

## Water Walkers

Matthew 14:22-33

I believe there is something – Someone – inside us who tells us there is more to life than sitting in the boat. You were made for something more than merely avoiding failure. There is something inside you that wants to walk on the water – to leave the comfort of routine existence and abandon yourself to the high adventure of following God.

So let me ask you a very important question: What’s your boat?

Your boat is whatever represents safety and security to you apart from God. Your boat is whatever you are tempted to put your trust in, especially when life gets a little stormy. 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 in the waves. Your boat is whatever pulls you away from the high adventure of extreme discipleship.

Want to know what your boat is? Your fear will tell you. Just ask yourself this: What is it that most produces fear in me – especially when I think of leaving it behind and stepping out in faith? (pg. 17, Ortberg)

Today we begin a series called “Water Walkers”. As you heard a few moments ago, this series is based on the book by John Ortberg, “If You Want to Walk on Water You’ve Got to Get Out of the Boat.” Ortberg gives us a good way to talk about the common human experience of what it means to live by faith. Living by faith is a learned experience. It may be something we are born with but somewhere over the years we seem to lose our ability to trust, to believe and to step out into the unknown, so most of us have to re-learn the principles that allow us to become water walkers. Much of what Jesus taught his disciples, even apart from this famous water walking story of our gospel reading, has to do with re-acquiring those water walking skills.

According to Ortberg, water walking requires developing several specific skills: discerning God’s call, transcending fear, risking faith, managing failure and trusting God.

These don’t always happen in sequential order and in fact may occur simultaneously. Ortberg says, and I think he is right here, that the way to figure out what it means to get out of our boat can easily be determined by what causes us to be afraid. Our “boats” are the creations we build around our fear to keep us safe. But in the process of staying “safe,” we

lose our opportunity to grow, to discover new things about ourselves and learn more deeply what it means to live by faith and trust God's grace.

Before we can become water walkers, we have to own that we're in the boat. **If you haven't figured out what your boat is yet, there's a good chance you are not going to be able to get out of it.**

Let me give you an example of one of my boats. **(Sometimes I think I might have a whole flotilla so there's never a need to actually get wet. Just jump from boat to boat!)** As a person who needs to come up with a creative, insightful, thought-provoking and motivating message every week, one of my passions is to never deliver a boring sermon. For one thing, I sat through enough of them in my day that I just can't imagine inflicting that on people on an on-going basis. So I work hard at finding interesting insights, thought-provoking ideas and scripturally-sound information that will cause you to ponder through the week **(or at least for the next hour)** and motivate you to begin using your life to make the world a better place. I have a regular process that God and I have worked out over the years that when I trust the process, the end result is usually something I feel meets my expectations. Most of you probably don't know this but our worship experience doesn't just happen by accident or instantly. Our planning for worship is very involved. Scripture passages and themes are chosen weeks in advance so that music and technology and drama can all have time to prepare to contribute. I know the topic I plan to use for every Sunday from now through Easter. But everything doesn't come together for the sermon until the week before. A sermon is the axis where the experience of scripture, the gathered community and what's happening in the world intersect. Every day of the week I spend some time in preparation and production. Usually each day, something new is revealed and added to the process so that by Thursday **(none of this Saturday night midnight oil for me!)** I have something hopefully worth saying and worth hearing. It is a process with which I have learned to trust. So it means that each week I have to trust God's grace again to inspire me so that I might try to inspire you. There are no guarantees that I will have an inspiring week so I have to trust God anew each time. Most weeks this process works well and little by little throughout the week I can discern what God is

saying to me so that I have something to say to you... until I have a week like this last one. Every day of the work week I found my sermon production time being interrupted by meetings, unscheduled counseling sessions, hospital emergencies, trips to the capitol to deal with HIV and marriage equality. All of these things are good uses of my time and usually not a problem to work study and sermon time around... except for this week.

As I watched the week slip away and my opportunities for reflection and study slip away with it, this fear tugged on my stomach. I wasn't able to work my process – my tried and true process that God and I had worked out through years of negotiation – and all of a sudden I realized I found myself in a new boat and God was calling me to be a water walker. “Trust me with yourself,” I sensed the Spirit whispering. “Leap into the unknown and see if I don't catch you.” And here was the hard one, “Practice what you preach!” Yeah... talk about low blows.

So I want you to know that I stand before you today as a person who has wet feet. I don't have a formula that I can give you that if you do  $a+b+c$  you will find  $d$ . That's not how grace works. **If you had a formula you wouldn't need faith.** Water walking is becoming aware each day and in each new situation where we are allowing fear to guide us and where we are allowing faith to guide us. I can tell you that learning to live by faith will involve these elements.

Next Sunday, we will cover chapters 2 and 3 in the book, if you are reading along for the series. I understand we ran out of books last week but more were ordered and a new stock is available in the store downstairs. Next week we'll look at what it means to be called. Once you step out of the boat, where are you going. Each of us has a unique calling – a unique story, set of skills, passions and interests. For you to walk on water may look very differently from how I walk on water but in the end everyone of us is called to get our feet wet, which means we have to get out of the boat.

I want to close with what Ortberg told us in our first reading today.

“I believe there is something – Someone – inside us who tells us there is more to life than sitting in the boat. You were made for something more than merely avoiding failure. There is something inside you that wants to walk on the water – to leave the comfort of routine existence and abandon yourself to the high adventure of following God.”

The high adventure of water walking has begun.

Sources:

Ortberg, John, “If You Want to Walk on Water, You’ve Got to Get Out of the Boat, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI, 2001, pg. 17.

[www.homileticsonline.com](http://www.homileticsonline.com) Blue Ocean Strategy, August 2005.