**COME, WALK ON THE WATER**

 December 9, 2018

Matthew 14:22-36 / Key Verse: 28-29, “‘Lord, if it is you’, Peter replied, ‘tell me to come to you on the water.’ ‘Come,’ he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.’”

Have you felt that you are in the middle of sea in a stormy night? Have you felt that in a stormy situation you cannot make any progress in your life journey although you work hard which makes you exhausted and feel that you are alone and no one can come to you to help you and rescue you? Today’s passage teaches us that in such a situation or circumstance you should not lose hope. It is because Jesus comes to you to be with you and help you even when you are in the middle of sea in a stormy night; when you think no one can come to you to rescue you. Paradoxically, in such an adverse situation, you can learn even more about Jesus and have stronger faith in him. In today’s passage Peter experienced more about Jesus’ divine power in a stormy night by faith; by fully focusing on Jesus. He walked on the water to come to Jesus. Ordinary man Peter did something impossible by faith in Jesus. Today we will learn an important principle which can be applied to anyone who is willing to live by faith. By faith in Jesus, ordinary man can do extraordinary things for God’s glory. Let’s learn this principle.

1. **“Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” (22-27)**

In the previous passage, we learned that out of his great compassion Jesus fed 5000 men (besides women and children) with 5 loaves and 2 fish that the disciples brought. After this event Jesus immediately made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side of the lake, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. According to John 6:15-16, when Jesus fed 5000 men with 5 loaves and 2 fish, his popularity among people was in the peak and he knew that the crowd intended to make him the political king of Israel by force. When he was in high demand from people, Jesus knew that he needed to be directed by the Father God for his right direction as the Messiah of the world. For this need, Jesus was there alone in prayer to God. His prayer in solitude all night shows his total dependence on God. Here we can learn that if our Savior Jesus prayed all night, how much more do we need to spend time with God in solitude! The well-known preacher Charles Spurgeon said about solitude: “*There are times when solitude is better than society, and silence is wiser than speech*.” We would be better Christians if we were more alone, waiting on God in deep meditation on his words.

While Jesus was praying on a mountainside by himself, what was happening to the disciples? Look at verse 24. “and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.” When the disciples started their boating, it must have been a piece of a cake for them because after a hard work to serve the crowds now they were enjoying their boating with tender breeze and watching the beautiful sea. But on that night a big trouble came upon them. The problem was the wind; a powerful wind against them. Their boat was literally being tormented by furious waves that wanted to swallow them up whole. The wind was so violent that the disciples started to panic. Forget about a relaxing boat ride; they were now anxious about survival and getting safely to their destination. After all it was Jesus who had made them get into the boat to let them go to the other side of the lake. They might have asked, “Where is Jesus now when we need him?” Did Jesus abandon them in the middle of the stormy sea? They were heading towards a downward spiral about to hit rock bottom.

But in the midst of this chaos, what happened? Let’s look at verse 25. “Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake.” Jesus was coming to their rescue. What was Jesus doing when he walked on the sea? He was revealing his divine power and presence. In the Bible, the sea represents the chaotic forces that can be controlled only by God. Job 9:8 says about this: “*He alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea*.” So, when Jesus walked on the stormy sea, he was doing what only God can do. By transcending the physical laws of nature, Jesus was showing that he was not merely human, but the same God who created the universe. But from the perspective of the disciples, they couldn’t imagine that a human figure on the water was moving closer and closer toward them. So they were terrified thinking that it was a ghost. Have you seen anyone walking on water? What would you have done in their situation?

When the disciples were terrified and cried out in fear, what did Jesus do? Let’s look at verse 27. “But Jesus immediately said to them: ‘Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” When the disciples were at the end of the rope, Jesus came to them in a way they could have never imagined. Jesus gave them great comfort by assuring them of his presence. We often despair when we meet our human limitations or feel that I am alone and no one can understand me and help me. Yet it is at this point of humility and helplessness that God encounters us. Are you in the middle of a stormy sea? Then do not give into despair. Instead, look at Jesus by faith. Jesus is right there. Where and when you need him most, he is right there to comfort you and help you. He says, “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” This command is the most repeated command in the Bible.

1. **Step out of your boat to experience Jesus and his divine power. (28-36)**

When Peter recognized Jesus and his voice, he was suddenly comforted and encouraged. What did Peter ask in response? Let’s look at verse 28. “‘Lord, if it is you,’ Peter replied, ‘tell me to come to you on the water.’” Wow! What a bold request! Walking on water? That’s a crazy idea, isn’t it? Should we interpret this as an expression of faith or as a reckless request made out of his impulse? When we look closely at Peter’s request, we should notice that he had a childlike pure faith in Jesus and his major concern or focus was not merely experiencing miracles of walking on the water but walking on the water to come to Jesus. His focus was to come to Jesus. Peter had a strong spiritual desire to know and experience Jesus all the more. Also, Peter recognized Jesus as his Lord. When he had a desire to come to Jesus on the water, he did not just jump into water. Instead he said, “Lord, tell me,” or “Lord, command me” (ESV). Like Peter, we must acknowledge Jesus as Lord and wait on him to work instead of using him to serve our own desire or agenda, whatever good intension we may have.

