

The Ride of Your Life Water Walkers 3

Mark 9:17-27

Do you remember being in the first or second grade and seeing kids who were in say the fourth or fifth grade and thinking? “Wow, they are so mature. They seem so confident and smart.” Or maybe that is too far back for some of us. Maybe freshman year of high school and our admiration of seniors is an easier memory to retrieve. I have a distinct memory from the first grade. My sister was in the sixth grade and she walked me to school the first day. **This is not a picture of her walking me to school, by the way.** I thought her friends, those sixth graders, were like adults. I was nervous, unconfident and new. They were everything I wasn't. That was my perspective through the eyes of a new first grader. If I look at sixth graders today, “mature” isn't the word that normally comes to mind. **Even people in college seem like babies to me.** How can they be that young and be in college? My perspective is shaped by the information I have from my experience, my sense of security and my knowledge of the situation (or lack thereof).

In this series, “Water Walkers”, which is based on the book by John Ortberg, “If You Want To Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat” we have discovered lots of things about ourselves and how faulty thinking or misconceptions can sometimes be an obstacle for us. For example, we have looked at how the situations that felt comfortable, safe and familiar (our boats) are often the very situations that rob us experiencing the grace and presence of God. We've learned that our ability to step out of the boat is an act of faith and that living by faith means there are no absolutes when facing the storms of life. We simply keep our eyes on Jesus and trust that God's grace will sustain us.

What do we think will happen when we get out of our boats on the stormy seas of life? Do we really expect that no wave might wash over us? Do we consider it failure if we end up wet more than we end up dry most of the time? Just because you have your eye on God's purpose for your life doesn't mean that a rogue wave might not still send you for a tumble. **Following Jesus isn't about creating a new boat to protect**

ourselves from the waves but learning to change our perspective on how we view the storm. I've never been a surfer dude, but watching them ride the waves, shoot the curl, taking air looks like they are having the ride of their lives. For the novice who has no experience working with that kind of waves, it can look frightening.

Consider this: the meaning you attach to an experience, a moment, a memory, a relationship shapes how you see them. When we become Water Walkers, we are asked to re-shape how we view the world. When we use grace as the lens through which we see everything else, then even the storms take on different significance that completely changes how we handle them. We have to grapple with making sense of our reality through the eyes of faith. That was the struggle of the father in our scripture passage. He loved his son and was destroyed by watching him suffer. He desperately wanted to learn what this faith stuff was all about. Help my unbelief, he asks. Our perspective shapes how we see things. Let me give you a visual example.

[Video]

Faith grows when we have a willingness to allow God's grace access to our lives. We don't have control over everything. We don't always have all the information. All we have is a willingness to go along for the ride and trust that it will be worth taking.

This week we learned that President Obama has instructed the Justice Department to no longer defend DOMA lawsuits because they believe the statute to be unconstitutional. It is not the end of DOMA, but it is an important step in the right direction. That was an unexpected wave that rocked our world! Hawaii passed civil union legislation and Maryland is close to having marriage equality. It has been quite a ride.

On a different topic, ABC News reported on the return of Captain D. J. Skelton to active combat command. Captain Skelton was seriously injured in the opening battle of Fallujah in Iraq. He was hit by an AK47 that blew away all the bone between his left elbow and hand as well as between his knee and his foot. A piece of shrapnel entered his right

cheek and exited through his left eye, blinding him on one side. After 60 surgeries he is recovered but still has no roof in his mouth. He is the most seriously injured commander to return to active combat command in US Army history. Nobody would have thought a thing about someone who had experienced all of that simply retiring from service and taking it easy or even being bitter about the hand life had dealt him. Captain Skelton was determined to return to his men. He underwent all the physical tests required of combat soldiers, pushed his body to find ways to work around the limitations of his injuries, wrote a book and received a Harvard Fellowship. It took six years but this week he is back with his battalion which is now in Afghanistan. What some would have called a tsunami of obstacles, Captain Skelton has used as an opportunity to surf.

This past week I traveled out to United Theological Seminary to interview prospective clergy interns for next fall's school term placement with our congregation. These are students who are discerning their call and their gifts for ministry. The internship allows them to "try on" the mantle of pastor, teacher, leader and clergy. We have had several interns come through All God's Children and it is part of our mission to accompany them in their journey toward discernment. I tell the students to use their internship as an opportunity to stretch themselves. This is a good time to try something that could fail. If they fail creating a program or leading a worship service during their internship, it's not the end of the world. It is a learning experience. It will be much more costly to fail once they are pastors.

How are you defining the experiences of your ride? Do the challenges immediately become failures or is it possible to repurpose them as opportunities? Do the uncertainties make you pull back in fear or step out in faith?

Take a chance on the ride. Risk falling down. Risk having a wave knock you off course for a while. Faith grows when we have a willingness to allow God's grace access to our lives. We don't have control over everything. We don't always have all the information. All we have is a willingness to go along for the ride and trust that it will be worth taking.

Sources:

Ortberg, John, "If You Want to Walk On Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat" chapters 4-5.

<http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/dj-skelton-armys-wounded-commander-returns-combat/story?id=12984099&page=3>