

“Where faith takes us ...”

August 10, 2008,

Text: Romans 10:5-13, Matthew 14:22-33

I.

Does fear hold you back in your life? Fear of failure, of falling short of the mark ... of not living up to expectations?

Do you NOT do certain things that you really want to do in your life ... because you're basically afraid. You'd never admit it; but that's really what's going on?

Do our fears keep us from discovering who we are at our best?

Reality TV is all the rage these days. Although some of it can be borderline ludicrous, there are some good things that come out of some of the *reality* shows. Yvette sometimes tapes the show, *America's Got Talent* ... where a whole range of people, from all kinds of life-situations, are invited to do their thing ... show their talent.

Many of them are quite good and some of them have gripping stories to tell about how they've been held back in their lives by circumstances ... usually family situations related to finances and limited opportunity.

Notably, the three judges always ask them, before they perform, if they think they can win the competition; and of course, they say yes. But you can often tell that they're quivering with self-doubt and fear of failure.

And how can we blame them. For many of them, they're putting it all on the line.

Certainly, they want to believe in themselves. They want to have faith. The Bible teaches that *faith is the antithesis of fear*.

Certainly, for all of us, we want to believe that we can do it. We want to believe that God is alive in our lives. We want to believe that there's a *goodness* to the human spirit that, if we can just *build it up* enough and *nurture* it enough, it can change the world. And the truth is, it can.

Where faith takes us?

II.

I don't know if Jesus ever, actually, walked on water. The gospel account, from **Matthew** this morning, says that he did. It's certainly an exciting prospect. But more than anything, it says something about how these first Christians saw Jesus.

After feeding the 5,000, the disciples got into the boat and went ahead of Jesus towards the other side of the lake. Jesus, meanwhile, dismissed the crowds and went off by himself. In the early morning, however, wanting to join them (they were still in the boat, out on the lake), **Matthew** says,

... he came walking towards them on the lake.

At first, upon apparently seeing Jesus *walking on the lake waters*, the disciples are confused. Their first response is that they're *terrified* ...

It's a ghost! they cry out, overcome with fear. But then Jesus speaks up to them: **Relax, guys**, he effectively says, **It's me; don't be afraid!**

And then Peter, always eager in every way—eager to believe, eager to speak his mind, eager to jump into the fray and do whatever needed to be done—Peter says:

Lord, if it's you, command me to come to you on the water! Immediately, Jesus says, **COME!** And so Peter gets out of the boat and starts walking on the water approaching Jesus.

And for a fleeting moment or so, apparently, Peter is himself *walking on water*. It's a short-lived moment, however, for, almost immediately, when he notices the strong wind, he becomes frightened ... and, beginning to sink, cries out, **Lord, save me!**

Whereupon Jesus, of course, reaches out to him lamenting: **Peter, Peter, you of little faith, why did you doubt?**

III.

Part of what's amazing, here, is that Peter thought he could walk on water to begin with. What person thinks that? We don't think we can walk on water.

The point is that Peter tried to do something that—under normal circumstances—he would never try to do. **Where faith takes us ...**

- For a few fleeting moments, Peter embraced possibility with a whole new set of assumptions.
- However briefly, he opened himself and—therein—his life, to acts he couldn't imagine himself doing before hand.

He opened himself to higher expectations ... and in the process, to a bigger world.

That's where faith takes us: *to a bigger world.*

Faith takes us beyond our normal fears of sinking and failing, of falling short of the mark, of not seeing the possibilities that are out there ... and, therefore, of compromising and settling for less: less love ... less risk ... less sacrifice ... less peace with justice ... less of everything.

IV.

The ultimate question in the story becomes NOT whether Jesus walked on water or what Peter might have done had he believed enough. The question becomes, to what heights of belief and acts of love and generosity can faith take us?

For Peter to get out of the boat, into the water—at Jesus’ command—is an enormous act of faith. Why would he do that?

Life was much safer, much more reassuring in the boat. In the boat, events were infinitely more predictable ... they were under control. There was little to fear in the boat.

