

Walking on Water

8.9.2026. Matthew 14:22-33

Let us pray: Father God, through today's message, give us your rhema, your promised word, that helps us break through the storms of life. In Jesus' name. Amen.

When my wife and I were serving in ministry in Korea, we once traveled with our church members to Japan for a short-term mission trip. We went by high-speed ferry, and as I watched the waves rising and falling around us, I felt a bit afraid. I remember praying quietly that the Lord would keep us safe on that journey.

I'm reminded of another experience from a pilgrimage trip. We were on the Sea of Galilee, worshipping together on a boat. It was the middle of the day, yet suddenly a strong gust of wind swept across the water and shook the boat. We had always heard that the storms usually come at night, so our group was surprised. I had been there four times, but that was the only time something like that happened. As the boat rocked, we talked together about what the disciples must have felt in moments like those.

We often compare life to a voyage, and the storms we encounter become a picture of the hardships we face. When we meet those storms on the sea of life, what kind of God do we come to know? And what does God desire from us in those moments? As we listen to today's story, may the Holy Spirit grant us ears to hear the word he speaks to us.

Scripture contains many miracles, and among them one of the most unique and well-known is the moment when Jesus and Peter walked on the water. When we read passages like this, they shatter the limits of our common sense and our lived experience. In a storm, most of us would consider it remarkable simply to survive. The idea of stepping out and walking on the waves is something we would never imagine. That is the difference between God and humanity.

If our thoughts remain confined within our own limits, our faith becomes flat and without wonder. To believe is to step beyond what is ordinary and to see into a fourth-dimensional world. God opens the realm of the miraculous to those who hold this supernatural faith.

But does trusting the Lord mean we will never face hardship? Of course not. In fact, it was Jesus who placed the disciples in the situation where they encountered the storm. He urged them to get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side of the Sea of Galilee while he dismissed the crowds. The disciples knew the geography of Galilee well. They knew that at night the lake often became turbulent, and they must have felt uneasy about going without Jesus. They had already once faced a deadly storm while Jesus was asleep in the boat. Still, they obeyed and set out. And as we know, the very thing they feared came upon them.

Why would Jesus, who is the all-knowing God, send his disciples into a place where a storm was already forming? To understand his purpose, we need to look at what happened just before this event.

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That day had been a day filled with miracles. Jesus healed many who were sick, and he fed five thousand men, plus women and children, with five loaves and two fish. Everyone was overflowing with joy. But in the Gospel of John, we read that the excited crowd wanted to take Jesus and make him king. The disciples, still spiritually immature, must have been even more excited. They may have thought that Jesus was finally about to ascend the throne.

Jesus knew this could not continue. So he hurried the disciples into the boat, and might have said something like this, "Go on ahead to the other side. I will send the people away and come later." In Jesus' eyes, it was spiritually far better for the disciples to head into the stormy sea than to remain on land with a crowd full of misguided enthusiasm. On land there was excitement, applause, and popularity. But none of that was within the will of God. Out on the lake there were waves and wind, yet that was where the will of God was leading them. No matter how successful we may appear in the eyes of the world, if we are outside the will of God, our lives are headed in the wrong direction.

Before our self-admiration destroys us, God often places us not among cheering crowds but into a boat that sails toward a storm. These are the moments when our pride and ego are broken. Grapes must be crushed to become wine, and grain must be ground to become bread. It is painful, but it is spiritually necessary.

Even when we obey within the will of God, we may still meet storms. They are frightening, exhausting, and painful. But they are not hopeless. Why? Because Jesus is the one who told us to go. If he sends us, he will take responsibility for us. Yet the disciples felt as though they were about to die. Why do we become anxious? It is because we lose sight of our calling. We must hold on to the truth that the Lord has called us, entrusted us with his work, and told us to go where he sends us. But the disciples seem to have forgotten what Jesus had said to them. All they could see was their situation.

When the disciples set out, it was already well into the night. The waves were so strong that what should have been about an hour's journey across the lake had now stretched into several exhausting hours. They were facing a new test of faith. The last time they had encountered a storm, the Lord had been with them in the boat. The problem then was that he was asleep. They woke him, and the awakened Lord calmed the storm. But now he was not with them. And we also cry out in the storms of life, wondering, "Lord, you sent me out here, so where are you now?"

Where was Jesus at that moment, and what was he doing? After dismissing the crowds, Jesus went up the mountain to pray. He was not indifferent to the disciples' suffering. He prayed for them through the night. He knew their spiritual condition perfectly.

The Lord came to them sometime between three and six in the morning. It was his timing. He comes at the moment when we think all hope is gone. The storm becomes the very pathway through which the Lord comes to us.

The disciples, unable to raise the sail or row against the fierce headwind, were desperately trying to keep the boat afloat by bailing out water. And then they saw something white rising and falling on the waves, moving toward them with garments fluttering in the wind. They were terrified. Sailors believed that if a

ghost appeared on the sea, the ship would surely be lost. So they cried out, "It is a ghost," convinced that they were about to die. This was the true state of their hearts.

