

## ***“Don’t let your doubts tell you who you are”***

**August 7, 2011**

*Text: Psalm 85:8-13, Matthew 14:22-33*

### I.

Do you ever wonder, can I do it? Am I still good enough? Am I strong enough? Do I have enough faith? Do I have the experience and skills to get the job done?

We all have our human doubts, don’t we, our doubts and fears?

In the grip of all the rapid change that surrounds us, we ask: am I competitive with the competition? With all the experienced people in the community? With all the outstanding talent coming out of our colleges and universities? Am I good enough?

And what if I’m not, what am I going to do? What if there are simply countless others who are better than I am—more talented, more knowledgeable? What if I fall short and can’t get it done?

It’s human to have our doubts?

In our story from **Matthew**, Jesus has sent the disciples off in a boat to the other side of the lake. You may remember, this is right after the ***feeding of the 5,000***. Meanwhile, he goes to a nearby mountain for some solitude and prayer ... for a time to reflect and sort things out.

In any event, when evening comes, Jesus is alone and, by now, the disciples’ boat has drifted due to the wind and is off course. And *early in the morning*, as the text says, *Jesus came walking towards them on the lake*.

When they see him, they’re terrified. They don’t know what to make of it. At first, they think he’s a ghost and they cry out in fear. Immediately, Jesus tries to quiet their fears: *Take heart*, he says, *it is I; don’t be afraid*.

Peter, always the exuberant one—always a little over eager—says to Jesus: *If it is you, Lord, command me to come to you on the water*. Right away, Jesus says, *come!*

But think about it, what if Peter doesn’t go? What if he stays in the boat, overcome by fear and doubt? **How would he ever know if it was Jesus?** There’s no way he can really know unless he gets out of the boat and goes for it.

In many ways it’s a moment of truth for him and for his faith. How much does he believe? And how is he ever going to know if he doesn’t get out of the boat?

## II.

**William Willimon**, Bishop of the United Methodist Church in Alabama, makes this point in a sermon reflection on this passage: *How will you know if it's Jesus?*

If we want a closer walk with Jesus, a closer walk with God, we have to be willing to take risks. We have to be willing to get outside the comfort and security of the boat ... into the deeper waters. Our faith calls us to more than merely wading through the shallow waters, always close to the shore line, never taking any risks

- never going deeper in our life ...
- never venturing out in faith into the deeper waters, the deeper challenges ...
- ... to a place where meaning and purpose are realized ...

There's a humorous story about three ministers out fishing in a small boat one day. One of them, realizing that he had left his tackle box in the cabin, suddenly, stepped *out of the boat* and walked on the water over to the shore.

Just then, the second minister remembered he had forgotten his fishing hat on the front seat of the car. He, too, stepped out of the boat and walked on water to the shore.

When they had both returned, the third minister who had watched this remarkable demonstration with mouth and eyes wide open, reasoned to himself: *Gee, my faith is as strong as theirs. I can do that.*

Trying to act reassured, he stepped out of the boat and promptly sank to the bottom. His two companions dragged him out, but once they got him in the boat, he was determined not to be shown up. So he stepped out once more, and immediately sank again.

As his friends pulled him out, he sputtered, *My faith is strong. Why can't I walk on water like you?*

The two other ministers looked at each another, one finally saying, ***Okay, okay, we'd better tell him where those rocks are out there before he drowns himself.***

## III.

Well, Peter apparently doesn't know where the rocks are either. However, Peter, wanting so much to be reassured in his faith and hearing Jesus' words to *come*, gets out of the boat and starts walking on the water toward Jesus. *Wow*, we say; we're impressed. However, right away he notices the strong wind, immediately loses his focus and becomes frightened and, beginning to sink, he cries out to Jesus, *Lord, save me!*

Jesus reaches out his hand, catches him and says, *You of little faith, why did you doubt?*

*Walking-on-water* aside, what this parable is about is stepping out in faith—having the faith to step out of the routine, the ordinary, the mundane, the boring, the one more day of *same ole', same ole'*.

It's about getting out of the boat of yesterday,

- full of all of yesterday's worries and concerns ...
- all of yesterday's negativity and pessimism ...
- all of yesterday's memories.
- It's about getting out of the boat of yesterday into the unknown waters of today ... and tomorrow—where hope and promise await us.

***Don't let your doubts tell you who you are!*** Don't let your doubts hold you back from doing what you know you need to do, from being the person you know you're supposed to be ... from taking the risks in life that you need to take to move forward.

#### IV.

It's human to doubt. We can all identify with Peter when he steps out into the deep waters and, suddenly, becomes aware of the wind and of the contingencies of the human situation. It's human to doubt. We all have our doubts, our fears and our anxieties.

- But they don't have to dominate us and control us and define our spirit.
- And they certainly don't have to tell us who we are.

The future is with those who, with Peter, are willing to get out of the boat of comfort and security and are willing to risk the challenges and the invitations of tomorrow's possibilities.

It was **Ralph Waldo Emerson** who once said, *Our chief want in life is someone who will inspire us to be what we know we could be.* Amen!

1. Life in the deeper waters of faith is a life worth living.
2. There's meaning and purpose in the deeper waters.
3. There is hope and promise in the deeper waters.

There may be heartbreak at times, too. But there's also great joy. **GET THIS:** Great joy does not come without the possibility of heartbreak.

What if Peter had never gotten out of the boat? What if he had never risked finding out if, indeed, Jesus was calling him. Again, how would he ever know it was Jesus if he hadn't risked the disappointment that perhaps it was not?

***Don't let your doubts tell you who you are!***

## V.

You know, it's easy in this life to get off track ... to be knocked off our game, so to speak. As we say all the time in our church, STUFF HAPPENS. Unpredictable stuff ... things we never could have imagined.

And sometimes it's a bit much; for the person struggling with addictions of whatever kind; for the person with weight problems that keep affecting other parts of their life; for the person who keeps being slighted at work or with friends or wherever ... who, for some reason, is always being put down and diminished; and for the person with financial woes.

And sometimes we can't help but wonder, why is this happening to me? And why aren't I doing as better job of handling this? What do I need to do to climb out of this malaise and down period I'm in?

Why aren't I happier? Why aren't I more successful? Why isn't my life going better?  
(pause)

Whoa! Whoa! We gotta slow down. And we gotta get away from all the negativity, all the personal doubting. Sometimes we just have to *let go* of all the bad messages of yesterday and get a fresh start. Sometimes we have to *risk* a new beginning ... move out into the deeper waters of faith, trust God and see where the Spirit takes us.

***Don't let your doubts tell you who you are!***

Faith moves us beyond our doubts ... beyond our fears. Faith moves us into the deeper waters of meaning and purpose. It invites us to risk greater intimacy with people, to risk new relationships, new ways of looking at our lives. It moves us into the all-embracing arms of God—who understands our every need and heartbreak.

*For God will speak peace to his people, said the Psalmist,  
to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.*

**All praise be unto God! Amen!**

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