Now loot at verse 29. “‘Come,’ he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.” Once Jesus gave the command, walking on the water was simply a matter of trusting him. On Jesus’ words, Peter stepped out of the boat. By faith, he stepped out into the great unknown. Then, he walked on the water toward Jesus! For the first time in human history, an ordinary human was walking on water! What kind of implications does this story have on our lives? Should we go to Lake Ontario on a stormy day and practice water-walking in the middle of lake by faith? This is not a story about risk-taking to test God for our own benefit. However, it is about *radical discipleship*, *taking a risk based on Jesus’ words*. How could Peter step out of the boat and walk on water? It was his faith and obedience to the words of Jesus that turned what is impossible possible.

When we stand on the word of God, we can also step out of our familiar world. We love to live in our comfort zones. We love to stay in a place where we feel most at home. Trying something unknown is scary and stressful. We fear something unfamiliar or unpredictable; we fear the unknown future. But the Bible is full of stories of people who stepped out of their comfort zones and lived extraordinary lives. Think about Abraham. When he was called by God to go to the land God would show him, he left his country and his father’s house and became the father of nations. He did this by standing on the word of God. When Moses was called by God to lead his people from Egypt, he was an 80 year-old man who lost human confidence completely. But by faith he left his comfort zone and challenged the great task that he had never experienced before. This year 2018 is the 500th anniversary of the church reformation in church history. When Martin Luther stood up for the gospel based on the word of God against corrupt Roman catholic authority, he risked his life. He said, “*My conscience is captive to the Word of God*!” There is a book by J. Ortberg called: “*If You Want to Walk on Water, You’ve got to Get Out of the Boat*.” The author repeats that if you want to walk on water, you’ve got to get out of the boat. Your boat is “whatever presents safety and security to you apart from God.” God is pleased with those who are eager to experience him by taking a risk.

My life was saved from God’s righteous judgment because of Jesus’ gospel; his death and resurrection. My life key verse and marriage key verse and missionary key verse are all about living based on gospel truth; *John 12:24*; a life of a kernel of dying wheat and *Acts 20:24*, giving my life completely to Jesus for the task of testifying the gospel of grace. But when I look back on my life of faith and mission, in many ways, I have lingered in my human comfort zone instead of challenging for the work of God more boldly. I really pray that in the rest of my life I may really get out of my comfort zone and walk on water by faith and obedience to his words so that I can do extraordinary things for the glory of God by faith.

Look at verse 30. “But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!” At first, while walking on water, Peter’s eyes were firmly fixed on Jesus. His mind was entirely filled with Jesus’ presence. But when Peter saw the wind blowing the water and his clothes, he was suddenly convinced of the reality of the situation and focused on his human inabilities. He was saying to himself, “What am I doing now? I shouldn’t be doing this. When his mind was distracted and divided, fear overtook him and he began to sink. What changed here? Nothing except Peter’ focus. Peter failed because he took his eyes off from Jesus and focused on the wind, that is his current situation.

Look at verse 31. Immediately Jesus reached out his hand, caught him, and he said, “You of little faith. Why did you doubt?” Doubt (“*distazo*” in Greek) means literally “*to be divided in two*.” It is like trying to go in two different directions at once. Faith is the very opposite-a single minded focus on Jesus. Here we learn that even when we step out of our comfort zones, there are still possibilities that we will fail. When you fail, the important thing is how you handle your failure. Do you condemn yourself and become more afraid? Do you blame situations or others? Or do you turn to Jesus again? Peter turned to Jesus again by crying out to him, “Lord, save me!” Jesus wants us to refocus on him when we fail and grow through our mistakes. Our life is like a sailing on the sea. We cannot always expect smooth sailing. Definitely, sometimes we will meet stormy days; adverse situations or circumstances. But whether we are in good situation or bad situation, our best attitude is always to focus on Jesus. Then we can walk on water even in stormy days and when we fail, we can refocus on Jesus and move on by faith. Then we can experience Jesus’ saving grace and his divine power more and more and our faith can grow stronger and stronger.

Look at verse 32. “And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down.” In Matthew 8, Jesus rebuked the storm and stilled it. But here Jesus did not rebuke the wind but the wind died down out of respect for Jesus. In verse 33, Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.” The disciples’ eyes were opened to see Jesus. The confession, “Truly you are the Son of God.” makes a decisive difference in our lives. Our life is in the hand of Jesus whom we can fully trust. As we go deeper in knowing and experiencing Jesus through various tests in our lives, we will worship him more and more wholeheartedly. This is the goal of discipleship.

As a conclusion, let’s remember that when you are in any difficulties or challenging situations, you are not alone. Jesus is there for your help and rescue. And a crisis is not a crisis but an opportunity for your spiritual growth when you trust in Jesus. When you trust in him and focus on him (not on situations or on yourself), you can walk on water; you can do something impossible for the glory of God. In order to experience such divine power of God, you have to get out of your boat; your human comfort zone by faith based on the word of God. May God bless all of us to live by such faith! Amen.