



COURAGEOUS FAITH

By Rev. Will Nelken

Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, CA, on Sunday, June 7, 2020

“Faith” is a keyword in the Christian community, because “without faith it is impossible to please God.” Faith is our KEY to relationship with God our Creator, and the everlasting life He wants to share.

But there are different kinds of “faith”—and each has its own value and effect, but they don’t all unlatch the door to eternal life.

INTELLECTUAL FAITH – mental assent or agreement to an intellectual proposition. “I agree that is true; I believe in that.” Faith in a statement of belief (a creed) is this kind of faith.

This kind of head-faith aligns people around ideas, purposes, and practices. A local church shares this kind of faith.

HEART FAITH – trust in / reliance upon someone to be there for you, to mean what they say, to do what they promise. This is relational faith, a bond of individuals into something greater than “the sum of the parts.”

This kind of faith builds bridges that release people to grow, to become more, and do more than they thought possible.

My go-to Scripture for this is Matthew 14:22-33.

Jesus had just multiplied five loaves and two fish to feed 5,000 men, plus women and children. It would be no stretch to imagine He fed 12,000-15,000 people that afternoon from a single lunch!

Let’s read it...

²² Immediately after this, Jesus insisted that His disciples get back into the boat and cross to the other side of the lake, while He sent the people home. ²³ After sending them home, He went up into the hills by Himself to pray. Night fell while He was there alone.

²⁴ Meanwhile, the disciples were in trouble far away from land, for a strong wind had risen, and they were fighting heavy waves. ²⁵ About three o'clock in the morning, Jesus came toward them, walking on the water. ²⁶ When the disciples saw Him walking on the water, they were terrified. In their fear, they cried out, "It's a ghost!"

²⁷ But Jesus spoke to them at once. "Don't be afraid," he said. "Take courage. I am here!"

²⁸ Then Peter called to Him, "Lord, if it's really You, tell me to come to You, walking on the water."

²⁹ "Yes, come," Jesus said.

So Peter went over the side of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the strong wind and the waves, he was terrified and began to sink. "Save me, Lord!" he shouted.

³¹ Jesus immediately reached out and grabbed him. "You have so little faith," Jesus said. "Why did you doubt Me?"

³² When they climbed back into the boat, the wind stopped. ³³ Then the disciples worshiped Him. "You really are the Son of God!" they exclaimed.

Several elements of this story are worth noting...

Jesus often does what we do not expect!

"Jesus made His disciples get back into the boat and cross to the other side of the lake," while He stayed behind.

Have you ever been following Christ's directions, but could not find His presence? Felt like you'd been abandoned? Where did He go? Why did He leave?

In this case, He lingered to spend time with His Father in prayer. I'm sure we could benefit from the same.

One thing is evident: Jesus is ever with us, but sometimes He is silent. Still we follow.

His instructions don't guarantee us a life of ease.

"Meanwhile, the disciples were in trouble, far away from land."

The destination is promised, but the path may be obscured. If it is, it is probably because it involves risk, which we might prefer to avoid if we knew. Job lamented, *"Man is born to trouble,*

like sparks from a fire fly upward.” Even Jesus said, “In this world you will have trouble.” He is surely right.

But Jesus never abandons us, no matter how tumultuous the circumstances may become.
*“About 3:00 in the morning Jesus came to them, walking on the water.”
“It’s all right. I am here. Don’t be afraid.”*

If life seems difficult right now, recognize this: you are not alone.

Then Peter called to Him (trust, but verify :-), *“Tell me to come to You.”* And Jesus said, *“Come.”*

“So Peter went over the side of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus. But when he looked around at the high waves, he was terrified and began to sink.”

Faith can be scary! Even dangerous. When the familiar has been taken away, and ease and comfort have fled, where will you turn? Who will you look to?

“Instantly, Jesus reached out His hand and grabbed him.”

Jesus never misses a beat. He knows who you are and He knows where you are. He knows what you’re facing right now, and He knows what’s coming next.

He knows and He cares. And He is ready to help, if we call on His name.

He understands our weaknesses and our failures, even our rebellion, yet He meets us without judgment. *“You don’t have much faith.”*

When Jesus and Peter climbed into the boat together, immediately, the wind died down. Then, the disciples worshiped Him, as should we!

As we reflect on this event, we often focus on Peter’s effort and subsequent failure (it’s probably all too familiar to each of us). Losing focus can lead to a downfall.

But, today, in the midst of a viral pandemic, and anarchistic riots, and peaceful, appropriate protests—when the waves are threatening to capsize OUR boat—I choose to focus on something else:

Peter got out of the boat!

Think about that. Who could’ve predicted that response? Would you? Really?

On a rolling sea, in gale force winds, Peter climbed over the side of the only ark of safety he knew, to attempt something no one but Jesus had ever done before.

That was COURAGEOUS FAITH.

The Jewish culture emphasized faith as faithfulness—persistent faith in action—when times were good and when times were tough.

The New Testament does not abandon that. Not at all! Paul and James and Peter are emphatic that PERSISTENT FAITH is the only kind that saves.

But the New Testament also adds another layer: courageous faith. This is faith that takes a risk—beyond my comfort zone, beyond my familiarity, even beyond my sense of preparedness—because Jesus beckons.

Courageous faith says, “Lord Jesus, because You’re in this, I will experience a miracle and I will succeed. Issue the call, Lord!”

Courageous faith does not deny order or propriety, but it is not bound by tradition or comfort or convenience. Courageous faith is moved by a deeper value and a higher prize: getting closer to Jesus.

I don’t think Peter’s faith was aimed at walking on water. His thought was NOT, “Guys, watch what I’m about to do!” I believe Peter’s eyes were set on being with Jesus, whatever that required or looked like.

What could that mean for you today?

What risk do you need to take to get closer to Jesus?

What do you need to let go of in order to take His hand?

What do you need to step away from in order to strengthen your relationship with Christ?

There’s always something, especially in tough times. Of course, in tough times, the *natural* thing to do is hunker down, lay low, maintain the status quo.

But it’s risky faith—courageous faith—that breaks through and brings peace and real success.

Do you want Jesus to call you to Him?

What could that mean for you today? What would that look like?

If you ask Him, He will show you. And when He shows you, He will also empower you.

“It’s all right. I am here! Don’t be afraid.”

What’s preventing you from talking with Him about it right now?