

## TENTATIVE

### Peter Walking on the Water Matthew 14

I'm going to confess to you that I might be one of the most tentative people I know. For instance, as a kid, I didn't much like the slide. It meant climbing a high ladder, looking down at the great unknown, and letting go of your safety net. The slide at Max Meyers playground was a big swirly one. Scared the bejeebers out of me. I much preferred being immobile on the ground. No danger there.

Later on, it was the bicycle. Two wheels versus two feet? Easy answer -- take the feet every time. Didn't learn to ride a bike until I was 12 years old. "No guts no glory?" Hardly. "No guts, no danger."

Then it was the Ferris wheel, roller coasters, tilt a whirl. Not my thing. Never my thing. A few times I was goaded into it, shamed, embarrassed, humiliated. I did it, --- to save face with a girl or two. But I didn't like it.

My brother's the exact opposite. He is energized by taking risks. In fact, so much does he enjoy the danger, that some years ago he went on one of those Outward Bound trips -- you know, the ones where you sign your life away, and then go out jump off a cliff. He climbed the Three Sisters mountains in Washington State using repelling gear and all kinds of other death-defying items. Most recently he told me that he had his 50 year exam -- you know the one -- without any anaesthesia.

As kids, one of Rick's favorite things to do whenever we went on vacation was to explore every nook and cranny of the places where we stayed. His motto, "if it doesn't say, 'don't enter,' then they expect that you will." You'd be amazed at the places he went and the things he saw

Rick, five years my elder, was always pushing me to go along on his adventures. Many times he failed -- but a few times he succeeded. One time, in particular, stands out to me. It was the night we stayed at the Sheraton Brock -- a hotel overlooking Niagara Falls. He had found a back stairway and urged me to follow. Up we went -- higher and higher and higher. We found an old ballroom that was being renovated. We found a storage room that clearly hadn't been

touched in years. Finally, after flights and flights of stairs, we reached a metal door with a loose bar in front of it.. “Let’s go,” Rick declared.

It was the roof. And clearly no one in the world was intended to be there cause there was no safety devices -- railings, fences, gates. Nothing. The wind was rushing past our heads as Rick headed toward the edge. He urged me on. “Come here, take a look!”

I obeyed. And there is was -- the most dazzling scene of Niagara Falls I could imagine. Unbelievably beautiful from this height. For just a moment I got a rush -- and then the fear set in, and I was ready to go back to the stairs.

But today, in my head, I can still see the scene -- I can feel the rush. I spent a week at Niagara Falls and don’t remember much else from that year. But that moment, I will never forget.

Here’s why I bring all this up. I wonder. Would I have heeded Jesus’ call to get out of the boat if I was Simon Peter? Would I have gotten the opportunity to say, “I walked on water!! I defied the laws of nature. I took a risk?” I doubt it. And perhaps that makes me like the other 11 disciples. They didn’t get out either. And maybe they didn’t because they weren’t asked to -- or maybe Jesus didn’t ask them because He knew they wouldn’t come. Either way, only Peter could say that, by God’s power, got out of the boat and did what no other man has done. And yes, he got afraid and started to sink. Yes, He was chided by Jesus. Yes, it was a little embarrassing.

But in the end, Peter is the one who has the memory engraved in his head. Peter is the one whose faith was strengthened. Peter is the one who will be forever remembered by Christians as the one who got out of the boat.

My point? I think we sometimes have the tendency to be a little timid when it comes to heeding God’s call. I think, often, in our heads, we can sort of hear the voice of Jesus calling us to do something -- to get out of our boat -- to take a risk -- to be bold, courageous, daring -- and, rather than heed the call, we shut out the voice.

It happened to Amy and me with out neighbors back when we lived on the south side of Mequon. The wife was a lapsed Catholic, the husband was a Jewish agnostic. When we would get together we could feel the inner call for us to open up about our faith with them -- to tell them were we found strength, hope, and help. But we were afraid of offending them, afraid of the discomfort we might feel -- afraid that we wouldn't know what to say. Did they know I was a pastor? Sure. Did they know Jesus was important to me. Of course. But, we never took it beyond that. We never got out of the boat.

