

THE RECOVERY OF LOST JOY - Part five**Sunday, April 16th, 2023 - 5:30 p.m.****Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON****THE UNNATURAL ROLE OF FAITH IN TRYING CIRCUMSTANCES**

Matthew 14:22-33 - "Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. [23] And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, [24] but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. [25] And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. [26] But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear. [27] But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." [28] And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." [29] He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. [30] But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." [31] Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" [32] And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. [33] And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

The story is important to us because it shows faith in both it's ups and downs. An incredible start by Peter - and a very human, even disappointing lapse. "If that's really you, Lord, then that's all I need!" - out of the boat and on top of the troubled waves.

Then the sudden turn. "Help, Lord! These waves are too much. I'm drowning!" The whole journey is there - from trust, power and glory to fear, panic and failure. And it all happens so fast, it leaves Peter's head spinning. I think we all know about that in different ways. Change can happen so fast.

Matthew 14:31 - "Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, 'O you of little faith, why did you doubt?'"

Jesus asks the only question that matters - four very simple, monosyllabic words - "***Why did you doubt?***" And the important point for our consideration is what kind of **tone** do you hear in Jesus' voice in those words? Because I don't think they are the words of frustrated exasperation. Like, "Peter, what in the world are you doing? What kind of weak-kneed goofball are you, anyway?"

Rather, they're words inviting self-examination - "Peter, you need to really understand and learn what went wrong here. There are life-giving lessons for your future growth in faith."

Let's look at some of the lessons:

- 1) **FAITH MUST BE CONSTANTLY EXERCISED IN FOLLOWING JESUS**

I suppose that's the first obvious thing in this passage. It certainly isn't that Peter lacked faith. He walked on the water with Jesus! Everybody remembers Peter for sinking beneath the waves. But that's a bit of a bum wrap. Actually Peter walked on the water - ***twice!***

But something happens to his faith in the process. The storm gets the best of him. The waves overwhelm him. The faith he started out with ***wanes*** somehow. So we learn faith isn't an automated spiritual process. You can't set it and forget it. You and I can never ***presume*** a heart and mind of faith. We can never be lazy or careless about exercising it.

The very same lesson comes out in another passage of Scripture:

Luke 8:22-25 - "One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake." So they set out, [23] and as they sailed he fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in danger. [24] And they went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" And he awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm. [25] He said to them, "Where is your faith?" And they were afraid, and they marveled, saying to one another, "Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?"

There you see the same thing. It's the very same question asked by Jesus both times in slightly different words - ***"Where did your faith go? What happened to it? What caused its decline or weakness when it was most needed?"***

Jesus seems to be driving home the very same point over and over again. You always ***need*** to be applying your faith in following Him. You can never just ***live off your conversion.***

It gets very easy in North American church life to pick a path of action that can never work very well for long. The normal road seems to be pretty well choreographed for the Christian. He gets saved. He appreciates the fact that he's forgiven. He trusts he will go to heaven when he dies. ***Then he proceeds to live off of his conversion - with varying degrees of closeness and consecration to the Lord.***

Usually nothing but tragedy will bump that believer into stirring up his whole walk with the Lord all over again. There is no perceived need to do anything drastic in his Christian walk.

But Jesus teaches something very different here. The believer needs to constantly expend great energy squeezing his faith into the battles of life. There are obstacles. There are temptations. There's the pull of the world. There's the inner pull and deceitfulness of our own hearts. There are the wiles of the devil.

All of this means there is nothing about my Christian life that can be put on hold. The whole Christian experience in this world is called the ***fight of faith*** for good reason. There is much that is constantly ***pushing back*** against your walk with Jesus.

Listen to it put as simply as I can make it. The faith that got you out of the boat is not enough to keep you on top of the waves. There's a connection between church attendance and victory in daily life. There's a connection between obedience and a strong marriage. There's a connection between prayer times and a successful, pure life morally.

Understand it well. Peter's problem is not that he has no faith. His problem is like ours. He doesn't work out that faith very well once he's on his journey. He thought all he needed was faith to ***start out***. He didn't realize what it would take to ***continue***.

You see, there's a wear and tear in the journey. Life affects us spiritually. Your faith doesn't just maintain itself. It doesn't just fall down from the sky in pink balloons. It's exercised in hard fought battles. It's stretched and toned as we guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. It's purified as we humble ourselves daily when we're wrong. It's purified when we rinse our minds of worldly thought patterns. There are no shortcuts.

