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Walking on Water
Matthew 14:22-33

I don't know about you, but I think the ***news has been particularly scary*** this week. Lots of fear, lots of '***what ifs***', lots of potentially scary scenarios, right? It's unnerving to think about war or some other worldwide conflict, isn't it? And then there's the hatred and violence...very scary as well! But it's not just the news, is it? Isn't it also our ***daily lives***? Aren't most of us '***what-ifers***'? *What if I can't do this?*
What if this sickness is something more?
What if something happens to my kids? Or my loved ones?
What if I can't pay my bills?
What if that milk I drank this morning past the expiration date makes me sick, right in the middle of the meeting at work that I'm not prepared for, and what if the whole thing causes me to lose my job?
A lot of our what-ifs are like that, aren't they?

One little fear leads to another and another, and soon we are down the path of doom and gloom. In fact, some might say that it's just ***easier to be a what-ifer***. ***Easier to be negative***, because at least that way we won't be surprised or hurt when life goes badly, right?

It's ***harder to be real, and vulnerable***. It's harder to let go of the future, live in the present, and let God be God. But that's our calling from our Savior Jesus.

To be real.

To be ***vulnerable***.

To ***let go of all the what-ifs***, and the ***negativity***, and to ***live life to it's fullest***. Even in the midst of a storm, let's say a real whopper of a storm at sea til about 3 am, just like the disciples saw that night.

In fact, it's often ***in those kind of storms*** that we figure out how to be real and vulnerable...which is an awesome trait, if you ask me. (*I mean how many of us like people that are always fake, seemingly perfect, and never admit to having any problems. Ugh!*)

I have preached this passage many times, and I love the book about it by John Ortberg, called *If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Gotta Get Out of the Boat*. But this week I was watching some TED talks by a researcher named **Brene Brown** and it got me thinking. I've quoted her before in sermons—she's a great storyteller. Brene Brown is also researcher and professor at the University of Houston, and she studies **vulnerability**.

Sounds a little odd maybe, but that's her life's work---**studying vulnerability**. She asserts that the biggest problem we all face is our **lack of tolerance** for vulnerability. So much of the time, ***we want to be invulnerable***, or we want to **numb ourselves** with addiction or overeating or overspending so we won't be vulnerable anymore.

Why ***does she care*** about this? Because she thinks that the ***goal of a meaningful life is to live wholeheartedly***, which means being ***real, vulnerable, and open*** to both the pain and the joy of life. (see brenebrown.com, and her youtube and TED talks)

It got me thinking about this story, and ***why it's so important*** for us today. You can read about this miracle story and people have ***different ideas*** about what's important—the **walking** on water, the courage and **faith** to get out of the boat. The keeping your **eyes** on God so you don't sink! And I think there's truth in these interpretations. But, one thing I've learned is each time you really read a passage of the Bible, it's going to show you ***something new, if you let it***.

So today I want to look at it from a ***new perspective***. And I want to start with the **context**. Remember last week's sermon by Gordon Edwards?

What was it about?

Just before this story is the ***feeding of the 5,000*** when Jesus fed all those people from one boy's lunchbox of loaves and fishes!

That's the ***context of this story***, believe it or not.

It's kind of ***amazing*** when you think about it,

that they would have any ***doubt*** about who Jesus was or what he was capable of doing, once they saw that miraculous feeding.....

ah, but we ***humans are a little dim*** even about miracles, aren't we?

So what if we consider the feeding of the 5,000 to be a ***"mountaintop experience"*** for the disciples, a 'high point' in their journey with Jesus.

And what if we think carefully about what happens in those high mountaintop good times in our lives.....

sometimes it's ***in the midst of the good stuff***

that we ***forget just how much we need God***, right?

I mean when things are smooth sailing,

it's easy to think that we don't need to get down on our knees,

because things are fine!

When things are good, it's also easy to give ourselves the credit for all the good, and believe that we don't need our Savior near as much.

It's when the ***seas become rough***

that we usually ***start to pay more attention to God***, isn't it?

We've all heard it, there are no atheists in foxholes, right?

I imagine people who work in the ocean might say there are no atheists in a monster storm.

And that's what the disciples were facing.

A monster storm.

And the funny thing is, the text says that Jesus ***compelled*** them to go.

The word in Greek for ***'made them go'*** means to ***force***.

He sent them out onto the sea, knowing full well what was in store for them.

