

“It is I... Come” *What is your yacht?*

Dwelling in the Word 3: September 4, 2016

Matthew 14:22-36

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Today is the third Sunday morning of dwelling with this passage from the gospel of Matthew. This morning we return to our good old friend Peter. Let us remember the scene. The disciples and Jesus just finished feeding the massive crowd of over five thousand. Jesus sends the disciples to their boat and tells them to go on ahead of him while he spends time alone in prayer. We are told that the boat, assuming a simple fishing vessel, is being battered by the waves. Furthermore it is far from shore and the wind was against them.

We also need to be reminded that some of the disciples were trained fishermen, including Peter. Those with that training and experience would have known better than to get caught in a storm. They were aware of the perils of being out at sea on a simple vessel and having to fight to stay alive to make it back to the shore.

I found Max Lucado description of the scene to be helpful as it reminds us of the danger in which the disciples found themselves. He describes it this way:

The winds roar down onto the Sea of Galilee like a hawk on a rat. Lightings zigzags across the black sky. The clouds vibrate with thunder. The rain taps, then pops, then slaps against the deck of the boat until everyone aboard is soaked and shaking. Ten-foot waves pick them up and slam them down again with bone jarring force. These drenched men don't look like a team of apostles who are only a decade away from changing the world. They don't look like an army that will march to the ends of the earth and reroute history. They don't look like a band of pioneers who will soon turn the world upside down. No, they look more like a handful of shivering sailors who are wondering if the next wave they ride will be their last.<sup>1</sup>

It is within this context from across the sea that they see Jesus approaching, walking on water. They being afraid cry out, “It's a Ghost.” Jesus responds to them, “Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.” And here now is dear Peter. Peter the one is almost always listed first when there is a list of the disciples. Here is Peter who is usually the first to act or to speak. Here is Peter once again. And Peter cries out to Jesus, “Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the

water.” Now “Peter is often criticized for being impulsive, for having “little faith,” and for doubting, but such criticism should not overlook that he asks Jesus to command him to come to him. Peter begins his journey across the water toward Jesus with the recognition that this is not something he can do on his own initiative. He asks Jesus to command him to come, recognizing that he has no ability to come to Jesus unless his ability to come to Jesus comes from Jesus.”<sup>ii</sup>

Peter’s question to Jesus is also not just a question of verification. *You know, I think it’s you Jesus and it appears that you are walking on water, and boy I have always dreamed of having an opportunity to do just that. So if it’s you, would you tell me to come?* Again, context is extremely important. Peter is in the boat rocked by the winds and the waves. Jesus is somehow standing upright - surviving amidst the storm. It doesn’t take Peter long to determine that his odds of surviving might actually be better outside of the boat, on the water with Jesus. Jesus responds with one word, “Come.”

With this we are told that Peter obeyed the command and got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came towards Jesus. But, when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink, cried out. Now to see the wind means that he must have shifted his focus off Jesus to the storm around him. Remember, the storm was already in full force when he readily climbed out of the boat. The storm was already resulting in fear within himself of survival. But now, out on the water, he sees the waves and the storm in a new light. His vision changes from Jesus to the environment and fear once again grips his heart and he cries out.

Now, if you were Peter, what would you cry out if you were in his sandals so to speak? More importantly, who or what would you cry out to? Before this week I had never really considered the significance that as he is sinking he cries out to Jesus. He doesn’t turn to ask his friends in the boat, the ones who aren’t sinking at least not currently. Instead, he turns to the one

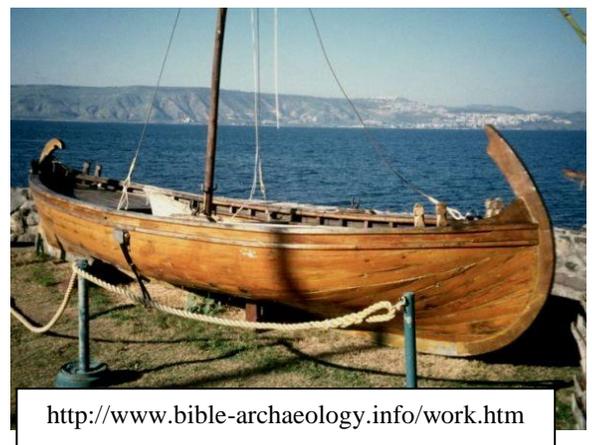
out in the elements, also on the water, not protected by a boat. “Lord, save me!” I would suggest that Peter demonstrates his faith both by asking Jesus to command him to get out of the boat, but also as he cries out to Jesus as he is sinking. You see when Peter got out of the boat I think he thought that this action was his ticket to evading the storm that appeared to be threatening his very existence. However, out on the waves the storms remained and it was there that he needed to keep focused on Jesus.

