

Get out of the Boat.

Sterling UMC
September 12, 2010
Matthew 14:22 – 32

I want to tell you a story this morning. It's my story. It's a story that begins when I was 20 years old. You see way back then I thought I had it all figured. I knew what I wanted to do. I had it all planned out. I was in my second year at Old Dominion University, studying electrical engineering. For as long as I could remember that had been my goal. To follow in the footsteps of my father and to be an engineer. That was where the jobs were. That was where the money was. I would have a great job, a wonderful wife, and a nice home. It was safe. It was comfortable. It was secure. And it was smooth sailing for a while. That is, until Jesus called. I began to hear his unmistakable voice to follow him. I have to tell you that call struck fear into my heart. It meant leaving behind everything that I had ever planned and going in a completely different direction. To leave behind the safety and security of all I had ever planned and hoped to follow him in a completely new direction. As I wrestled with that call, I knew it wouldn't be easy. What would my parents say? Would they support me? What would Robin think? Would she follow me? And yet the Lord was persistent. The call was relentless. And though the future was uncertain, and the way unknown, I knew I had to follow. I had to get out of the boat and answer God's call. And so here I am today, 27 years later. The way has not always been easy. There have been times when the wind has strong and the waves high, and yet there has always been one constant, Jesus. And just as he was for Peter, He has been there with me every step of the way holding my hand, keeping me strong, keeping me from sinking, leading me and guiding me, challenging me and comforting me, helping me to fulfill his desire more my life.

I have a suspicion that my story is not unique. In fact I know it is not. All of us can identify with Peter. Jesus is constantly calling his people. Your calling may not be exactly the same as mine, but the call is there. Jesus calls us to step out in faith and to follow him. And this morning on this Rally Day Sunday, the beginning of a new church year, Jesus is calling us as individuals and as a church. He is calling us to get out of the boat!

And so this morning I want to invite you on adventure. I want to invite to step out in faith. I would like to let Peter's walk stand as a challenge and inspiration to experience more of the power and presence of God. A call to discover and embrace the unique calling of God for us. And what is that call? It is a call to "Come."

Now, picture in your mind this scene we hear about in Matthew's Gospel. Picture the size of the waves, the strength of the wind, and the darkness of the night. And try to imagine how Peter felt....he was cold, wet, exhausted, terrified. And Jesus comes to him in the midst of the waves and says, "Come!" I would think it would be difficult enough to get out of a boat and try to walk on the water when it's calm, in the daylight. Even that would take more courage than the average person could muster. Imagine doing it when the waves are crashing and the wind is at gale force and it's three in the morning and the night is black. Think about it. The boat is safe, and the boat is secure, and the boat

is comfortable. The water is high, the waves are rough, the wind is strong, and the night is dark. A storm is out there, and if you get out of your boat, you may sink. But if you don't get out of your boat, you will never walk on water because if you want to walk on the water, you have to get out of the boat. And this is what Peter did. He got out! Does this sound familiar to you? We struggle, we pull, and strain, fighting against the wind and the waves, and Jesus is here even in the midst of the storm bidding us to let go, to step out in faith and come to him. He's calling to us today.

What is that call? It is a ...

Call to be a church that is not lukewarm - on fire for Jesus Christ.

Call to have a hunger and thirst to learn and to grow as true disciples.

Call to be a place where we gather as a community of faith gathering with a sense of excitement and anticipation to worship the living God.

Call for us to not be spectators but to be a body of believers where every person is actively involved in ministry using his or her gifts and talents for the work of building God's kingdom.

Call for us to go into our community and our world to serve others and to carry the good news of Jesus Christ.

Call for us to be one body; One in unity, one in vision, one in mission, one in love.

Call for us to be a place where people know they can come to find answers to their questions, help for their problems, healing for their pain, forgiveness for their sins, and hope for their future.

What is it that is holding us back? The answer is one word, fear. When God calls there is always fear. God has an inextinguishable habit of asking people to do things that are scary to them. It may be a fear of inadequacy. (Moses). It may be a fear of failure (spies). It may even be a fear of God (parable of talents). But one way or another there will be fear.

The boat is safe, secure, and comfortable. On the other hand the water is deep. It is rough. The waves are high. The wind is strong. If you get out of the boat, there's a possibility that you might sink. But if you never get out of the boat, there's guaranteed certainty that you will never walk on the water.