And sure enough, they are faced with a monster storm, far away from shore, til about 3 o'clock in the morning.

And that's when Jesus has finished his solitary prayer time on the mountain (*isn't it interesting that he does this before big events?*

Jesus makes time to pray—alone! Take note).

Jesus finally joins them by ***walking to them*** on the water.

They can't even understand what they are seeing, and ***assume he is a ghost***.

Which would be a **good call**, since people don't walk on water!

And that's when the story gets really good.
 Jesus sees their fear, and **says three things**:
Take heart,
it is I,
and do not fear.

This is the part where I want you to imagine **yourself on that boat**,
 being tossed by the waves for hours, maybe you're seasick (I would be), and
 then you see this person, this shadowy figure, walking towards you.
 What do you do?
 I would blink a lot.
 That's what? Who?
 O great, I'm so out of my mind with nausea and fear that I'm seeing ghosts.
 Only **all of them** feel that way!

But what if you can't see yourself on the boat?
 Well, haven't we all experienced rough seas of some kind?
 What **storms are you facing** in your life right now?
 Don't you have something you're up against?
 Some kind of fear? Some anxiety or worry?
 If you don't, just turn on the news and listen to the sermon again.
 We are **surrounded by fear and negative** messages.

So at this point, the disciples, and most of us, are wondering—**where is God?**
Where is Jesus?
 He leaves us to go pray alone, and we're sinking out here!
 That's when Jesus comes out walking on the water,
 looking like a ghost to them.
 Why?
Why does Jesus walk on the water?
 What's the point of this miracle?
 It's not like he comes out on the waves saying "Ta-da! Look what I can do!"

I think one reason this whole story happens is so we can **see their response**,
 and **his response—of power, comfort, and grace**.
Take heart—in other words, it's ok, there, there, it's all going to be ok.
It is I. When those disciples heard him say It is I,

in Greek he was literally saying, I AM.
 Which for Jews would have meant one thing: ***the name of God***.
 The name God gave to Moses when asked who God was, was I AM.
 That's what Jesus says, I AM.
 Finally Jesus says, ***Do not fear***.
 In other words, he offers them comfort, compassion, and grace.
 He doesn't say look you idiots—I'm right here!
 He says I'm right here, it's ok. You don't need to worry anymore.

Then there's ***Peter***.
 And Peter is not a saint, Peter is a disciple, just like any of us.
 And in this story we learn a lot from him.
 He says to Jesus, ***if it is you***,
 the Greek actually can also be translated '***since it is you***,
command me to come to you on the water, and Jesus says, ***Come on***.
 Right then we have another miracle!
 Peter was able to walk on the waves to Jesus! Amazing!
 But then, he sees the wind, and starts to sink.

Why is this such a great part of the story?
 Because ***Peter is the real deal***.
 He's ***real***.
 He's ***vulnerable***.
 He's ***human***.
 It's what ***a real, vulnerable person would do***.
 He sees the waves, and panics.

Remember what I told you about Brene Brown?
 She's the researcher who says that ***invulnerability is the biggest problem*** in
 our world today.
 The biggest problem.
 Think about that.
 She might be onto something.
 Most of us ***put on a good face*** a lot of the time, even at church, right?
 We so often ***try to have that picture perfect***, Facebook approved life, right?
 We try to hold it all together, and look like we know what we're doing.
 But sometimes inside, we are ***just afraid, and falling apart***.

What if we ***decided to be like Peter***?

What if we decided to be ***real, and vulnerable?***

To ***open ourselves up*** to one another.

To just put ourselves out there,
to ask God to call us onto the waves,
and then to ***step right on out*** of the boat?

And what if we are real and vulnerable enough that we see those waves,
and start to sink?

That's the thing about vulnerability.

Brown says that it can ***lead us to fear and pain,***

BUT it also leads us to joy, love, courage, compassion, and connection.

Hmm.

In other words, vulnerability is a ***package deal.***

It's why numbing ourselves with stuff or addiction or food or stress or
overscheduling...it's why all that's so bad.

To be real and vulnerable means ***you will feel what you should feel.***

When things are ***scary***, you'll feel ***afraid.***

When things are ***crazy***, you'll feel ***confused.***

When things are ***hurtful***, you'll feel ***pain.***

But it also means you have the ***capacity to feel
joy, and love, and compassion!***

You ***can't have the joy and love without the pain and difficult*** feelings.

