

WIMPS OR WATER WALKERS

Romans 10:5-15 & Matthew 14:22-33

Saint Paul's Memorial United Methodist Church

1001 W Colfax Ave, South Bend, Indiana 46616

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Romans 10:5-15 (NIV)

⁵ Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: “The man who does these things will live by them.” ⁶ But the righteousness that is by faith says: “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷ “or ‘Who will descend into the deep?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). ⁸ But what does it say? “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,” that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: ⁹ That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. ¹¹ As the Scripture says, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” ¹² For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile — the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³ for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

¹⁴ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵ And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

Matthew 14:22-33 (NIV)

²² Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. ²³ After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴ but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. ²⁵ During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. ²⁶ When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear.

²⁷ But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” ²⁸ “Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.” ²⁹ “Come,” he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”

³¹ Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?” ³² And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. ³³ Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

Wimps or Water Walkers

Somewhere I read about a family that decided to vacation in Colorado. They flew into Denver. Rented a car. While there, they visited the Royal Gorge Bridge. I am told this bridge is a little scary to drive across. It stands more than 1,000 feet above the Arkansas River.

Walking out onto the bridge, the dad noticed it swaying in the wind. Then a car went past them, and the wood-plank roadway moved beneath their feet. "I don't think I want to drive the car across this bridge," the dad said nervously. "What are you worried about?" replied his teen-aged daughter. "It's a rental." Well, maybe it was a rental, but he and his family were going to be in it and so, nonetheless, he was apprehensive.

Some of us can sympathize with that Dad. We get a little nervous about even the thought of driving on a rickety bridge suspended a 1,000 feet in the air. Fifty feet in the air would make us nervous.

If you have ever been afraid, you can sympathize with poor Simon Peter. Impetuously he had told Jesus that he wanted to imitate the Master and walk to Him on the water. But then he looked down at the waves and became suddenly fearful and began to sink.

You know the story well. Jesus has just fed 5,000 hungry men and an untold number of women and children. He tells His disciples to get into a boat and go on ahead of Him to the other side, while He dismisses the crowd. In John's Gospel we read that Jesus did this because the people were ready to proclaim Him king after He had performed this amazing miracle of feeding so many hungry people.

After He dismisses the crowd, Jesus goes up on a mountainside by Himself to pray. Meanwhile the boat containing the disciples is already a considerable distance from land. A sudden storm has come up, and the boat is being buffeted by the wind and the waves. The disciples are growing fearful.

Then, shortly before dawn, the disciples see something that really terrifies them. Out on the water they see someone coming toward them. They think it's a ghost. It is not. It is Jesus walking toward them on the water. Jesus says to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." "Lord, if it's you," Peter replies bravely, "tell me to come to you on the water." And Jesus simply says, "Come."

At this Peter gets down out of the boat, walks on the water and comes toward Jesus. But then he starts thinking about what he's doing. He notices the wind and the waves swirling around him, and he starts to wonder whether this is such a good idea after all. The Sea of Galilee is cold and deep, and he's not wearing a life-preserver. And then it happens — he begins to sink.

This burly, out-spoken fisherman is afraid of drowning. He's a fisherman, for crying out loud! Doesn't he know how to swim? He cries out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reaches out His hand and catches him. "You of little faith," Jesus says, "why did you doubt?" And when they climb into the boat, the wind dies down. Then the disciples, including Simon Peter begin to worship Jesus, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

It is an exciting story, and it is one of the best known stories in the New Testament. It's a story that has captured the imagination of people through the ages.

Humorist Mark Twain referred to it when he told of a time he was in the Holy Land with his wife. They spent one night at a resort on the Sea of Galilee. It was particularly beautiful — a full moon over the sea made for an especially romantic setting.

So the Twains decided that they wanted to go on a moonlit ride on the lake. Twain approached one of the local fishermen and asked him how much he would charge to take them out in a boat.

The man looked at Twain — observed his white suit, hat, shirt, and shoes — and supposed him to be a rich man. “For you — my friend — twenty-five dollars!” the fisherman replied.