So let leads me to a very important question. What is your boat? What is our boat? That boat is that which represents safety and security apart from God himself. Your boat is whatever keeps you so comfortable that you don't want to give it up even if it's keeping you from joining Jesus.

Peter shared a moment, a connection with Jesus, that none of his peers did that night. They missed out because they never got out of the boat. He learned some things in this

experience....things that the others did not...because Peter didn't stay in the boat. This brings us to an aspect of discipleship that a lot of people don't like. I don't always like it myself. You see, a commitment to a life of following Christ is a commitment to the constant recurrence of the experience of fear. It'll happen over and over again. To be a disciple is to be a learner or a student. It is to choose to grow in Christ. And growth means entering new territory, getting out of the boat. Every time you do that, you experience fear. Discipleship is often a choice between comfort and fear. To be a disciple is to renounce comfort. It means we are willing to get out of the boat! That's bad news for many of us -- because our society is into comfort. We like to come home and say, "I just want to 'veg out'" - usually in front of a television set. And we refer to people who do that as "couch potatoes."

Well, the eleven other disciples were "boat potatoes." They did not want to run the risk. They did not want to experience fear. And churches are full of folks whom we might call "pew potatoes." Trying to live for Jesus....accepting His invitation to the abundant life that comes from following Him....means that there are times when we may sink. We may fail. But I have a secret to share with you: it doesn't matter because Jesus is adequate to save sinking people. Jesus is still looking for people to simply get out of the boat....people who will accept His invitation to draw on His power source to do great things in His kingdom. If you do, you will face problems. A storm is out there. But I know two other things. I know that when you fail-and you will sometimes. But if do not take your eyes off Jesus and call out to Him, Jesus will be there. He will pick you up. He will not leave you alone. And I also know that every once in a while, friends, you're going to walk on the water!

That is our theme for the coming year.

Jesus is still looking for people who will get out of the boat. Why risk it? I believe there are many reasons:

- It is the only way to real growth
- It is the way true faith develops.
- It is the alternative to boredom and stagnation that causes people and churches to wither up and die.
- It is part of discovering and obeying your calling.

There are many good reasons to get out of the boat. But there is one that trumps them all: The water is where Jesus is. Jesus is not in the boat. The main reason Peter got out of the boat is that he wanted to be where Jesus was.

So let me ask you, where are you in relation to Jesus these days?

- Huddled in the boat with a life preserver and the seat belt on
- One leg in, one leg out
- Out of the boat—but the wind looks pretty bad
- Out of the boat and loving it!

What is Jesus calling you to do? Now is the time to get out of the boat!

Maybe it means that you will step out of the boat and ...

- practice tithing
- Get involved in an area of service or ministry
- Join a Sunday school class
- Participate in a Bible study
- Join the choir
- Volunteer to help in our children's or youth ministry
- Go on a mission trip
- Help in one of our local missions projects
- Volunteer to help in the launching of our Hispanic/Latino ministry
- Share your faith with someone you know that does not know Jesus
- Invite someone to come to church with you

When was the last time you stepped out of your boat? When was the last time you went out on a limb for something that you wanted? When was the last time you stepped out on faith in Christ?

If you want to WALK ON WATER...if you want to enjoy the thrill of following Jesus....then remember to learn from Peter's mistakes. Rely on Jesus' strength and not your own. Do not be held captive by fear. Do not allow yourself to become distracted by the storms of life that will come your way. Keep your eyes focused on God no matter what comes. And most importantly....get out of the boat. Attempt great things for God. Leave your comfort zone. The first step is the hardest. Take that step today...because you will never "walk on water" until you do!

I close with this quote about the common cold of the soul according to Gregg Levoy:

To sinful patterns of behavior that never get confronted and changed,
 Abilities and gifts that never get cultivated and deployed –
 Until weeks become months
 And months turn into years,
 And one day you're looking back on a life of
 Deep intimate gut-wrenchingly honest conversations you never had;
 Great bold prayers you never prayed,
 Exhilarating risks you never took,
 Sacrificial gifts you never offered
 Lives you never touched,
 And you're sitting in a recliner with a shriveled soul,
 And forgotten dreams,
 And you realize there was a world of desperate need,
 And a great God calling you to be part of something bigger than yourself –
 You see the person you could have become but did not;
 You never followed your calling.
 You never got out of the boat.