

“Faith Eyes”

Matthew 14:22-33

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January 13, 2019

You are in a small fishing boat two miles from the shore. It is 3:00 a.m., exhausted you are fighting a strong wind as wave after wave batters your boat. You see something on the water, but you can't reach for the flashlight, because it hasn't been invented yet. You wipe the water from the last wave from your eyes and peer into the darkness with sleep deprived eyes. You have never seen anything like this before, it almost looks like a person. You, a veteran fisherperson, are afraid. You hear a voice, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid,” at least that's what you think this something on the water said through the wind and sloshing waves. It sounds sort of like Jesus, but it can't be, we left him behind, on the shore with no boat last night. What would you do?

Fast reacting Peter suspects it is Jesus and says, “Lord, if, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” Would you do what Peter did? Or would you stay in the boat with the other disciples to wait and see what would happen next? Do you seek out courageous, risky, heart pounding ways to follow God or do you play it safe? Pastor John Ortberg reminds us, “If you want to walk on water you got to get out of the boat.”

Peter had faith eyes. Peter loved Jesus and listened intently to him over their many months together, so he was able to discern, despite all the noise, that this was Jesus. Sort of like a parent that knows their child's cry across a room crowded with crying children. Peter knew Jesus' mannerism which helped him discern that this shadowy image was his friend. One's regular prayer and fellowship with God in the good times enables us to see beyond our fear the ways God is supporting us in bad times. Peter grew to believe that Jesus was God. Capable of anything that even though logic says a person cannot walk on water and that the distance was too far for Jesus to cover in a few hours, his faith eyes knew anything and everything is possible with God.

Peter got out of the boat, focused his faith eyes on Jesus, and walked on water. Then he looked around, noticed the strong wind and waves, thought about how impossible it is to walk on water and began to sink. Now what would you do? Remember you are a fisherperson, an excellent swimmer and only a few feet from the safety of the boat. Your friends are watching from the boat ready at a moments notice to throw you a rope. I suspect I would have turned and swam for the boat. I am inspired again by Peter's faith eyes instead of trusting his own strength he trusted in Jesus, asking Jesus to save him, which Jesus does. Jesus carries Peter to the boat saying, “You of little faith, why did you doubt.” The verb translated doubt is only used twice in scripture, here and in the post-Easter appearance story. It literally means to be of a divided mind. Peter was divided, he had faith eyes, but he also had fears. Focus, concentration, and single mindedness is what gets one through the storms of life. If one's mind is divided and starts focusing on difficulties, it is then that one begins to sink.

My struggle with double-mindedness is not so much Jesus and fears rather Jesus and self-reliance. I probably would have swum for the boat. I get caught up in trying to be self-sufficient. In a tough situation is your first thought prayer, to reach out for God thinking with a single mind, you and me Jesus, together we will get through this ordeal or do you think I can make it on my own? I will do it my way and if that doesn't work, then God is a nice back up plan. Some of us dread giving up control, abandoning ourselves to God, admitting that we need God's grace, need the grace of others to live fully alive. Are you tempted to choose security over purpose, safety over risk, convenience over fairness, or comfort over service? Is your confidence in yourself, in others, or in Jesus?

This text is easy to misunderstand. I do not believe the text is saying if you have enough faith, you can walk on water or avoid storms or that even Jesus will remove you from the storm. Rather Jesus is always with us. If we have faith eyes we can sense his presence even in the midst of a storm, then we can develop a single-minded focus on Jesus. Now, we can be guided through any storm and God will bless our actions yielding some miraculous results.

There is another level of meaning to our text that our faith eyes can see when we consider the context. The previous day a hungry crowd of 5,000 to 10,000 people needed something to eat in the middle of the wilderness. Jesus told the disciples to feed them. After all Jesus called them to be fishers of people, to be a conduit through which people can be fed physically and spiritually. They replied impossible, we only have five loaves and two fish. They were not using their faith eyes. They were thinking as if they were alone. They

simply looked at the math, the resources available, and the resources needed. They were way short, so they proclaimed impossible it can't be done. Faith eyes does the math and then factors in God presence and the grace of God that can bridge the gap. Faith eyes enables one to focus on God's power rather than their inadequacies. Jesus blessed a meal of five loaves and two fish, fed the people and twelve baskets were left over. Jesus modeled how to care and serve people with love, then said you do it, use your God given gifts, your resources which all come from God and do God's work.