The answer has everything to do with what was going on in Peter’s personal faith journey ... in his spirit. Peter harbored an eagerness to grow himself ... certainly, an eagerness to move closer to Jesus; to be more caught up in the aura of Jesus’ spirit; to be swept away by the power and the depths of Jesus’ love and compassion and the way he made everything around him different, better ... new and refreshing.

Faith invites us to a world outside ourselves ... to a world beyond reason and logic ... to a world where *mystery* and *wonder* are alive ... a world where it’s not all about us ...

1. a world where we’re worried more about compassion and love than about always *playing it safe* ...
2. where we’re concerned more about peace with justice than about *bottom line profits* and *looking out for #ONE* ...

V.

Wes Seliger is an unconventional Episcopalian minister who loves motorcycles. He tells about being in a motorcycle shop one day, drooling over a huge HONDA 750 and wishing he could buy it. Soon, a salesperson came over to talk about the product.

With great enthusiasm, he talked about the speed, the acceleration, about the excitement, the attention-getting sound of the pipes, about racing, risk-taking ... about how good-looking girls are attracted to any man riding such a motorcycle ... *motorcycles make a man more sexy* ...

Then, the salesperson found out Wes was a minister. Immediately, everything changed: the words he was using, the tone of his voice. Now, suddenly, he was talking about the good mileage the cycle got, about the great visibility (*visibility!!*) ... about how it was a *practical* vehicle.

Thinking back on the experience, Wes Seliger was observing how salespersons aren't at all surprised to find clergy looking at a lawnmower, for example. But looking at a motorcycle?? Catches them totally off guard.

Lawnmowers are slow and safe; they're sane and practical. Motorcycles, on the other hand, are fast and dangerous ... they're wild and thrilling and out-of-control.

All of which prompts the question: is the Christian life supposed to be *safe* and *sound* and that's it? Is it supposed to be disciplined and practical ... and that's all there is? Or is there an element of danger involved, and risk ...

From wanting to experience ... more of God's madness and unpredictability? More of God's justice ... and fairness ... and wider truth?

- Wanting to be surprised by grace ... overwhelmed by love ...
- Wanting to be drawn in to a deeper relationship with the Spirit and with God ... and to ways of *living out our lives* that touch the needs of other people.

I'm not recommending that any of us rush out after church and buy a motorcycle to jump-start our lives. However, aren't there times in our lives when we could all benefit from a *motorcycle* spirit, a spirit of adventure and exhilaration?

VI.

As Christians, sometimes we need to take our faith out on the open road, open up the throttle and see what it can do. ***Where faith takes us ...***

- Faith invites us to a world beyond fear ... beyond the impulse to smallness or narrowness; or always taking the safe and easy path.
- It invites us to believe things we didn't know we could believe ... to do acts we didn't know we could do. To take on challenges we didn't know we could take on.
- Faith invites us to a life of higher expectations. And how is that? Because faith confesses an infinity of possibilities that we cannot know.

1. Possibilities for goodness and righteousness to rise up in the human spirit.

2. possibilities that we can't discover if we don't talk to one another, even our enemies ... in fact, particularly our enemies, or those who are different from us in whatever way ...
3. Faith invites us to the *high ground* ... the ground where hope and promise live on forever ...

Where faith takes us, friends, is to a bigger world. How big a world do we want to live in? We have to ask ourselves that question every day: how big a world do we want to live in?

Faith takes us to a world where we see and understand the BIG PICTURE ... the BIG PICTURE about how, at our best, there is beauty in every human being, virtue in every religion, every culture.

As Paul tells us in Romans, *there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him.*

Where faith takes us is to a world beyond fear and anxiety, to a world where we don't spend our lives, in the back of the boat,

- never risking anything ... never aiming high ... never daring to discover the best we can be.
- never daring to discover the heights and depths of the purposes to which God calls us in Christ.

Where faith takes us is into the presence of God, forever and ever ...

All praise be unto God! Amen!

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