This was back when twenty-five dollars was a lot of money. Twain knew it was certainly too much for a boat ride. He turned to walk away. “I always wondered,” he grumbled, “why Jesus walked. Now I know!”

I wonder if this story of Jesus walking on the water — and Peter's failed attempt to follow Him — doesn't appeal to so many people because we all know what it is to begin a daunting venture and then draw back because of fear. Fear is, of course, a universal emotion. Everybody is afraid of something.

According to psychologists we are born with two fears when we come into the world — a fear of loud noises and a fear of falling. It does not take us long, however, to accumulate many other fears — fear of the dark, fear of lightning and thunder, fear of dogs, fear of other people, etc. For many people this list continues to grow over a lifetime — fear of heights, of closed-in spaces, fear of trains or planes, and many others.

FEAR IS A UNIVERSAL EMOTION. MANY OF US, UNFORTUNATELY, ARE BOUND BY OUR FEARS.

This is a hostile world for us. Everywhere we look we see chaos, death and decay and we are afraid.

It is a terrible feeling to be afraid. We can be paralyzed by fear of such things as losing our job, our marriage, our health, our life. Matthew tells us that the disciples were terrified. Jesus said to them, “Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.”

It's said that scientist Louis Pasteur, founder of the science of microbiology, was morbidly afraid of germs. That shouldn't surprise us. It was Pasteur, you may remember, who introduced us to the idea of germs in the first place. The time most of us learned about Pasteur was when we were first introduced to pasteurized milk; pasteurization being the means by which harmful bacteria are removed from milk.

Pasteur discovered that these tiny microbes — bacteria — exist almost everywhere. Realizing that

these bacteria can cause illnesses of many kinds, some of them fatal, and further realizing that, at that time, there were no effective antibiotics that could destroy these perilous bacteria, Pasteur became obsessed with his own personal cleanliness. He spent a ridiculous amount of time compulsively washing and rewashing his hands — he even washed the bar of soap!

He refused to shake hands. If someone grabbed his hand to shake it, he immediately rushed to the nearest washroom to wash up. He was famous for examining his food before he ate it to look for any sign of contamination. He also examined dishes and silverware for any suspicious signs they hadn't been properly washed.

His obsession affected his concern for his son, Jean-Baptiste. Jean-Baptiste served in the French army during the Franco-Prussian War. He was stationed in an army hospital far away from the front lines. You would think Pasteur would be relieved that his son was not involved in the fighting. This was no comfort, though, to Pasteur for he knew that hospitals can be especially infested with germs. It is interesting how the world has changed to where we are beginning to be concerned again about patients being infected with germs, even super-germs, in our hospitals today.

Pasteur was so obsessed with germ-infected hospitals that he actually wrote to his son's commanding officer requesting that Jean-Baptiste be sent to the front and away from the contagion in the hospital. "In Pasteur's mind, flying bullets on the frontline were safer than all those germ-ridden sick and wounded men. By the way, despite his father's concerns, Jean-Baptiste survived the war and lived to be 56 years old, a long life for that era."

HERE'S WHAT WE NEED TO SEE: JESUS DOESN'T WANT US TO BE PRISONERS TO FEAR.

Actually Louis Pasteur had good reason to fear, but think how much joy was taken out of his life by his constant obsession with germs. Jesus doesn't want fear to rob us of our joy, or our effectiveness as His followers. He doesn't want to see us shrink back from responsibilities to our community and our family and ourselves because of fear.

Note what Jesus said to His terrified disciples when they see Him walking toward them that night on the lake. Jesus says to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." This was but one of many times that people in the Bible are told to not fear. If there is one thing many of us need, it is more courage and less fear.

A few years back in New Haven, Connecticut, a group of gang-bangers confronted a young man named Winfred Rembert, Jr., and told him that they wanted him to sell drugs for them. Winfred turned them down.

These gang members had never before had anyone tell them "no," and they decided to make an example of Winfred. They roughed up Winfred's 14-year-old brother and damaged his bicycle. Winfred, only 15 himself, stepped in to defend his brother. One of the gang members drew a gun and

shot Winfred in the stomach. Fortunately he survived. Afterward he said if he were in the same situation again, he would still stand up to the gang because, and I quote, “You’ve just got to do what you think is right.”