We are told that immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him and said for his ears only, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” The Greek word that is translated as little faith is “always used in Matthew with respect to believers, never of unbelievers, that is, its purpose is to rebuke those who fail to draw on their faith. A parallel of sorts is... (in the gospel of John) where believing is always a verb, never a noun; faith is not a possession but an activity.<sup>iii</sup>

We are told that as Jesus and Peter got back into the boat the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped Jesus, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

Today I believe that our task is to consider what is our boat? How big is our God? Then how is Jesus commanding us to get out of the boat?

So, first, what is your boat? Now here is a picture of what some scholars believe a boat might have looked like during the days of Jesus and the disciples. It would have conceivably been a boat like this that the disciples were in as the waves beat against the sides and threatened to



<http://www.bible-archaeology.info/work.htm>

overtake it. I would argue, going along with our metaphor, that we each are given a boat like this. Now a boat like this has a specific purpose. This boat is meant for fishing. It's designed for short trips out onto the water to gather fish, and then to return to shore. Or, it is designed to transport people from here to there, assuming that here to there does not cover any great distance. It is not a boat designed to become a permanent residence, or even overnight accommodations. It's a simple vessel with a specific purpose. We can look at this and recognize that in the face of a storm it would be really scary and the vessel could actually help to facilitate learning to trust in Jesus.

Well, I would say that we have taken our education, our finances, our desire for independence, our push of sense of entitlement, and the real underlying reality of our fear to propel us add some *slight modifications* to the simple fishing boat we were given. So now, instead of this image, we now have floating vehicles that look more like this. A yacht. This



spacious accommodation provides ample space for entertainment and enjoyment. It has four decks, sleeps up to 12 (ideal for the disciples), and promises to sail smoothly even over rough or turbulent waters. And for only 44.4 million dollars this yacht could be yours! Now if a storm started brewing this yacht would provide more protection from the storm, or at least you would be able to survive longer than if you were in the simple fishing vessel.

What does your yacht look like? Well let me confess that I have modified my fishing boat into something quite lovely. I have padded deck chairs, flat screen tvs, a mini bar stocked with ice cold diet-pepsi, a kitchen filled with fresh fruits and veggies... and oh I should also mention

that I have a plethora of life saving devices. I have a navigation system, a satellite that links to weather and sea conditions, life jackets and the more life jackets. I have come up with a safety plan that gives me a lot of options to consider, even or especially if I find myself in the midst of the storm. And if the last resort is to abandon ship, I have a smaller speed boat that is attached to the yacht to use as my escape. There is no need for me to ever think I need to actually get out of the boat and into the water. I have everything I need right here. I am self-sufficient.

What in your life is your yacht? Whatever you name as your yacht “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 on the waves. Your boat is whatever pulls you away from the high adventure of extreme discipleship.”<sup>iv</sup> We upgrade our fishing vessels based on our fears. It is like building security around us, to guard our hearts against that what we fear the most. So what fears propel you to add another deck to your boat instead of praying for the Spirit to grant you boldness to courage to get out of the boat and become a water walker? Perhaps it are fears that relate with our personal safety – will our lives be endangered if we do this or that, or economic fears – do we have enough money, are we considered successful; or fears from our relationships – can I trust the other to hold the pain I feel, can I admit my shortcomings to another; and then it comes down to our fear of is God enough. Will God hold us as we jump into the water, and what happens if like Peter we get far from the boat and the shore and we start to sink? How can we possibly survive without... our yacht, our retirement account, our cell phone, our personal addictions, our hidden fears of failure, our investments, our sense of security. What is your yacht?

Next question. How big is your God? Of course we have a Sunday School answer ready to go, right? But *really*, how big is your God in terms of your fears and your level of trust? Currently my family and I are having almost daily dance parties. One of our favorite songs goes... “Our God is so BIG so strong and so mighty there’s nothing my God cannot do.” Both of our sons before school started this year, first grade and preschool, asked to sing that song before the first day as they were feeling anxious. For them it reminded them that their God is HUGE and is capable of ANYTHING... including riding the bus with them, holding their hands as they meet their new friends, and calming the storms of their inner fears.

