

Transformed by knowing Jesus: Peter

Message for Sunday, March 3, 2013

Scripture: Matthew 14:22-33

Children's Message: from Eldon Weisheit, *The Gospel For Kids - Series A*.

I want someone to help me as I talk a bit about the next reading from the bible that we will have today. Who will help out? (Take out rope from bag)... First I want you to hold onto this rope. Hold on as if you were climbing a cliff and needed it so you would not fall.... Good - remember now - hold onto it or you will fall - isn't that right. (Quietly take out the ball)

Now - (catch this ball....)

What happened? Did he/she drop the rope to catch the ball? Or hold onto the rope? She/he had to make a choice didn't he/she?

In the Bible reading we saw Peter doing something that is incredible - at the command of Jesus he gets out of a boat in a storm tossed lake - and walks on water towards Jesus. And everything is fine as long as he is looking at Jesus - but when he looks around at the wind and waves - he begins to sink. Jesus reaches out his hand and rescues him and then gently chides him for not having enough faith - for looking at the water and the wind rather than at him.

Peter forgot what he was doing - he made a choice to look away from Jesus - and he began to perish. Our choices are the same - to do what Jesus calls us to do - or to get distracted - and maybe to start sinking - even though God gives us the power to conquer even the greatest storms....

Sermon: "Transformed by knowing Jesus: Peter"¹

Part 1: Peter's story

My dear friend John was here last week, and told you how he met Jesus, and how he was changed. We worked alongside each other for some years, so we knew each other pretty well. He was the dreamer, with big ideas and, if I may say so, a big ego to go with it. Me, I was pretty cocky, ready to try anything. Sometimes I bit off more than I could chew, but it usually came out alright in the end. Life was certainly interesting.

¹ Many of the ideas in this message come from John Ortberg's book *If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat*. Wonderful writer; highly recommended!

Jesus asked me and my brother Andrew to be his followers the same day as he did John and his brother James. John already told you a lot of the things we did, so I won't bore you by repeating all that.

There is one day — one night, actually — the memory of which I will carry with me forever. No, it's not the night when I bragged about how I would never leave Jesus, but always be faithful to him. I would even die for Jesus! Then that very night, just a few hours later, I turned coward when a serving girl said I was one of his followers. That's a story for another day. [See Matthew 26:33-35, 69-75]

What I'm thinking about is the night when I walked on water. Really!

The day started badly; we received the news that King Herod had executed John the Baptist, who was very close to Jesus. We got in a boat and went down the lake to have some private time. But the people on shore could see where we went, and when we landed there was a huge crowd waiting for us, thousands of people. Many of them had brought family members who were sick, and Jesus spent hours going among them, touching them and healing them. When it was time for supper, Jesus did the miracle of turning a few loaves of bread and some fish into a feast where everyone had plenty to eat. Finally, it was getting dark and he sent the people home.

We were exhausted; Jesus in particular was drained empty. He told us to take the boat and cross to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. He was going to spend the night in prayer, getting some badly needed time with his Father. I always found that interesting: you'd think what he needed most was a good night's sleep; but with Jesus, prayer was better than sleep or food.

He said he would catch up with us later. That struck me as odd at the time because he didn't have a boat; but I didn't think anymore about it. Maybe he had arranged a ride with someone.

We started sailing across the Sea, but when we got to about the middle, a big storm blew up. It was pushing us back the way we had come, so we had to start rowing. We were pulling with all our might, and barely making progress. The wind was getting stronger and the waves were getting bigger.

As if that wasn't trouble enough, all of a sudden, we saw a ghost coming towards us across the water. We were terrified, and began screaming in fear. Oh, if only Jesus were here! He would know what to do.

The "ghost" called out to us in that familiar voice we had come to love: "Take courage! It is I; don't be

afraid.” It was Jesus, coming to meet us, walking on the water!

We all stared in amazement, straining our eyes to see if it really was him. Without thinking, I called out, “Lord, if it is really you, order me to come out on the water to you.”

Jesus answered simply, “Come.”

The others were staring at me now, wondering if I was insane. I went to the side of the boat, stepped over the edge, and planted my feet firmly on the water. That’s right: *firmly on the water!* I started walking towards him, eager to be with him.

I can’t believe it. Nobody thought I’d actually get out of the boat. I didn’t think I’d do it myself. When I let go of the side, it was the hardest thing I’ve ever done. I was afraid I’d die. Yet now I find myself actually doing what Jesus is doing. I don’t know how it’s working—I’m not walking any differently. Yet something . . . Someone . . . is holding me up. I think I’m beginning to understand now. It is true. He really is the One. I don’t see how things can ever be the same after this.

Jesus is nodding at me, beckoning me to keep coming. He has a big grin, and his whole face is beaming.

That’s when it suddenly hit me: *What am I walking on?* A huge wave came rushing toward me. I looked down at my feet to see what was there. The moment I took my eyes off Jesus, the firm water underneath me became a drain, pulling me under. The wave crashed over me. I was going down. *What was I thinking!*

I cried out, “Lord, save me!”

In that moment, Jesus was at my side and grabbed hold of me, holding me up. He said to me, “What little faith you have! Why did you doubt?”

We got back into the boat, and immediately the wind died down and the water became calm. We all exclaimed, “Truly you are the Son of God!”

So I failed. I didn’t have enough faith to completely trust Jesus. But for that moment — I’ll never forget those few seconds — *I walked on water!* Jesus gave me this precious gift of experiencing what his power can do in a person’s life. And you know, in a way I gave a gift to Jesus: the gift of seeing one of his followers *really* trusting him. The look on his face while I did that was priceless.

Part 2: Our story

Peter knew the joy and freedom of experiencing God’s power after taking an enormous risk. Peter isn’t the only one who has taken bold steps of faith to follow Jesus. Many in this congregation are doing the same. Wonderful! Bless you!

Question: Did Peter fail? It depends what we mean by “fail.” I want to say that failure is not an event, but rather a judgment about an event. Failure is not something that happens to us; it’s the label we put on what happened.

Before Jonas Salk developed a vaccine for polio that finally worked, he tried two hundred unsuccessful ones. Somebody asked him, “How did it feel to fail two hundred times?”

“I never failed two hundred times in my life,” Salk replied. “I was taught not to use the word ‘failure.’ I just discovered two hundred ways how not to vaccinate for polio.”

Did Peter fail? Maybe; maybe not. But one thing is for sure: he knew the glory of being lifted up by Jesus in a moment of desperate need. The others were spectators; they didn’t have that experience. Peter knew, in a way the others could not, that in the future when he sank, Jesus would be completely adequate to save him. He need not worry about anything.

They couldn’t know that, because they didn’t even get out of the boat. The worst failure is not to sink in the waves. The worst failure is to never get out of the boat.

Failure does not shape you; the way you respond to failure shapes you.

Sir Edmund Hillary made several unsuccessful attempts at climbing Mount Everest before he finally succeeded. After one attempt he stood at the base of the giant mountain and shook his fist at it. “I’ll defeat you yet. Because you’re as big as you’re going to get—but I’m still growing.” Every time Hillary climbed, he failed. And every time he failed, he learned. And every time he learned, he grew and tried again. And one day he didn’t fail.

Next Steps:

- What is your boat? What are you hanging onto, afraid to let go, so that you are watching it instead of looking at Jesus?
- Ask God to give you faith to step out in the direction he is calling you.