

Mountains and Lakes

Week 7: Jesus Walks on Water (ProP)

Matthew 14:22-36

Incredible week at Hilltop.

- Thanks for praying and reaching out!
- Dorm dad with Wesley Spicer and Dylan Stegemoller. We had 15 loud, rambunctious, fun boys in our room. They made me promise I'd come back next year to be their dorm dad, so it looks like we'll be running it back in 2026.
- Turned 45 on Wednesday. Can honestly say it was one of the best birthday's I've ever had. Won't say who, but may or may not be the daughter of someone who led us in worship this morning. When she found out I was 45, she said, "Oh, yikes!"
- All the heat, mugginess, lack of sleep, strange smells...all worth it for these moments...(show camp picture)

Last week took me back to my early days of ministry working with kids and students. My very first ministry was at Shakamak Community Church in Jasonville, Indiana. If you've ever been to the State Park, you pass right by it. It was a part-time ministry that I did during my last 2 years of college.

They had a house next to the church that they let me live in and paid me with a love offering. I just hoped each week there was enough in the box for gas and a little food for the trip to and from campus.

My faith and trust in the Lord grew so much during those days. The Lord was stretching my faith and teaching me new things. I've shared this story before, but Jasonville had one of those little greasy-spoon diners where all the older farmers in town would gather for breakfast every morning to talk about the weather and current events and solve the world's problems. It was one of those places that, as a young, college kid not from around there, I didn't really fit in.

But one Friday night, as I was falling asleep, I couldn't shake this feeling that the Lord wanted me to go have breakfast there the next morning. It was this totally random thought that just popped into my head and I couldn't make it go away. I remember arguing with God, "I'll stick out like sore thumb! What would I even say? I'd feel weird just eating there by myself." But, the nudge didn't go away, so I took a step of faith and set my alarm.

The next morning, the alarm goes off, I reach over and hit the snooze button. Nine minutes later, it goes off again...snooze. I do that a few more times until I finally just turned it off, rolled over, and went back to sleep. I never went.

And I think about that silly little moment quite a bit and wonder what I missed out on. If there was a conversation that God had teed up for me. A chance to connect with someone. Encourage someone. Be challenged by someone. I don't feel shame or guilt about not going, just curiosity about what would have happened if I'd taken that next step of faith.

Setting my alarm that night was the first step of faith, but I just didn't have the courage to take the next one. We've probably all been in that place where we felt the Lord leading us to do something, but we hesitated. We pulled back and played it safe instead. Maybe you were afraid of looking foolish, like I was. Or maybe you were afraid of failing or what others might think.

Maybe you doubted and decided not to follow through. Was it really God leading you, or just a feeling you had? Or you wondered if God would show up when things got tough. Walking by faith can sometimes feel like cutting the safety net from underneath the tightrope, and you just weren't sure that God would be there to catch you if you started to fall.

We've probably all been there before. We've stayed where it's safe instead of taking the risk. We've watched others step out on faith wishing could do the same. Having faith (head) in the Lord is easy...walking by faith in the Lord requires a little more.

The author of Hebrews says that faith is *...confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see (Hebrews 11:1)*. Faith isn't about having all the answers. It's about trusting God enough to take a step, even when we don't know, or can't see, how it's all going to work out. This is the kind of faith that Jesus is constantly inviting us into. It's a faith that's not just about sitting back and believing things in your head, but actually walking in the confidence and assurance of what we believe to be true.

And so, more often than not, our faith doesn't grow when we're sitting in here, or attending a Bible study or group. Our faith grows when we step out of our comfort zone and start putting it into action. In other words, *Faith grows when feet move*.

I think that's what we see in our text today, Matthew 14. Jesus has just finished feeding the 5,000 with 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish, which we talked about last week. Matthew continues the account in verse 22...*(READ vs. 22-24)*

- Jesus' humanity and humility is on full display.
 - Humanity: as we've said, he's TIRED. Draining, demanding season of life and ministry. He needs rest.
 - Humility: John's Gospel tells us the crowd wanted to make Jesus king by force. Jesus resists and sends everyone away, even his disciples, and goes up the mountain to pray.

- Vs. 22 - “Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat...”
 - Strong, forceful language.
 - Continued to be compassionate to the crowd, but was pretty direct with his disciples.
- Jesus goes to spend some time with God to rest and refill, but he sends his disciples right into some hardship.
 - Wind was blowing against them.
 - “Buffeted” means tormented, tortured. Mark’s Gospel says they were “straining at the oars.”

I read this and I realize an uncomfortable truth about following Jesus... Sometimes Jesus leads us into situations that will stretch our faith. Jesus sends his disciples away, likely late at night. It’s dark, the winds and waves are pushing against them. He sends them into a situation that’s not easy, but he does it to teach them something they couldn’t fully learn from the safety of the shore.