If the disciples had held even a small measure of faith and waited for Jesus, what might have happened? They did not wait for him, and that is why only fear remained. If they had prayed, "Lord, we do not know how you will come to us at this hour, but please come," then even a faint silhouette on the waves might have stirred hope. They might have recognized that Jesus was approaching them in a new way. The truth is that the disciples still did not fully understand who Jesus was, nor did they trust that he would never abandon them. The problem was not the storm. The real issue was that they could not see the Lord who was coming to them through the storm.

Yet Jesus used that very storm to challenge them and help them grow. And in this story, the one who surprises us almost as much as Jesus is Peter. At first the disciples cried out, "It is a ghost." But when they heard the voice saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid" (ESV), they realized it was Jesus and felt relieved. Then suddenly Peter said, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." The other disciples must have nearly fainted when they heard him.

Pastor John Ortberg wrote a well-known book on this passage titled *If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat*.

Taking that one step out of the boat is incredibly difficult. The boat feels like our safe place. But in reality, compared to the vast sea, that tiny boat was no true refuge. Without the Lord's intervention, it might have sunk at any moment. When the Titanic went down, staying inside the ship was no longer safe. Living in this world means there is no perfect safe zone.

Jesus comes to us walking on the water. His paradigm is completely different. His world is far larger than ours. The realm he governs is infinitely greater. And it is this Jesus we believe in.

There is an important foundation we must have if we want to step into the paradigm of Jesus. We must first seek his permission. We need a personal word from the Lord. When Peter said, "Lord, if it is you," he was not expressing doubt about whether it was truly Jesus. In the original language, the phrase carries the meaning, "Since it is truly you." If he had been uncertain, how could he have taken even one step out of the boat into waves that were ready to swallow him?

Peter was not being reckless. From the very beginning, when Jesus first called him as a disciple, Peter learned to act on the word of the Lord. He cast his nets at Jesus' command, and the miracle followed. If Peter had been focused only on the supernatural power of Jesus, he might have said, "Let me walk on the water too." But instead he focused on the command of Jesus and said, "Command me to come to you on the water."

When a person obeys, the Lord takes responsibility for them to the very end. Because Peter obeyed the Lord's command, "Come," a new world opened before him. The laws of the kingdom of heaven, which even the law of gravity cannot resist, began to surround him and work in his life.

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But obedience is not a one-time act. It requires a continual fight of faith. For Peter to keep walking, he had to keep his eyes fixed on the Lord. His faith was being tested in real time. And when he became distracted, fear rushed in, and he began to sink.

Just because we believe does not mean the wind stops blowing or the waves stop rising. The stormy sea is always the same. The issue is this: when we move forward in faith, we rise above the storm. But the moment we become slaves to fear, the storm rises above us and takes control.

Faith is a battle. When we are doubting, we may feel calm for a moment, but once we choose to believe and obey, we must stand on the word and fight. Even when we believe, sickness does not always disappear instantly, and problems are not always solved right away. Faith must contend with our senses and with our circumstances. We must keep our eyes fixed on Jesus through his word.

Several years ago, when my younger son was serving in the military in Korea, he faced an unjust situation that placed him at risk of going to trial. Because of the COVID pandemic, I could not travel to Korea. All I could do was pray. And even if I had gone, it was not something I could have solved myself. As we prayed, the story from Matthew 8 came to our hearts, the story of Jesus rebuking the wind and the waves and calming the storm. We kept looking to Jesus and proclaiming that word in prayer, asking him to quiet that storm of trial and lead us to a new shore of ministry. For months we prayed that passage into the Lord's ears. And by his grace, he calmed the storm we were facing and led our family into a new chapter.

When doubt enters our steps of faith, crisis follows. But the crucial truth is this: Jesus immediately reached out his hand and rescued Peter. And he said, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" Yet even so, Peter had at least a little faith. The disciples who stayed inside the boat did not have even that.

The next point is even more beautiful. Jesus took Peter by the hand and walked with him back to the boat. Imagine what that must have felt like. Moments earlier Peter had been terrified, but now, holding the hand of Jesus, he must have felt as light as a child holding the hand of his father. The storm was still raging, but the peace, confidence, and security that came from holding Jesus' hand must have been overwhelming.

And here is the remarkable detail: when they climbed into the boat together, the wind ceased. Through this event the disciples came to understand that Jesus was truly the Christ, the Son of God. For the first time they confessed, "Truly you are the Son of God," and they worshiped him.

Beloved, every crisis is an opportunity for faith to shine. When we seek the word of the Lord, he gives us a word that becomes the footing of our faith. And when we obey that word, we step into the new paradigm of Jesus. Even if we fail, it is all right. The Lord does not simply stand at a distance and say, "Come out of the water." He extends his gracious hand and lifts us up. He walks with us on the very waves that once overwhelmed us. And he will bring us safely to the new shore of ministry he has prepared. Amen.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, on our life's journey toward the New Jerusalem, when winds of doubt blow and waves of fear rise, we hear you coming to us and saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." Help us to trust Your word, keep our faith, and walk upon the waves of trial. Lord, come into our boat and bring us to our desired haven (Psalm 103:30). In your mighty name. Amen.