

Stepping Out of The Boat
Texts: Romans 10:5-15, Matthew 14:22-33
Kirkpatrick Memorial Presbyterian Church – August 9, 2020
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I got a better sense of what the waters may have been like for Peter this week while we were in New Hampshire. By the time Isaias got to us up north, it was just some wind and rain. But some of the pictures you saw in the opening slideshow were of the water and waves on the lake during the 20-30 mile per hour winds we experienced. And so, let us picture, for a moment, the scene in the boat on the day that Jesus sent His disciples off ahead of Him, while He dismissed the crowd. The water was pretty rough, and I can just assume what the mood was on the boat. “Why do you think Jesus is not coming with us? Is He giving up on us? I know it was because we only had 5 loaves and 2 fish originally to feed all those people—He is upset with us because He had to work a miracle.” Then one of them calls out, “Look a ghost!” That got all the rest of the disciples carrying on and wondering how they were going to get out of this one.

But Jesus tries to calm them, telling them to be courageous, for it is Him. Peter, not really too sure, becomes the “brave” one. Well, sort of. He says, “OK Lord, (if that is who you *really* are!) tell me to walk on this water if it is really You.” Jesus simply answers, “Come!” And then here is the scene. A toe goes over the edge—a look to Jesus. Then the rest of the foot. OK, Lord if it is You, I will bring my other foot across the side of the boat and just lean a little against the boat until I decide I am strong enough to stand up. The whole time, he is looking to Jesus, waiting for the look of affirmation.

“Hey, I can do this...no sweat!” He takes a few steps and gets a big gust of wind in his face. And what does he do? “Quick, help me, save me Lord. I cannot do this on my own.” And Jesus responds, “You know what? You are absolutely right! You cannot

do this on your own. You need Me. You have to trust Me. Have faith in me! If you leap, I'll be there to catch you.”

In the October 1993 issue of *Life* magazine, a photo by Scott Threlkeld shows three teenage boys who have jumped from a thirty-foot high cypress branch toward a dark Louisiana pond. Threlkeld evidently climbed the tree and shot from above the shirtless, soaring Huck Finns, for we look down on the boys and the pond. There's something inspiring, even spiritual, about this picture. The lanky boy on the right shows the least confidence, jumping feet first, knees bent and legs spread, ungainly arms flapping like a drunken stork about to make a crash landing.

The middle boy dives head first, arms spread stiffly straight and perpendicular, like the wings of a Piper Club airplane. His head is slightly ducked and to the right, as if he were approaching the runway against a side wind. He is in a hurry to reach the water.

The third boy also dives head first but he isn't hurrying toward the tunnel-dark pond. He is floating. His head is up. His body is in a relaxed arch, both knees slightly bent, legs slightly apart. His arms are nonchalantly straight, hanging from his shoulders in an upside-down V. Poised and self-assured, as playful as an acrobat on the flying trapeze, he knows exactly where he is and, it appears, waits until the last moment to lift his arms, duck his head, and slip into the water.

No matter their kinesthetic sense or style, each of these three boys did a challenging thing; He took a scary leap. Granted, high dives into country backwaters aren't always wise, but sometimes to follow God, we must take a similar leap of faith. When we do, we will find that the kingdom of God is in the pond. (Craig Brian Larson,

editor, *Contemporary Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Writers*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998, p. 67).

As we think about what church is becoming in the wake of this pandemic, are you prepared to step out of the boat? Are you willing to get your feet wet a little bit and trust that Jesus will be with you to hold you close so you do not sink? Are you prepared to withstand the winds of life, of change, of “we have never done things this way before” to the nth degree, to keep the faith that you will stay afloat? Can we weather the spiritual storms the same way we have the physical ones this week? That is where we are, my friends. Church looks differently today than it did five months ago, and I imagine it will look different moving forward. Are you prepared to risk some things in order to get out of the boat to follow Jesus more fully?

My supervisor at St. Mary Medical Center in Langhorne, where I worked as a chaplain during my seminary days, gave our group a poem that was written by a friend of hers. It deals with taking risks, and I think it fits well with our theme this morning. It goes like this. “I walked along the beach yesterday and tried to find the perfect shell. At the edge of the surf, the shells were, for the most part, broken, and worn smooth by the tides. I kept searching, up and down the dunes, and I finally found some perfect shells. They had been cast aside by the very high tide and left. As I pondered the shells in my hand, a thought occurred to me.

If we involve ourselves in the surf of life, we may get broken. That’s the risk, but we will certainly get polished. And that polishing reveals an inner beauty that can be missed in perfection. Given the choice, I’ll go with the tides.” (Catherine Christine Shires, 1944-1998). The shells that were in the top part of the beach, untouched and

unscathed by the surf were protected. They were safe, unable to be affected by the waves and the rough waters. They were safe.

Safe is not where God wants us to be. If we give ourselves wholly and freely and confidently to His will and to His service, He will be with us every step of the way.

Through the rough times, through the storms that spring up on us, through the nervousness and fear, through and well past the pandemic. It gives God great joy to see us put ourselves out on the line for Him. He won't turn His back on any of us if we are truly seeking His will. Ever. Period.

But it has to be His will, and not our will. And we have to say no at times because that is what He wants us to do. Not because we do not want to do something that He is calling us to do. So, I am asking you – I am encouraging you – I am pleading with you to pray. Pray for this church. Pray for God to reveal to you where He wants you to serve now and in the days and months ahead. Pray that God will put in your life those brothers and sisters in Christ that will encourage you with the right words, that will help reveal to you what you should be doing. Pray for how you fit into the “new” that the future church will encompass.

And after you pray, listen for God. Discern the gifts that God is calling you to use. Talk with me or others in our church family about where you see God leading you. Your Session and I would love to help you realize your passion and your call to God's service more fully. To think about the future can be scary. We do not know where this is all headed right now. However, will you consider joining me in putting a leg over the side of the boat, following Jesus' voice to “Come,” and seeing where He brings us together? Let us pray...

Heavenly Father, help us in our fear and hesitation to be willing to step out of the boat, to challenge ourselves and each other in our Christian walk. Grant that we may truly accept and humbly follow Your will for our lives. We want to seek Your will. We want to serve You. Help us and strengthen us in Jesus' name, Amen.