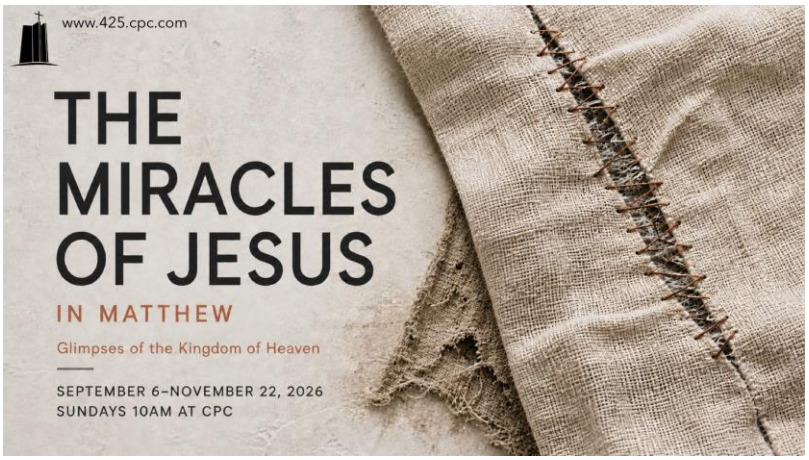


Walking on the Sea
Matthew 14:22-33

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**This original sermon is not A.I. generated*

We're looking at the miracles of Jesus in Matthew, and this message is Part Two of the nature miracles. Last week we looked at Jesus' calming the raging storm. This week we'll look at Jesus' and Peter's walking on stormy waters.

The miracles over nature show us Jesus' power over nature. The natural order does not have dominion over Jesus; it's the other way around. We should connect these miracle stories to God's power to create in Genesis, his power over nature to set his people free from slavery in Exodus, and especially in the parting of the Red Sea. We should connect to the miraculous crossing of the Jordan, and the Lord's stopping of the sun in Joshua. We should bring to mind the miracles from Elisha and Elijah over nature, like the raising of the iron axe head from the bottom of a lake so that it floated on the waters in 2 Kings 6. The gospels tell us that Jesus performed miracles like these; in fact, the NT tells us that Jesus is the Creator; through him, all things are created, and he sustains the world and everything in it. These miracles over nature give us a glimpse of the Creator King and his kingdom. Most importantly, they show us glimpses of the new heaven and new earth, where God will settle his groaning and unsettled creation.

Our miracle story this morning is from Matthew 14:22-27. This is directly after Jesus fed the 5,000. The disciples and Jesus were already tired after a long day of ministry and miracles. After they dismissed the crowds, Jesus made his disciples get into the boat to go to the other side, while he went up on a mountain to pray.

The disciples get to the middle of the lake, and they're hit with a storm, this time without Jesus in the boat. They battle the storm all through the night until Jesus comes out walking on the stormy waters sometime between 3am and 6am. They think they're seeing a ghost, but Jesus immediately speaks to them, "it is I!" and Peter decides to take the most premature, biggest step of faith in his Christian life—he walks on stormy waters to get to Jesus. This is a story about walking on stormy waters to come to Jesus.

Let's get to the story. I invite you to open to Matthew 14:22-33 (NIV).

22 Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side,
while he dismissed the crowd. 23 After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by
himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, 24 and the boat was already a considerable
distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.
25 Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. 26 When the disciples saw him
walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear.
27 But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

28 “Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.”
29 “Come,” he said.
Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. 30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”
31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?”
32 And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. 33 Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”
The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Mt 14:22–33.

The Word of God for the people of God.

The King Comes into the Storm (Matthew 14:22–27)

Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him-- key word: "made." The literal Greek word there is "compelled." Jesus, for whatever reason, had to compel his disciples to get into the boat without him. I think this was a real faith-building moment for the disciples. They had already experienced that raging storm that Jesus calmed, maybe that was in the back of their minds as they pushed off into the darkening night. No sooner did they get out to the middle of the sea, and wouldn't you know it? A fierce storm comes upon them again! Why, after a long day of ministry work, would Jesus knowingly push them off to sea by themselves into an oncoming storm?

Once again, we see in these gospel stories that following Jesus does not mean you are exempt from battling storms or frightening circumstances. There's always a purpose though. This all-nighter fighting the storm sets the stage for new revelations about Jesus. That is something we need to understand. Our nightly battles are bringing us to new places where Christ's presence will show up in ways we never expected. We'll see in this story that sometimes Christ sends us into storms and then calls us to come to him in impossible paths through the storm.

What was Jesus doing the entire time the disciples were rowing against this storm and getting nowhere? He was on the mountain praying. We don't know what Jesus was praying but I imagine that praying for his disciples had crossed his mind. Rom. 8:34 says that Jesus is at the right hand of God interceding for us. In other words, Jesus is on our side through every trouble, hardship, and danger.