That’s courage! It’s always inspiring to us when a young person has the courage to stand up for what’s right. Think of how many people have been inspired by a young woman known as Malala. If you don’t know her story, you need to.

A few years ago, at age 11, this girl named Malala began blogging for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). She wanted to let the world know about life in Pakistan under the Taliban. In 2009 the Taliban issued an edict that banned education for all girls. This was offensive to Malala, and the edict became a featured target of her blog.

And so, in October 2012, some misguided Taliban thugs boarded a school bus on which young Malala was riding and shot her in the head at point-blank range. The bullet should have killed her, but miraculously she survived. She not only survived, but she became even more determined to stand firm in her fight to ensure that girls everywhere receive an education.

Malala has been recognized around the world for her courage, including a nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize, and an opportunity to address the United Nations on her sixteenth birthday about the importance of education. By the way, Malala forgave her attackers, which is what she says “real Islam” teaches.

That’s courage! We see it in people young and old and we admire it at any age.

There is a delightful anecdote about a famous evangelist named Peter Cartwright. One day the President of the United States, Andrew Jackson — came to Cartwright’s church. The elders of the church warned Preacher Cartwright not to offend the President. You see, at that time, the President could seriously influence a religious denomination — not that this could happen today. Anyway, the elders of the church had no desire to have President Jackson angry at them. So, they insisted that Cartwright must not offend the President.

They were wasting their time. When Cartwright got up to speak, the first words out of his mouth were: “I understand that President Andrew Jackson is here this morning. I have been requested to be very guarded in my remarks. Let me say this: Andrew Jackson will go to hell if doesn’t repent of his sin!”

The entire congregation gasped in shock. This was no way to talk about the President of the United States, though it is kind of refreshing.

After the service, Andrew Jackson met the preacher at the door looked him in the eye and said, “Sir, if I had a regiment of men like you, I could conquer the world!” Jackson evidently appreciated meeting a person of conviction and courage.

FRIENDS, IF ANDREW JACKSON COULD CONQUER THE WORLD WITH PEOPLE LIKE PETER CARTWRIGHT, THINK WHAT JESUS COULD DO WITH CHRISTIAN PEOPLE WITH CONVICTION AND COURAGE.

Being a follower of Jesus isn't for wimps! It's for those who are willing to do whatever it takes to bring in Christ's kingdom.

That's the kind of devotion Jesus needed from Simon Peter! Throughout the Gospels, Simon Peter is more a reed than a rock. Throughout the Gospels he is almost a comical figure in his eagerness and impetuosity. He wants to walk on water, but at the first sign of trouble, he gives in to fear and begins to sink. On the night Christ was betrayed Peter tells the Master that even if all the rest of the disciples forsake him, he will never forsake him — and that same night Peter denies three times that he ever knew Jesus. Christ needed more out of Simon Peter than that — just as he needs more than that from us.

Fortunately, after Pentecost, Jesus got much more than that out of Simon Peter. Peter became a rock for the early church. He and St. Paul became the acknowledged leaders of the early Christian movement. Tradition has it that Simon Peter, like his Lord and Master, died from crucifixion, except that Peter was crucified upside down because he didn't feel worthy to be crucified in the same way as Christ.

Who are the persons in this church who are ready, like Simon Peter, to take their commitment to another level and give their all to the service of Christ's kingdom?

Listen to these words of philosopher and author Dallas Willard: "The leading assumption in the American Church today is that you can be a Christian, but not a disciple." And that, of course, is false, says Dallas Willard. To be a Christian is to be a disciple.

Christianity is not a mere social club that you join because all your friends have. Neither is it a club for people who are merely fans of this man Jesus. As we have said before, Jesus wants followers, not fans. He wants people who will walk in His footsteps. Jesus wants people who will deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Him. Can He count on you? Are you, and I, persons of courage and conviction who will give our best to serving Him? I hope so. The whole world depends on it.

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