And after some quiet time with the Father, Jesus goes to join them. Verse 25...(READ vs. 25-27)

The disciples are probably a few miles off shore. It’s still dark outside and their exhausted from being tormented by the wind and waves. They look up and see this shadowy figure walking towards them. They don’t recognize that it’s Jesus and they’re terrified. Jesus shares one of his favorite greetings, “Take courage. Don’t be afraid.” I’m just walking on water, in the middle of the lake. It’s all a little unbelievable, so Peter says...(READ vs. 28-31)

Now, if I were Peter, I’d be looking around like, “Wait, you’re not talking to me, right?! When you say ‘Little faith,’ you’re obviously talking about the guys still dry because they stayed in the boat!”

But I think when Jesus says, “You of little faith...” he’s not insulting Peter. He’s just making an observation. The faith Peter had to step out of the boat wasn’t the faith he needed to continue walking on water. That required deeper trust and faith than Peter had as the wind and waves started to push against him. He became afraid and started to doubt.

But, even in the midst of the chaos around him, when Peter begins to sink and cries out for help, Jesus reaches out and grabs him. His step of faith wasn’t perfect, but it grew his faith because he was willing to move his feet. Vs. 32...(READ vs. 32-33)

Peter is sitting there cold and wet and probably feeling like a bit of a failure, but his step of faith, as imperfect as it was, drew him and his friends closer to Jesus. Verse 33 is the first time the disciples make this confession of faith that Jesus is the Son of God.

Some of them had heard God say it at Jesus' baptism, they heard Jesus allude to it a while back, but there was something about seeing Jesus in that moment and watching Peter take that step of faith towards him, even though it didn't go the way he wanted...there was something about it that made the dots connect and the lightbulb go on that Jesus is the Son of God.

And, I imagine that this step of faith Peter took, even though it felt like 2 steps forward and one step back, this step of faith prepared him for bigger steps he'd take later. Peter didn't walk on water again, but his faith led him to preach, heal, and stand boldly in the face of the persecution and hardships he'd come against for following Jesus.

Faith grows when feet move, and Peter's faith grew that day as he stepped out of the boat and put action to what he believed. I think what we see in Peter's life, and this account is that steps of faith, even messy ones where we don't get it all right, lead us to trust in Jesus more deeply than if we'd just stood still.

As we close out today, I just want us to focus on this question...**what's one step of faith Jesus is inviting you to take?** (Leave on screen)

- Starting a spiritual conversation with someone. Inviting them over for dinner or having a block party in your neighborhood just to form friendships the Lord might want to use.
- Serving where you feel unqualified? (Writing letters tonight, FGA?)
- Forgiving someone who hurt you?
- Taking a risky step of generosity that the Lord has laid on your heart?
- Beginning a new habit, or finally taking steps to quit an old, worn down one.

What's one step of faith Jesus is inviting you to take? And then, follow up question, **what's keeping you from it?**

Peter climbed out of the boat, feet on top of the water, heart pounding, eyes fixed on Jesus, but as soon as he started focusing on the wind and waves surrounding him, he lost his confidence in what he hoped for and assurance of what he couldn't see. What's making you lose confidence and assurance in Jesus and keeping you from taking your next step of faith? Fear? Doubt? You've tried before and failed?

Faith grows when feet move, and I just want to challenge you, this week, to move your feet, get out of the boat, get off the sideline, and take that step of faith Jesus is inviting you to take.

I've learned a lot about this in the 20+ years since that morning I turned off my alarm. My faith journey has continued to be a process of taking two steps forward and one step back, but I've learned something each time that Jesus has used to grow my faith and trust in Him. Things I wouldn't have learned if I'd continued to just play it safe.

One of the things I'm learning is to act on those little nudges, even when it makes me a little uncomfortable.

A couple of weeks ago, I was having breakfast with sweet Claudia Mitchell. We'd struck up a conversation with our server as she would come by to fill our coffee, and as she brought the check, I felt that same nudge I felt all those years ago. This time it was simply, *Ask how you can pray for her.*

I didn't want it to be awkward for her, but I also didn't want to miss an opportunity, so I said a quick prayer. Something like, "Lord, this better be from you!" and I said, "Hey, is there anything we can be praying about for you today?"

She paused, took a deep breath, and started opening up about some things she was going through. I said, "Thanks for sharing. We'll definitely be praying." She said, "Oh, thank you" and just closed her eyes and bowed her head right there. And I was like, *Okay, we're doing this now!* So I prayed for her right there at the table.

When I finished, she had tears in her eyes. It wasn't a big, flashy moment, it was just a small step, but my faith grew because of it, and I've been praying since then that hers has, too. That maybe she was able to experience Jesus that day in a way that will make her say, "Truly, Jesus is the Son of God who loves me and has pursued my heart."

Response Setup

Invitation – Next step is to take your first step to Jesus?

Communion – Reminds us that before we took a step of faith towards Him, Jesus stepped towards us. He didn't stay in the safety of heaven. He stepped into our world, into our suffering and pain, into death, so that we could find new life in Him.

Every step of faith we take is simply in response to first step Jesus took towards us.