The disciples battled against the storm all night then just before dawn, Jesus miraculously walks out on the stormy sea to them. Now, the sea in ancient Jewish thought was the birthplace of chaos. It was synonymous with unrest, danger, and unpredictability. The sea was untamed nature. It was uncontrollable.

Waters in the OT were also used in judgment. In Gen. 6 the Lord judged the whole world with a flood. In Ex. 14 the parted Red Sea came crashing down on the Egyptian army. Jonah was thrown into the depths of the sea for his rebellion.

So, the sea was thought to be uncontrollable chaos; it was used in judgment, and the sea was also used to symbolize evil raging against God and his people. Is. 17:12 says, "woe to the many nations that rage-- they rage like the raging sea." Other symbols include the great sea monster, Leviathan, which

symbolizes Satan (Is. 27:1), and the beast rising out of the sea in Revelation 13, which symbolizes satanic power rising out of chaos and evil.

The Jews understood the sea to be under the complete control of Yahweh. God created the seas, bringing order from chaos. Job 9:8 says, "He alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea." Ps. 77:19 says, "your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen."

That's a lot of information about the sea, but Jesus' walking on the stormy sea connects to the God who has dominion over the seas. Symbolically, it shows his dominion over the realm of chaos and evil that terrified the whole ancient world. As well, his walking on the stormy sea demonstrates his power over nature. It connects Jesus to the creation story in Gen. 1, where the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters ready to speak the world into existence. Heb. 1:3 says that he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

For us, nature seems to uphold everything, and we live under its rule. It's very hard to believe that the laws of physics can be nullified or changed by anything let alone an invisible God. Biblical theology tells us that Jesus upholds nature, and nature lives under Jesus' rule. Science says the universe and all its natural laws are governed by principles; biblical theology says all creation is governed and held together by a person, Jesus. His walking on a stormy sea encourages us to recognize that even the unpredictable forces of nature are well in his control, and even under his feet! Amen!

In vs. 26, the disciples see Jesus walking on the lake and they're terrified-- "it's a GHOST!" They scream out. Fear takes over and their vision gets distorted. A side note about that; fear will always distort your perception of reality. Fear can make you think someone's stalking you when there's no one there. Fear can turn your closet at night into a haven for monsters. Fear turned Jesus into a ghost.

In vs. 27, Jesus immediately speaks to them, “Take courage, it is I’ - "Ego Eimi" in Greek, this is literally translated as "I Am." Where have you heard that before? This is considered by many scholars to be a legitimate 'I Am’ statement from Jesus (Ex. 3:14). The "I Am" statements from Jesus identify him as one with the God of the Hebrews. The famous "I Am" statements are I Am the bread of life; I am the Door; I Am the light of the world; I am the way, the truth, the life; I am the good shepherd; I am the resurrection and the life; I am the true vine. Here, Jesus walks on a stormy dark sea like a ghost over the waters and speaks the words, "I Am" to his disciples.

"Take courage my disciples, I Am!" It is still dark and stormy, but Jesus' words, "I Am" say that there is a greater presence that has made its way into that chaos. A greater presence is brooding over the stormy sea and it's not a ghost or a figment of the imagination.

The King Calls Us to Come to Him (Matthew 14:28–30a)

Peter, in a great leap of very, very premature faith, says, “Lord, if it’s you, tell me to come to you on the water.” If Peter thought Jesus was just a man, there’s no way he would ask him to call him onto the water. Peter had a moment of recognition that this Jesus, if he was truly Jesus, was the Son of God, and if he was truly the Great I Am, he could call him out on that stormy sea to him. At that moment, Peter was compelled to come to Jesus, but an impossible path stood between him and Jesus.

When Jesus compels us to come to him, we often see impossible paths between us and him. Peter was compelled by Jesus, but there was an impossible path between him and Jesus. There might be somebody listening to this who has never come to Jesus-- and there's something compelling about Jesus, you feel a little tinge in your heart that makes you look his way... but maybe that path between you and Jesus looks like an impossible stormy sea to cross. Don't be afraid to take that step toward Jesus. Step out into these stormy waters of the unknown. Jesus won't let you step into that impossible path without his presence there with you.

Peter said, "tell me to come to you on the water." Peter wasn't acting out of blind faith, and for as flawed as Peter was at this moment, there's a gold nugget for us in this. Faith is not blind; faith always moves toward Christ in response to Christ's compelling call. Without Christ's compelling, faith is blind. With Christ's compelling, faith is never blind, but we still have to act on that faith.

