

## WALKING ON THE WATER

Sermon prepared by The Rev. Ralph W. Bayfield, D.Min.+ August 9, 2020  
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An interesting humorous copy of an article, *Not Making the Grade* came across my desk. It was a copy of a high school students report card that was prefaced by the remarks, “When you were in high school did you feel as if your teachers failed to recognize your true talent and potential? This guy likely would have felt the same way.” The report card read:

1)Course; English, grade C: Comment, “Tends to write in archaic forms (“sayeth,” “maketh,” etc.) and relies overly on outmoded figures of speech.”

2)Course; History, grade B: Comment, “Excellent and enthusiastic pupil of ancient history but is baffled by the modern era.”

3)Course; Earth Science, grade incomplete: Comment, “Totally misinterpreted a major assignment on the age of rocks and instead reported on the “Rock of Ages.” Needs to repeat.

4) Course; Physical Education, grade D: Comment, “A trouble-maker e.g. during our unit on swimming, refused to work on technique and instead tried to walk across the pool.”

General Comments: A charismatic boy but social concerns persist. Most disturbing is that he has organized a gang of 12 of his peers. Also, he should keep his hair at a tidy length and not wear sandals, in accordance with the school uniform guidelines.-signed *pleacher.com*. Before I put the report card down, I noticed the students name was: *J.Christ*, Grade 10.<sup>1</sup>

The apostle Paul in today’s Epistle to the *Romans* says “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”<sup>2</sup> These words could describe

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<sup>1</sup> Article sent in mail with no author or title; The only clue to the source are the words atop the article *Reader’s Digest*, but there is no date nor page number.

<sup>2</sup> Romans 10:13

the saving power of Jesus in today's Gospel, as he calms the storm and rescues Peter from drowning.

Following the miracle of the loaves and fish,<sup>3</sup> Jesus dismisses the crowd and sends the disciples ahead in the boat, while he alone goes up the mountain to pray.<sup>4</sup> As nighttime approaches, a storm comes up on the Sea of Galilee. That night, the disciples work hard in the boat against the strong winds and waves that are pounding against it.

At daybreak, they are fearful when they see Jesus walking on the water toward them. In the mist, Jesus must have appeared to them as a ghost. But it is really Jesus and he cries out to them, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." The sentence, "it is I," is similar to the Old Testament designation for the Divinity. For example when God reveals God's name to Moses in Exodus as "'I am, who I am,'" and again in Deuteronomy, 'see now that I, even I, am He,'" <sup>5</sup> and today in Matthew when Jesus reveals Godself as "it is I."

Peter then seeks to imitate Jesus: "Lord, if it is you, tell me to come to you," in other words, to walk to you on the water."<sup>6</sup> Just as Jesus gives the disciples power to do what he does, "to walk on the water,"<sup>7</sup> Jesus calls to Peter to come to him. Note, as long as Peter's thoughts are focused on Jesus, he is able to walk on the water.

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 14:13-21

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 14:23

<sup>5</sup> Exodus 3:14, Deuteronomy 32:39, II Isaiah 41:13 and II Isaiah 43:10

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 14:28

<sup>7</sup> John 14:12-14

But as soon as Peter changes his attention, his thoughts from Jesus to the storm, he gets scared and begins to sink! Caught between faith and doubt, we hear Peter calling, “Lord save me!”<sup>8</sup> Jesus reaches out to Peter and saves him from drowning. Here Peter is copying the Old Testament Psalmist who pleads to God, “Stretch out your hand from on high, set me free and rescue me from the mighty waters, from the hand of aliens.”<sup>9</sup> Israel was facing enemies surrounding them. The Psalmist realized only God could save the nation of Israel. Jesus by rescuing Peter, witnesses that in some situations, only God can save us.

When Jesus lifted Peter to safety He says, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”<sup>10</sup> There are several instances in Matthew where Jesus noticed the lack of faith of His followers: There was the time when Jesus was trying to teach the disciples not to worry about their life and to have faith in God. Jesus asks the disciples what they would eat or drink? Or about their bodies, what they would wear? “Look at the birds of the air,” he says, “They neither sow, nor reap, nor gather into barns, yet your Heavenly father feeds them.” Jesus asks his followers, “Are you not of more value than they?” Furthermore, “Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field how they grow, they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of

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<sup>8</sup> Matthew 30:14

<sup>9</sup> Psalm 144:7

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 14:31

the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven- will he not much more clothe you- you of little faith? Therefore, do not worry saying, “What will we eat? Or What will we drink?” Or “What will we wear? Indeed your Heavenly Father knows you need all these things. But strive first for the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worry of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.”<sup>11</sup>

I once read a little book called *Why Worry*, the name of the author, I have unfortunately forgotten, but he was a psychologist from Hofstra University. I remember he wrote in the book: When you worry, you use more muscles, more energy and effort of the brain. Work is tiring, exhausting. It takes more work to worry than not to worry. After reading this, I thought to myself: *Why work overtime?* At times we don’t have to labor as much as we do? Furthermore, we don’t have to worry about how to walk on water if we can find a boat, a plane, or a bridge and a car that can take us across the streams, rivers, or oceans we may have to cross. However, I was always glad I learned to swim- just in case I fell in!