That evening Jesus told the disciples to cross over to the other side of the lake. No doubt to continue to fulfill their calling to nourish the people over there. Jesus is giving them another chance to develop their faith eyes. It's three o'clock in the morning. If I am up at three in the morning, I am either sick or my mind is racing against wave after wave of worry, uncertainty, or distress. The disciples were fighting the waves of their calling, to be fishers of people, to love all people, to feed and nourish all people. Sometimes being a disciple seems like rowing against the wind. Does my giving to feed the hungry really make a difference in the face of so much need? Is my love of all people really creating a more peaceful world? Does my service to the church really make a difference for eternity? Are my gifts to the church really worth the sacrifice of all I need to give up to make those gifts? If you let your mind splinter, soon your mind will be battered by waves of thoughts. You will become discouraged, hopeless, and fearful.

Discipleship is not easy. Do you remember how the disciples got into this predicament? How they found themselves in a sleepless storm at 3:00 in the morning? Scripture says, "Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead to the other side." Jesus sent them into the storm. Therefore, it is the obedient church that experiences the storm. It is the obedient who find themselves in troubled seas.

If you do not from time to time find yourself in a 3:00 a.m. storm tossing on your bed struggling against a storm within and without, then you are likely blissfully blind with a compartmentalized mind. If you truly look around you and at the world, you will see great need, great hunger. If you have been nurturing your relationship with Jesus, then you are experiencing great love and great nourishment. This puts you right where the disciples are in our story looking out at a hungry crowd. Jesus who has called them, called you, says feed them. Jesus sent the disciples and sends us into the storm. We find ourselves tossing with fearful thoughts. If I give sacrificially today to help others will my future be secure? If I invite someone to church, what if I am rejected? Is loving boldly worth the risk of a broken heart? If I share my faith, what will people think about me? If I am honest, ethical and a person of integrity, others may get ahead of me. Waves of counter God, worldly thoughts threaten to make us doubled minded. Thinking I am not worthy of God's forgiveness and love or I am not capable of fulfilling God's call, the need is too great or the resources too small, the tasks are too difficult or I keep messing up God is not able to help me get my life together and be a faithful disciple. Waves of doubt even for the church; doubting its buoyancy under waves of imperfection, financial struggles, splintering viewpoints, declining membership.

I could go on giving examples of waves within and without all morning, but what matters most is for you to identify your waves. Then, place yourself in the boat, surrounded by fellow disciples. What are you going to do? Blindly throw yourself into work frantically rowing. Give up, lose hope and sit there despondent. Replay your fears and worst case scenarios in your mind until you are crippled or paralyzed by fear. Or will you look with your faith eyes believing that God is with you and is making a way for you to overcome the waves to walk on top of them. Along the way, a big wave will likely knock you down causing you to sink. What will you do? Will you focus on the cost of discipleship and swim for safety or will you reach out to Jesus and let Jesus pull you up, so you can face the next wave together with God, with a single-minded trust and faith.

Peter recognized Jesus, jumped out of the boat and walked on the water. Then a wave knocked him down. Peter lost sight of Jesus and began to sink. He cried, Jesus save me! Jesus didn't hesitate. He reached down and grabbed his hand. Then he said, "Faint heart, what distracted you?" Together the two of them climbed into the boat and the waves ceased. Together Peter and Jesus went through numerous storms, denial three times, crucifixion, persecution and even death to name a few but together they got through it all. Peter is called the rock the church is built on, a model of how we can develop our faith eyes, nurturing a single-minded focus on Jesus and walking on the waves of life. When a 3 o'clock in the morning storm strikes you, when everything seems contrary, Jesus is with you eager to take you by the hand. You cannot avoid the storms of life, but you can be certain that Jesus will hold your hand and guide you through.

Matthew 14:22-33 NLT “Immediately after this, Jesus insisted that his disciples get back into the boat and cross to the other side of the lake, while he sent the people home. After sending them home, Jesus went up into the hills by himself to pray. Night fell while he was there alone. Meanwhile, the disciples were in trouble far away from land, for a strong wind had risen, and they were fighting heavy waves. About three o’clock in the morning Jesus came toward them, walking on the water. When the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water, they were terrified. In their fear, they cried out, “It’s a ghost!” But Jesus spoke to them at once. “Don’t be afraid,” he said. “Take courage. I am here!” Then Peter called to him, “Lord, if it’s really you, tell me to come to you, walking on the water.” “Yes, come,” Jesus said. So Peter went over the side of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus. But when Peter saw the strong wind and the waves, Peter was terrified and began to sink. “Save me, Lord!” he shouted. Jesus immediately reached out and grabbed Peter. “You have so little faith,” Jesus said. “Why did you doubt me?” When they climbed back into the boat, the wind stopped. Then the disciples worshiped Jesus. “You really are the Son of God!” they exclaimed. Amen