2) **WE CAN CREATE OUR OWN DOUBTS**

It's right at this point that the order of events in the story is of great importance:

- a) Jesus **sent** the disciples out in their boat - **Matthew 14:22** - “Immediately **he made** the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds.”

There is every reason to **assume** Jesus knew about the coming storm. Which means storms are not incompatible with the will of God. They were in the storm because they had listened to Jesus.

- b) Jesus then went up into the mountains to pray and seek the Father. During this whole time the disciples were out in the storm on the lake.
- c) Jesus then appears to the disciples walking on the water. The storm is raging at this time. And that’s the important detail. The storm isn’t a **new factor** in the equation at this point. However difficult it was, they had already been in it for a while.
- d) The disciples eventually recognize that it is Jesus walking towards them. Peter tells Jesus to invite him to walk on the water with Jesus. Jesus does so. And we marvel at the rugged, out-of-the-boat confidence of Peter. He shines here.

- e) Peter steps out of the boat and walks on the turbulent sea. Remember, ***the storm was already raging when he stepped out of the boat.*** That's a very important point. It's not that he stepped out and then suddenly the storm was a new factor to think about. ***He already made the decision to walk on the water in spite of the waves and wind.*** So we know Peter had already ***factored in*** the waves when he started out on his wave-defying walk.

So where does this analysis take us? What we know for sure is there was no ***new*** reason for Peter to look back on those waves again. They weren't a surprise to him. And here's why this matters. We now know ***Peter created his own doubts.*** He messed up his own mind. He short-circuited his own faith.

It is fascinating to see the way the apostle Paul picks up and develops the same theme of the danger of the ***waves*** - **Ephesians 4:11-14** - ***“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, [12] to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, [13] until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, [14] so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.”***

There is a ***process of maturity*** described here. It is ***ongoing*** in nature. The effort required involves keeping a ***steadfast gaze*** at the Lord. Spiritual maturity is ***incremental***, and steady, not on and off with changing circumstances. Staying with it is incredibly challenging. Jesus said it's like putting your hand to a plough and refusing to even give the past a glance. That about sums it up perfectly. You can't ***dabble*** in your effort to mature in Christ. That's what Jesus meant when He said you can't even ***turn your head*** back in a self-centered direction. This is the same lesson in our text with Peter turning away from Jesus to look at the storm.

If you get careless or lazy in staying close to Jesus you can be caught up and caught off guard by things you thought you dealt with at the ***beginning*** of your Christian life. That's the lesson of Peter and the waves.

"Commit your way to the Lord and He will bring it to pass." You have to be ***all in*** if you want to be in at all. You have to commit yourself. Prayerfully, make solid, Biblical decisions. Then refuse ***afterthoughts***. Refuse to dabble with the sins that tripped you up in the first place. Burn all your bridges out of love for Christ Jesus. Christians don't get tripped up by brand new dangers as much as they get careless with temptations and dangers they would have ***known about*** if they had been careful and faithful in listening to the Holy Spirit as they keep their hearts fixed on Jesus Christ. Pour all your strength into that.

That's the only way to make your life count for God and eternity. If you're going to believe in Jesus, there are certain things you just close the door to - immorality, greed, pride, arrogance, disobedience to parents, neglect of the means of grace. There is nothing else to look at.

Storms *naturally* devour our attention. Looking to Jesus instead of the waves *isn't* natural. Maturity in faith takes *unnatural effort*. You build fascination in Jesus over time by His Spirit and the tools He's given to the church. And the reason it's so important is found in our last point.

3) **IF YOU'RE EVER GOING TO STAY ON TOP OF THINGS YOU NEED TO KEEP LOOKING TO JESUS**

This miracle isn't recorded just for fun. There's something in this picture that we are to constantly keep alive in our hearts and minds.

Storms come. Life gets dark and windy. People drown in the storms of life every day. But there is one who is majestic over all - one who triumphs - one who can not only walk on the waves, but can pick you up as well!

Do you see it? Walking on water is impossible. Everyone *knows* it's impossible. Satan has been telling me that a lot lately. He delights to point out everything that can't be done. He'll say it to you every day. He'll tell you the waves are too big and it can't be done. "My marriage situation is impossible!" "My spiritual situation is impossible!" "My personal situation is impossible!"

You built faith by constantly turning to Jesus. Look to Him. Peter walked on the water - **twice!** There's the proof. Jesus is the **author** and the **finisher** of our faith.

Jude 24-25 - "Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, [25] to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen."