

*“Step Out in Faith” – Matthew 14:22-33 - Rev. Jeff Childs*

**What Are You Afraid Of?** The story tells us that the disciples were in the midst of a fierce storm rocking the boat out on the sea, but they do not seem to fear the storm - that's another story. (In Luke 8 there is a story of Jesus and the disciples in a boat and Jesus is asleep when another storm comes up. They wake Jesus up, he calmed the storm, and they are amazed that the wind and the sea obey him. Next year I'll preach on that when we get into the Luke stories!) But here, it is Jesus' walking on the water which they perceive to be a ghost that scares them. They even scream! But what are you afraid of? For a moment I would like you to take out your bulletin and a pen or pencil and jot down your worst fears. Let me offer some examples to prime the pump: ghosts, the dark, cancer, losing a job, dying, failure... What helps us overcome those fears? Faith! Today I want to affirm us to face our fears, and overcome them, so we live by faith and not out of fear. But be careful in whom or in what you put that faith – in the stock market, federal government, your boss or the CEO? Put your faith not in the CEO but the DEO (that's Latin for GOD!)

**A Leap of Faith.** Theologian Soren Kirkegaard coined this phrase to describe what happens when we reach the end of the safe and familiar path and choose not to stop or turn back but to move forward in the full assurance of answering the call of the One who invites us to the journey. We may have fears and doubts in ourselves, but if we have faith in the one who calls, might we be like Peter and take that leap of faith even into the unbelievable which becomes the new reality. (Though we might think this was a big deal, I don't think so, the bigger deal was the first time Jesus called him to leave the boat, back in chapter 4, to learn to fish for people!)

Back in 2011 I was blessed to lead a group of pilgrims from one of my former churches to the Holy Land. I had wanted to go and “walk where Jesus walked” since I was in seminary, but I was afraid of the high cost of the trip and the turmoil and unrest in the Middle East. One of my hopes was to experience walking on the water on the Sea of Galilee. We went out in what we might envision as a small fishing boat, but realistically it was a tourist touring boat designed to give a bus load of people an experience of being on the water where Jesus walked. As we got out onto the choppy sea we had a devotional and a time to take pictures and look around. But I wanted to check out the water. Unwilling to jump ship, I instead stuck one foot out a porthole. I did not get to walk on the water, but I did get my shoe and pant leg wet. I had to settle to walk on the water by walking on the boat on the water.

**Doubting Peter.** The Sunday after Easter each year we hear the story of Thomas who missed seeing the resurrected Jesus when all the other disciples were gathered in the upper room and though ten claimed to have seen him still Thomas doubted. But if you read this text closely you will see that he was not the only doubter. Here Peter is the one who doubts and it causes him to sink like a rock! (that's a pun – remember Jesus named him Peter “the Rock” on which Jesus

would build the church.) This portion of the story may have more to say to us than leaping out in faith. It is calling out in fear and doubt. There will be times when even faithful disciples get into deep water and even peril. As Peter was sinking he had enough presence of mind to ask Jesus for help! Note that he did not wait until he was underwater or completely sunk. Ask for help when there is still time to be helped! If you find yourself doubting or struggling in your faith, who can you talk to? Are you in a small group, that's a great place to share both your joys and also your struggles. Share with a trusted friend or family member or come share with me. As a community of faith, we should be the place that helps one another through the doubts and struggles of life and faith? We should encourage leaps of faith and answering Christ's call. That's what I believe. Alleluia and Amen.

### **There Are Times When We Must Believe**

Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs 8/1/23

There are times when we must,  
Believe and by faith walk.  
For we all know, in God we trust,  
That's more than idle talk.

Jesus called Peter to come,  
And walk out on the sea.  
Fear of the storm made him slip some,  
In peril he came to be.

Peter was in the boat,  
Far out upon the sea.  
There in a storm and tossed about,  
Something walked, what could it be?

Peter to Jesus cried,  
Jesus to Peter reached out.  
Then Jesus to Peter replied,  
“why did you ever doubt?”

They could not see who it was,  
Who stood there upon the lake.  
Peter recognized it was Jesus,  
A leap of faith he'd take.

“Have faith and do not fear,”  
Jesus essentially said.  
No harm can come when Jesus is near,  
We are saved and we are blessed.