

Goal: That the hearers would more easily progress from fear to a greater faith.

Late one night a house caught fire and a young boy was forced to escape by climbing out onto his roof. His father stood on the ground with outstretched arms, calling, *"Jump! I'll catch you."* He knew his son had to jump to save his life, but all the child could see were flames and smoke. He was afraid to leave the roof. His father kept yelling: *"Jump! I will catch you."* But the boy was terrified, *"I can't see you."* The dad replied, *"But I can see you and that's all that matters."* He jumped and landed in the arms of his father. He was safe but he had to overcome the fear and trust that his dad would save him. I tell you this story because our Gospel today isn't just about Jesus walking on water but it's also a lesson of how our Lord helps us to move from our fears to a stronger, rock solid faith. F.B. Meyer once said, *"Unbelief puts our circumstance between us and God, but faith puts God between us and our circumstances."*

Jesus had just fed more than 5,000 people and He told His disciples to get in their boat while He went up on a mountain to pray. While He was praying, a wind came up and the waves beat against the boat and drove it out to sea. When Jesus came to help His disciples, those strong and hardened sailors were terrified. They thought He was a ghost. To calm their fears, Jesus spoke those powerful words: (***"Take heart; it is I."***) (***"Do not be afraid."***) (*Matthew 14: 27*)

This story, of Jesus and His disciples, also applies to our lives of faith, and how we respond to the "waves" of difficulties and the "storms" of hurt that threaten to drown us. Through Peter's experience, we're encouraged to follow Christ's command to walk by faith and not by sight, and how to go from doubt and fear to a confident faith.

Jesus called Peter to come out of the boat, to walk on water, and to trust His power. Peter wasn't an instant powerhouse of faith. He had to learn, just like us, to trust and obey when appearances tell us to do otherwise. He had to learn, just like us, how to keep his eyes fixed on Jesus when the waves are pounding around him. Consider the stages of faith in this story, the stages we must also learn as we grow as well.

Storms confuse us. They scare us. Powerful storms like category 5 hurricanes can make us forget what we base our security on. Why? Because the threat of imminent disaster is so powerful. For example, you get news that your wife has an incurable cancer or your daughter's health is ailing while she is thousands of miles from home, or you are sitting in the ER as the doctor says that the injuries of the automobile accident are near fatal. Waves like these seem 30 feet high, totally capable of swamping your boat. It's during times like these that we learn to walk by faith and not by sight.

Two American missionaries traveled to Shanghai, China, to visit the great Muen Church, which literally means *“Taking a Bath in Grace Church.”* In 1969 it was closed, along with other Christian churches in China, and Christians there were severely beaten and confined to labor camps for practicing their faith. For the next 10 years, the government used the building for a school. While the two missionaries were walking through this magnificent church, one of the pastors invited them to see the great pulpit. Behind the pulpit was a large cross cut into the marble and concrete. *“You see this cross?”* the pastor asked. *“Yes, it’s beautiful.”* *“During the time the church was closed,”* the pastor said, *“the authorities took cement and covered the cross. They figured that since no one could see it, no one would know about it.”* Then the pastor, took a deep breath and flashed a smile, *“We knew it was there all the time.”* In their hearts, they could still see the cross and they were focused on it. That’s good advice for us, because there are times when the waves beat around us and the storm clouds make visibility difficult. But Jesus comes to us in our hour of need.

What a comfort that is. Think about the strength we receive to know that in our storms our Lord comes to us on top of the waves! When the disciples were hiding behind locked doors after the crucifixion, so frightened they couldn’t move, the waves of terror tightening their chests, paralyzing their faith to act. What did Jesus do? He came to them through the locked door. ***“Do not be afraid.” (Matthew 28: 10)*** Don’t ever forget this crucial truth of our Lord’s response to our storms. But knowing He’s with us in the storms and responding to His call to step out in faith are sometimes two different things.

Faith gives us the strength to go out on a limb; doing things we never dreamed, trusting that God will take care of us. Faith isn’t simply a passive trust that God will come to us when we’re down and out. Faith is an active process of living life to the full, going places we’d never go, loving people we’d never love, because we know the Lord is with us.

Myrtle Harris knows about stepping out in faith. She’d been diagnosed with breast cancer. Surgery removed the tumor and chemotherapy and radiation treatments hoped to destroy it, but it made her so weak. Just doing the every day things of laundry, eating, and getting around the house sapped her strength. She was getting some of it back, but it was slow. One August, she and her husband were hiking up a mountain to a small teahouse. It was hard. Just past the halfway point, they stopped to rest beside a lake. Breathing heavily, they slowly climbed upward. Young hikers jogged past them as if it

was nothing. *“Pausing frequently and praying silently,”* Myrtle said, *“we reached the teahouse at last.”* The view from the top of the mountain was marvelous. Lakes, trees, rocks, waterfalls, and clouds hugging mountaintops set their souls singing with praise and thanksgiving. Myrtle now says, *“There are many kinds of mountains we must climb during our lifetime. Our faith in a caring God will encourage us to take that first step and all the other steps after that.”*

There are lots of people who have good intentions, and say that they’re Christians. Lots of people are excited to get their faith walk started, but few will act on that faith in their life. Peter was one of those rare few. He climbed out of the boat with his eyes on Jesus, but then he did what we all do...he took his eyes off the Lord and began to focus on the waves. Many of us believe that when we trust Jesus in the midst of a storm, He will always come and rescue us. And there are times when He does. But there are just as many times when the waves don’t quit and the storm doesn’t go away. It’s then our Lord calls us to walk through the waves with our eyes fixed on Him.

In 1987, my father and I went to the 50th anniversary of the San Francisco Golden Gate Bridge and we were told a fascinating story about the bridge. Back when it was first built there were no safety devices to protect the workers and 23 men fell to their death. Later, a huge safety net was installed at the cost of \$100,000. At least 10 men were saved because of that new net in the following weeks. But there was an additional benefit, work on the bridge went 25 percent faster because the workers were no longer afraid.

Hundreds of years before Christ, the prophet Isaiah wrote: ***“You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because He trusts in You.” (Isaiah 26:3)*** The best antidote for fear is to keep your eyes fixed on Christ. Peter learned this lesson on that lake in the middle of a storm. So what about you? Where are you this morning? Are you in the boat so frightened you can’t move? Are you looking for Christ’s presence to strengthen you, but you just can’t make Him out? Maybe you’ve taken that step out of the boat on faith but you’ve been looking at the waves again. Don’t worry! Don’t be afraid! Jesus is still there, reaching out His hands to you in the midst of the storm. Know that no matter how severe storms in your life may be, how powerfully they are bearing down on you, that Jesus Christ has gone from the cross to the grave and has risen from the dead to give you the power to live a life without any fears. Wherever you are in the storms of life, Jesus is with you and He will bring you through. Amen.