We can be the same way in prayer: so afraid that we might be disappointed -- so uncertain about God's desire, God's power, God's plan, that we don't even bother to really tell God what we want. We don't ask for miracles -- don't pray for success. We don't want to go out on a limb. Timid, we are, skeptical and apprehensive.

Sometimes that's the way we are with our finances too. We are convinced of the desperate needs which cry out for our attention: world hunger, world missions, disaster relief, preparing pastors, building God's house, -- but we look at our budget and find ourselves feeling limited. After all, there's groceries, home repair, the mortgage, cars, and all the things we want to do.

But I think about some people that I know who took out a second mortgage to help a refugee family have a place to live. I think of a member of my old congregation who, as a founding member in the early part of last century, gave days and days of his time to haul soil to fill in the swamp. And I think about the reward that they have knowing that their self-sacrifice produced a bountiful harvest. They got out of the boat, and God enabled them to walk on the water.

Then there's personal planning. Sometimes we sense God's voice beckoning us to make different plans that we initially dreamed. We sense His call to try something new -- to step out of our comfort zone -- to reach out in ways we never dreamed. And again, so often our reaction is to be tentative. "I can't do that." we say. "That's not my strength -- my talent -- my area."

Theodore Giesel, aka Dr. Seuss, began his life journey in advertising and worked there for 15 years before writing a single book. Ronald Reagan started out as a lifeguard and thought

he had reached his zenith as president of the Screen Actors Guild. Martha Stewart started out as a stock broker. Harry Truman as a hatmaker. Harrison Ford as a carpenter.

All of them, at a certain point in life, stepped out of the boat – some because they had to, others because they chose to.

But here's the point. While there are no guarantees when it comes to taking risks in life, we need not be hesitant when it comes to heeding the voice of God.

Here's why.

#1. A MIGHTY FORTRESS. Behind the voice of God is the all-powerful, all-knowing Lord of the Universe. He is one who created all things and He is the One who puts the puzzle together. He is the One who knows from whence things have come and to where all things are going. Our one goal in life should be to be aligned with His goal for our life, because He is our refuge and strength.

#2. THE VICTORY'S WON BY JESUS, THE MIGHTY SAVIOR. God has proved His commitment to our care. In Jesus Christ, He aligned Himself with us and declared that He would never leave or forsake us. He carried the weight of all our sins and failures, suffered the punishment we deserved to suffer, died the death we deserve to die, and rose from the dead so that we could be free of our sin and have a forever future with Him.

#3. AN EVER PRESENT HELPER. He offers His promise to guide us, to bless us, and to work all things together for our good. This is the amazing thing. With God, you never have to wonder – “Will it turn out okay?” Notice, for instance, what happened to Peter in our text. He stepped out of the boat and focused on Jesus and did great. But then he got distracted. He focused on the wind and the waves and started to sink. That's when Jesus grabbed hold of his hand and, in essence, said to him, “I'm still here. Don't worry. I know you're going to fail sometimes. But I promise you, I will never fail you.” This would be especially important to Peter later on when he would fail again. After denying Jesus three times with curses, seeing the pained face of Jesus as He heads to the cross, Simon Peter, after the resurrection, hears the gentle, forgiving Lord declare: “Feed my lambs, Peter – take care of my sheep – feed my sheep.”

What about you? Do you hear sense the gentle tug of God to get out of your boat and do something amazing? Do you hear His voice urging you to reach out, to step forward, to dream a dream, cast a vision, make a difference? Is He calling you to speak, to work, to sacrifice, to share in ways that you never have before?

Don't be afraid. Look into His eyes, and, more importantly, look at His wounded hands, feet and side. He's Jesus, and if He calls you out of the boat you can be sure that He will never let you sink. So go ahead, listen to His voice – follow where He leads. And, in the end, you will never be disappointed.