So if you ***numb*** yourself to avoid pain?

Well, you have essentially ***cut yourself off*** from joy and love as well.

I don't remember what saint said it,
but I've always believed what I heard once,
it's ***the depth of pain that leads to the deepest joy.***

That's certainly been true in ***my life.***

I can stand up here and praise God with the rest of you because I know what it
is to have pain, and heartbreak, NOT because my life is just fine!

Peter is real, experiencing all the feelings....

he steps out on the waves, and he sinks because of his fear!

I think he's probably afraid, shaking, unsure—

but he wants to be with Jesus.

His friend and Lord.

What if he just **wants to be right there with Jesus?**

What if he wants to **see Jesus at work**—helping him walk on the water?

What if he wants to **see the power** of this amazing man,
the man that he abandoned his entire life to follow?

Peter starts to sink, and in a real, vulnerable moment, he says,

Lord! Save me!

It could have come out more colorfully for some of us, but we get the idea.

(Scribes may have edited.)

And what happens right when he says that?

This is important—really important.

Jesus **grabs him** and catches him.

Jesus **saves** him.

The Greek here actually means to **grab hold of**.

He doesn't wave a wand and make the wind go away.

He doesn't just say—you goof, you're looking the wrong way.

He grabs him, and says **You of little faith, why did you doubt?**

In the Greek it says why did you **waver?**

Why did you wonder whether you could do it **with my help, or not?**

Then the **wind stops** as they get into the boat,

because we are after all talking about the God of the universe,

the God who commands the earth and sea.

And then something else amazing happens.

They **worshiped him**, saying **Truly you are the Son of God!**

In other words, they are filled with **gratitude!**

They have seen his power, they have experienced his help,

they have heard his words of comfort,

they have seen his compassion for Peter.

And they are filled with gratitude!

And what is the **ultimate way to show our gratitude?**

I'd say it's to **worship**.

I think that worship is the ultimate expression of our thanks and gratitude for
all of our blessings, isn't it?

We come here to say 'Thank you'!
 Thank you, Lord, for all you **have done**,
 thank you for all you **are doing**,
 thank you for all that you **will do!**

So, what do we learn from this amazing little story about some guys in a boat on rough seas, right after 5,000 people are fed?

Well, I think we learn from both Jesus and Peter that we should talk to God.

Talk to God.

It's important, folks.

I feel like some days I never stop talking to God—poor God---
 because it doesn't have to be out loud, or only when you are alone.

We can talk to God.

Jesus does this—he takes time to talk to the Father.

And of course we have the flip side of this—we ***listen to God.***

Jesus listened to the Father God, and we listen to God as well.

This usually requires some quiet time, to hear that still small voice of God, but sometimes God shouts at us.

So, we listen.

Then of course we learn to ***be real and vulnerable.***

Like Peter.

Be real. Say what you think and feel.

Be vulnerable.

Be willing to get out of the boat!

Be vulnerable enough to walk on those waves, and even look the wrong way
 and start sinking, because the other thing we learn is this:

Let God grab hold of you.

Let Jesus Save You.

What's more important than that?

When we are sinking, there is one person capable of saving us—and that
 person is ***Jesus Christ.***

Let Him ***grab hold of you***, of your heart, your life.

Finally, we ***learn to be grateful.***

Be grateful.

What is the answer to the fear and negativity of our world?

Gratitude.

What is the antidote to all the pain and anxiety all around us?

Gratitude.

What would our ***world*** be like with a lot more gratitude?

Can you imagine?

Count those blessings, and then count them again.

Realize how they seem to multiply every time you count them,
because we are usually not paying attention
to all the blessings we've been given!

Be grateful.

It's a choice, not a feeling---

we can choose to see the blessings,

we can choose to live in thanksgiving and praise.

Sure, it's far ***easier to be negative*** and Debbie Downer.

But Jesus calls us to ***gratitude***.

And to ***worship***—the ultimate expression of our thanks and praise.

Friends, believe me, there is some ***Good News in our Gospel*** today!

Jesus is with us in the storms of life,
offering his power, comfort, and grace.

So let's ***talk*** to him, and ***listen***.

Let's be ***real and vulnerable***.

Let's ***let him grab hold*** of us.

And let's ***be grateful***, for that is the way to live the Gospel.

And to that, all the people of God said, Amen!