Jesus said to Peter, “Come.” Peter heard that one word, it was all he needed, and he boldly got out of the boat... a huge step of momentary faith— a great momentary faith— and he walked on the water toward Jesus. Jesus sustained and upheld his every impossible step on that stormy sea. This was a huge but momentary measure of faith. Peter’s great, momentary faith was only momentary. A few steps in, he saw the power of the wind, he felt the power of a tumultuous sea under his feet. He probably imagined a sea monster waking up under his feet. He might have thought, "What have I done???" My friends, when you step out in faith like this toward Jesus, a few steps in reality will hit, and you're going to think to yourself, "What in the world have I just done!"

Peter's great faith turned to fear and that fear broke his faith. He took his eyes off Jesus and sank. Fear distorted his reality again-- or maybe fear brought him back to reality-- I don't know which is which, but nature and gravity took over as it usually does! Peter failed and started to sink because his trust in Jesus failed, not because nature took over.

My friends, we cannot carry ourselves through impossible paths without trusting fully in Christ. The Lord holds us above what would naturally drown us. Is. 43:1-3 says, "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior."

The King Catches, Saves, and Receives Worship (Matthew 14:30b–33)

Peter cried out, “Lord Save me!” Jesus caught him immediately. Even when the Lord calls you out into a stormy sea to do the impossible, when your faith falters, he is there to catch you. Yes, Jesus caught him but notice that Jesus did not affirm Peter's great but short-lived faith— that great faith was not a sustaining faith, it was only momentary. Instead, Jesus exposed the real problem of Peter’s short-lived faith. He immediately said to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” In reality, Peter’s faith was still not strong enough to overcome his fear and doubt.

They climb back into the boat together and instantly the wind dies down— another miracle— and the rest of the boat trip turns into a worship service. I think we might gloss over this little missing detail, but Jesus caught Peter when his faith lapsed, and they both walked back to the boat together on a sea that was still tossing and turning. That speaks encouragement to me. When we take our eyes off Jesus--

which I have done way too many times-- and when stormy circumstances all around distort and break our faith, we can turn our eyes back to Jesus and cry out, “Save me Lord!” He is there to catch us. Ps. 18:16 says, "He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters."

He will catch us but he doesn't leave us off the hook, and I love that about Jesus. He catches our fall but the disciplining words come quickly to our ears. Heb. 12:6 says, "the Lord disciplines the one he loves." He will continue to disciple us, teach us, and show us where we lack and how we can grow. Falling is a part of our walk with Jesus. Walking on an impossible stormy sea is a part of our walk with Jesus.

My friends, when we step out into that stormy sea to come to Jesus and it ends in one big shameful, embarrassing splash in front of everyone, how should we respond? In vs. 33 — the disciples, including the failure, Peter, worshipped Jesus together. Our response to fear and failure is coming back to worship. We worship him and acknowledge that he is truly the Son of God. Worship is the best and only response when our faith has been broken by fear. Worship places God above and us below. When your faith has been broken by fear and doubt— worship the Son of God. Fear and doubt break faith, worship breaks the chaos of fear and doubt. Amen!

I want to finish by connecting this to the new heaven and new earth. This story gives a glimpse of the nature of the kingdom of heaven and its King. Right now, creation still groans unpredictably, and we can't control it. That stormy sea represents the chaos of nature's anger lashing out in frustration over an unsettled world.

Rev. 21:1 says, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea." The old sea that birthed such chaos will pass away— this is symbolic language. What it means is that untamed chaos will be no more. Nature and the dangers of the sea will no longer wreak havoc on God’s people. In fact, like Peter demonstrated in those moments of walking on water with Jesus, we will rule with Christ over all creation in our new bodies in the new heaven and new earth. In fact, I think we will rule over whatever laws of physics God makes in the new heaven and new earth. We won’t have to run and hide from an angry, crazed nature because our new world will be settled and at peace.

Here's something amazing about waters in the new creation. The waters in the Kingdom of heaven represent life, peace, and wholeness rather than evil and judgment. Rev. 21 says that a river of the water of life flows through the new Jerusalem. Is. 55 says, "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters.... Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you... you will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Instead of thornbushes will grow the juniper, and instead of briers the myrtle will grow." Amen.

Let's pray.

Study Questions
Read Matthew 14:22-33

Observation

1) What did Jesus compel the disciples to do after dismissing the crowd?
2) Where was Jesus while the disciples battled the wind through the night?
3) What did the disciples call Jesus when they saw him walking on the lake?
4) What happened when Jesus and Peter climbed into the boat?

Interpretation

1) How does Jesus walking on the sea reveal his dominion over chaos and nature?
2) Why does the sermon connect Jesus' "I Am" to God's name in Exodus?
3) Why was Peter's faith not blind when he stepped from the boat?
4) What does Jesus' question expose about Peter's momentary faith?

Application

1) How has fear distorted your perception of Christ or your circumstances?
2) What impossible path may Christ be compelling you to take toward him?
3) If or when your faith falters in front of many, how should you respond?
4) How can worship answer your fear, doubt, or embarrassing failure?