

Boat People

Written by Ben Roberts

Jesus Walks on Water. (Matt. 14: 22-36)

Immediately he made the disciples get into a 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 the land,[a] 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." When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret. After the people of that place recognized him, they sent word to that whole surrounding region, and people brought all who were sick to him and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.

This story plays out in a very particular way in my head. Specifically, it is a Looney Tunes cartoon with the Road Runner and Willie E. Coyote. In this scenario, Jesus is the road runner and Peter is the coyote. The roadrunner zips across the water on sum unseen structure. The coyote follows the same trajectory fine, until he looks down and sees how crazy this is and immediately sinks into the lake.

Do I see myself as the roadrunner? Nope. The coyote? Nope. I am safely in the boat with the other 11 disciples.

While the other disciples did not jump out of the boat, it is important to remember that they were in the boat. They had devoted their lives to Jesus and were following him. Ultimately most of them would be martyred while building this faith. But in this moment, doubt and common sense won out over a leap of faith.

So what would get them out of the boat? It appears that repeated failure ultimately led to success. Throughout the gospels we see examples like this of the disciples doubting or missing the point of Jesus' actions. But with one notable exception, they all kept at it.

They failed early. They failed often. Until they got it. And then the 11 along with Jesus' other followers transform the world.

I sometimes wonder if I saw a bonafide miracle if it would transform my faith. I have had my share of faith highs over the years. Moments when I thought everything would change. Yet repeatedly, I failed to step into the water. But maybe that is the path. Maybe repeated failure is a necessary part of spiritual transformation. What if being in the boat is the important thing. It is only by putting myself in situations where I am tested, that I have the opportunity to fail, and fail, and fail again...

Until some day, I won't.

Prayer: Jesus thank you for repeatedly showing me your ways, in spite of my failures. Help me to stay on the path, until the day I get it.