the deep blue sea.

This church building was erected by those who were willing to take risks for the cause of Christ in the Kenmore community. Look around at this edifice. Can you image embarking on this kind of a building project prior to the days of power equipment? It took a tremendous amount of faith in the potential of the community of Christ-following water-walkers who were focused on a blue ocean strategy of bringing an un-churched community into a relationship with Jesus Christ. What holy boldness!!

Where is our holy boldness today? Two weeks ago, worshipers here were invited to start praying for a person that you would like to have join us in this community of faith. Are you ready to begin issuing that invitation, even if that person does not immediately respond positively? Are you willing to continue to pray for this person and their potential relationship with Christ, and issue multiple invitations? It may take repeated invitations and reassurance for that person to trust you enough to take your hand and step out of their boat.

This congregation will soon be embarking on a journey of spiritual visioning. Your prayerful support and your input are welcomed. I am beginning my prayers for this journey seeking for the Spirit of the Living God to reveal our next "blue ocean strategy." Are there ministries for which God has given us a passion during this season? Are we bold enough to speak out against racism, sexism, and violence? Are we burning with compassion for those who face addiction? Do we have a deep desire to offer faith-filled education? The questions, options, and opportunities are virtually endless.

The choice is ours... to know Christ as only a water-walker can, and align ourselves with God's purpose for our lives in the process. By the way, Do you know what they call a group of water-walkers? A bold and relevant Church of Christ! May it be so! Amen.