The Gospels of Mark<sup>12</sup> and John<sup>13</sup> also tell the story of Jesus walking on water, but they do not include the incident about Peter and his sinking.<sup>14</sup>

Peter took a risk in attempting to reach Jesus by walking on the water, but in so doing he came to a greater understanding of faith, trust and

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<sup>11</sup> Matthew 6:25-34

<sup>12</sup> Mark 6:45-52

<sup>13</sup> John 6:16-21

<sup>14</sup> *Synthesis Yr. A, Scripture*; PNSMI Publishing Co., Boyds, MD, August 10, 2014 page 1

obedience. Jesus in His rescue of Peter, teaches us that He also reaches out to us in our times of need. His spiritual presence next to us brings us peace and confidence in our faith. Even when our faith feels lacking, we are not beyond the reach of God's power and love.

In the Gospel lesson, Matthew tells us by the time evening came, the boat with the disciples in it was "battered by the waves and far from land, for the wind was against them." We can imagine the disciples struggling in the boat that night to keep it on course and upright, while fighting to control the wind in the sails and the bashing against the boat by the waves and the currents. Sailing a boat or ship at night if stars are not visible can sometimes be difficult and treacherous. The effort of the disciples, while only on an inland lake, is symbolic and can stand for the many dangers one can experience sailing anywhere, on a lake or worse at sea or on an ocean. At the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Midshipmen are taught to drive ships and beware of the bad weather at sea. There is a picture in the Chapel of the storm being stilled by our Lord. The Navy hymn alludes to our lesson:

"Eternal Father strong to save,  
whose arm hath bound the restless wave,  
who bids't the mighty ocean deep  
its own appointed limits keep,

O hear us when we cry to thee  
for those in peril on the sea.

O Christ whose voice the waters heard  
and hushed their raging  
at thy word,

Who walkedst on the foaming deep,  
and calm amid its rage didst sleep:

O hear us when we cry to thee  
for those in peril on the sea.

Most Holy Spirit, who didst brood  
upon the chaos dark and rude,  
and midst its angry tumult cease  
and give to wild confusion peace:

O hear us when we cry to thee  
for those in peril on the sea.

O Trinity of love and power, thy children shield in danger's hour,  
from rock and tempest fire and foe, protect them where so e'er they go;  
Thus evermore shall rise to thee glad hymns of praise from land and sea.”<sup>15</sup>

Today's Gospel lesson concludes: “When Jesus and Peter got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshipped Him saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

We started the sermon with a report card. Remember the Epistle of Paul to the *Romans* who proclaims, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”<sup>16</sup> Whenever we turn to God, Jesus gives us a good grade. Whenever we find ourselves in storms, dangerous difficult situations or even if we just have a moment to think or reflect about life, let us turn to the Lord Jesus Christ. Say a brief prayer. Say the Lord's prayer or a simple prayer of your own thoughts. Talk with God. Remember something good, then thank God. Tell God your situation, share your feelings: its all right to plead with God for assistance. Then remember Jesus taking Peter's hand and helping him into the boat, stilling the storm, and the disciples saying to Jesus, “Truly you are the Son of God.” God made you. God loves you. God can also help you. Jesus the Son of God can save you. Jesus the Son of God can save all of us. *Amen.*

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<sup>15</sup> *The Prayer Book and Hymnal 1982* :The Church Hymnal Corporation, New York, N.Y.  
Hymn #608; *Christian Responsibility*: Words William Whiting,(1825-1878),  
Music:Melito: John Bacchus Dykes(1823-1876)

<sup>16</sup> Romans 10:13

PROPER 14 Let us pray.

Grant to us Lord, we pray, the spirit to think and do always those things that are right, that we who cannot exist without you, may by you be enabled to live according to your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

### FOR THOSE SUFFERING FROM THE CORONOVIRUS

O God of heavenly powers, by the might of your Son's command, all sickness and infirmity that He met was driven away. May your healing mercies be with all those suffering from the Coronovirus now enveloping the people of your world. Comfort and relieve the suffering that weakness and sickness may be banished, strength restored, good health returned and cure come to your children and servants. Inspire the scientists to find a vaccination that will destroy this evil virus and end its reign. Bless all those working in the government, the medical and emergency fields, keep them safe and protect them. We thank you for your many blessings and mercy through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

### FOR RELIEF OF SUFFERING FOR THOSE IN LEBANON

Heavenly Father, whose blessed Son came to be served: Bless all who following in His steps, give themselves to the medical and social services in the city of Beirut, the nation Lebanon, and the middle east. Bless the workers of the Red Cross and those who serve the needs of others, who alleviate injury, illness, suffering and pain. Give them wisdom, patience, courage and strength as they strive to clean up the mess and bring peace to this troubled world; for the love of Him, who laid down His life for us, your Son our Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord, and the blessing of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit be with you always. *Amen*

Have a good day! Fr.Ralph+