

WEEKLY SERMON

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If you want to walk on water, you've got to get out of the boat!

This was the title of a book by John Ortberg focusing on the possibilities in life and faith if you are prepared to step outside your comfort zone and trust God rather than your own ability and confidence.

In this episode from Matthew's gospel, Peter chooses to get out of the boat, and for a moment he walks on water! But distracted by strong winds he eventually loses focus and begins to sink. One-minute elation, the next panic – 'Lord, save me!'

Peter is a man of contrasts. Recognised as the leader among the disciples. The first great voice for the gospel following Pentecost. He was enthusiastic and driven by purpose. BUT he often misunderstood things and got things wrong. He would make great statements then fail to follow through. He spoke without thinking and was frequently brash and impulsive.

But it's interesting that this mixed bag of a man was the one to whom Jesus said a couple of chapters later (Matthew 16:18) 'And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of Hell will not overcome it'.

Peter's story in many ways reflects the ups and downs of normal Christian life - we willingly follow but we frequently stumble!

This episode with Peter offers a number of helpful insights for any would be followers of Jesus.

First, following Jesus is about faith rather than foolishness. In stepping out of the boat Peter is not simply taking a risk or trying to look good, he is simply seeking to be obedient to Jesus invitation - 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.' Jesus willingly invites him 'Come' and in obedience, Peter steps out of the boat.

An ability to discern between the authentic call of God and what might be described as a foolish impulse is an important foundation to our faith.

A second insight is the recognition that you actually have to get out of the boat! Peter, anxious and fearful in his small boat being battered by the waves and the wind, has a choice. He can stay where he is or he can choose to move from one situation to another – he chose to step out of the boat drifting in troubled waters and walk on water – trusting Jesus for his future or he can stay where he is, relying on his own ability and luck!

We have a similar choice, but first we need to recognise what our boat is - What is or are the troubled areas of your life where Jesus might be saying 'Come!' step out of the boat and trust me; walk to me. Fear will probably tell you what your boat is and to step out of it could just be the hardest thing you will ever do. But if you want to walk on water – you've got to get out of the boat!

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If you do decide to step out of the boat, then one thing is for sure – you need to expect problems. Reflection three ... setbacks, opposition, unexpected obstacles, doubt, fear are bound to immerge if you choose to step out of the boat – we need to expect them if you choose to walk by faith!

Finally, a question ... did Peter fail? Yes and no!

It seems to me that failure provides an opportunity for growth. In faith, Peter was prepared to step out of the boat and walk on water. When he did, he lost his focus and began to sink, but Jesus walking with him, lifted him up and encouraged him.

We need to remember that failure does not shape us; it's the way we respond to failure that shapes us! Peter's 'failure' was probably the biggest catalyst for his spiritual growth, but the irony is he probably didn't realise it at the time!

'If you want to walk on water, you've got to get out of the boat!'

What will you do this week? Remain in your boat or step out in faith?

Your future is in your hands!

The Very Rev Peter Howell-Jones, Dean of Blackburn