



## **"Look, I'm doing it!" We are capable of amazing things if we can let go of our fear**

Sermon for Sunday, August 9, 2020 (10th Sunday After Pentecost, Proper 14A, Track 2)  
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Today's Gospel reading about Jesus walking on water is one of the most famous stories in scripture. There are countless representations of it in art, and it has made its way into our everyday language as an idiomatic expression for being idolized or worshipped: "His fans think he can walk on water!" We often read this passage as a story about Jesus's divinity, but today I'm going to suggest we look at it as a story about Peter, and by extension, all of us, and our life of faith.

Although we tend to think of Jesus's ability to walk on water as one of the "proofs" that he was God, we forget that, according to Matthew's account, Peter was also able to walk on water, however short-lived his journey out of the boat was. Perhaps this was Jesus's way of showing the disciples what amazing things they would be capable of doing if they could let go of fear and be completely and totally focused on God.

Notice what happens to Peter. He is able to walk on the water after Jesus calls him, but when he notices the strong wind and becomes frightened, he starts to sink. It is his fear, and the distraction from his focus that that fear causes, that thwarts his attempt to walk on water.

I can imagine a bit of what Peter might have felt in that moment, and I bet you can too. If you have ever learned to ride a bike or helped a child learn to ride a bike, you know how much of that initial inability to balance is psychological, how much fear plays into the constant falls and skinned knees.

The first time I got on a bike without training wheels, I put my feet up on the pedals and promptly fell over sideways. After slamming into the concrete, I was wary about getting back in the saddle again, so my father quickly intervened and assured me that he would hold on to the back of my seat while I pedaled, to keep me upright and balanced. He did so, and knowing

that my dad was behind me, holding on to me so that I couldn't fall, I pedaled happily around the driveway for some time, enjoying myself and feeling safe, until suddenly I noticed my dad was on the other side of the driveway! And he wasn't holding on to me anymore! My parents beamed with pride – “Look, you're doing it!” they cried – and then of course, I promptly fell over again.

As soon as I realized I wasn't being held, as soon as I realized what I was actually doing, the fear returned. It distracted me from my focus, and I fell.

Years later, I experienced the same dynamic in my practice of yoga. When trying to do balancing poses, like crow pose (where you perch your body on top of your forearms) or headstand, the teacher would often tell us to lean forward into the pose. That was really hard to do, because it felt like if I did that, I would fall flat on my face! But if I just listened and trusted that the instructor knew what they were talking about and did what they asked me to do, I found that they were right – the balance point is there, just a bit farther forward than feels comfortable.

Once I was working on a headstand in class, and had the teacher spot me – and when I realized she wasn't holding on to me anymore, that I was actually there, hanging out in a headstand, I started to fall. It was like being a child learning to ride that bike again – “Look, I'm doing it – um, wait a minute – help!!”

I'm sure many of you know the feeling of that moment – that moment where you realize you're doing something you didn't think you could do, without the support you thought you had, and the realization of that shakes you. The fear returns, it makes you lose your focus, and suddenly, you aren't able to do whatever it was you were doing anymore.

I can imagine that that feeling is what Peter felt in that moment where he suddenly realized, “Look! I'm walking on water here in the middle of a storm... um, wait a minute, HELP!”

As we follow Jesus, we are constantly learning to walk on water – to do what seems impossible to us, to let go of fear and step out in trust.

Just like my yoga instructor, Jesus is constantly telling us do things that sound like they will make us fall flat on our faces. You want me to lean

*forward* when I already feel like I'm falling? You want me to come to you on the water? You want me to love my enemies, pray for those who persecute me, give my cloak to someone who has already stolen my coat? The fear that drives our instinct for self-preservation kicks in and we think, "If I do what you're telling me, I'm going to get hurt!"

Following the teachings of Jesus can seem just as difficult as walking on water, and require just as much trust and suspension of our natural instincts.

Even when we DO begin to do these things, when we actually trust Jesus enough to take a small step toward putting one of his difficult teaching like loving our enemies into practice, the realization of what we're doing can throw us off. Suddenly we look back and think: "What did I just do? I just gave up an opportunity to get revenge on someone who hurt me? What if they hurt me again?" We feel vulnerable, and we get scared, and we start to sink.

But the good news is that Jesus is always there, ready to catch us, saying, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." And as he catches us, he reminds us of where our focus ought to be: on him.

It was when Peter was completely and totally focused on Jesus that he was able to step out onto the stormy waters and not be overtaken by them. We too must have that kind of focus on Jesus, so that we can overcome the fear that would prevent us from living the way he calls us to live.

If we can let go of fear and turn our complete focus on Jesus, we too can prevail over the stormy waters. As we step out of the boat, we will look over and see the Father beaming with pride and saying, "Look! You're doing it!" And this time, maybe we won't fall.