Somewhere along the line though we start to forget that our God is so BIG, or we start to not believe it to be true. Our actions, and lack of jumping out of the boat and facing our fears and putting our hands into the hands of Jesus confirms it. When Peter got back into the boat I think the other disciples gathered around him to hear all about the experience of walking on the water. And in their excitement they asked Peter, “Peter, how big is Jesus?” And Peter replied, “My Jesus is SO BIG, so strong and so mighty, there is nothing my Jesus cannot do!”<sup>v</sup>

So once you figure out what is your yacht, then comes the difficult question of how is Jesus commanding you to leave it to join him on the water? And why do we need to leave the boat? Jesus is on the water and on the water is where growth occurs. Our yachts represent different things for each of us, as does our being faithful to getting off of our boats and getting on the water. Sometimes we can look at someone else that appears to be out of their boat and we can say to ourselves “I could never do that!” And perhaps Jesus is not calling you out of the boat in the same way. On the other hand we can look at someone and judge their faith and courage and proclaim “Well, if they would just let go of their boat they could encounter Jesus and experience real growth!” However, as we say that we are unaware that he or she is actually far from their

boat, walking already on the water. Our fears are different, our securities are different, the invitation to get out of the boat looks different.

This week I began to dream how different our faith community would be if we could generate a sense of excitement and encouragement to each other to get out of our boats! If we came each Sunday and shared stories of the ways we stepped out in faith this week and faced one of our fears and held onto the hands of Jesus as we walked upon the water. But to do this means that we are honest with our fears and with our failings. Sometimes we will step out and like Peter we will begin to sink. Can we be the kind of a community that gathers around each other, out on the water, and say it is okay, here hold my hand I will hold you up until you get your feet under you again. Can we be the kind of community where we call to others still in the boat and say come on out and experience freedom in Jesus. Or do we see the world around us and just help each other build bigger and better and sturdier yachts?

When have you recently gotten out of your boat and joined Jesus on the water? How is Jesus calling you today to get out of your boat? I want to share with you a story of my own life. Now I add the important disclaimer that for this story I could also tell 10 stories of when I felt called or nudged to get out of the boat and instead of getting out I snuggled down on my deck chair and decided to not take the risk. I don't share this story because I am a prime model of this sermon. This sermon is for me as well.

Well I got out of my boat recently as I was on a grocery trip with one of my sons. It happened to be that I only had one child with me, so it was a date of sorts. Now you need to know that when I go to the grocery store it is about getting the task down. I write my list in the order of the story to facilitate organized shopping. You need to also know that I fear having to interact with complete strangers who appear different from me in major ways and make small

talk. It goes deeper to the fear of appearing uneducated, ignorant, or dull. I also live in an environment where I hear the stories and encouragement that I should fear someone who is different, or people who dress a certain way for they might really be terrorists out to kill me.

So here we are in the middle of the grocery, the baking good aisle to be correct, and a husband and wife are coming towards us and the wife is dressed in a niqab. My child, within his innocence and child understandings, boldly and loudly and confidently asserts “Mama, look, she’s a ninja!” I simply turn to my child and say actually no she isn’t, she wears that dress because of what she believes, and because of her culture. And I went on to say that it is not polite or respectful to call anyone else a name since we are all created by God and God loves everyone. So instead, we should introduce yourselves and if we have questions about their outfit feel free to ask them respectfully... but it is never okay to call names. My child says he is very sorry that next time he will be sure to ask them their name and then ask them his question.

And then I heard it. Jesus walking on the water, commanding me to get off my yacht and place my trust in him. So I say to my child, I actually think we should go find this family so we can meet them and apologize for calling her a ninja. My brave, courageous child says, Okay, Mama that sounds like a great idea!

So I abandon my list, and organized map of the store, and I jump out of my yacht away from my fears and we find the couple five aisles back. I walk up to the Muslim man and touch him on the shoulder. He turns and his eyes are filled with fear and a wariness. I said “Um, my name is Cindy and my son would like to say something to your wife.” He then turns and translates to his wife who doesn’t speak English. My son says, “My name is and I’m sorry I called you a ninja.”

The husband looks at me and I explain “My son has never seen someone wearing the dress and covering that your wife is and he thought maybe she was a ninja. So we just wanted to apologize for that and introduce ourselves to you.” The husband translated to the wife and then something holy occurred. She smiled, her eyes radiantly the gift of shared humanity, and she reached out and patted my son’s head.

I then looked at them both and said “My husband I desire to raise our children to treat everyone with respect even people who look different from us, or wear different clothes. We believe that all are created by God. And so we just wanted to apologize and introduce ourselves to you.” With this the man begins to cry, and simply looks at me and says “Thank you.”

As we continued with our shopping I realized that we had been out of the boat and met Jesus. As I stood there outside my comfort zone I realized that Jesus stood beside me, holding my hand and holding me up.

What is your yacht? How big is your God? And how is God commanding you this day and this week to get out of the boat and walk on water? Through God’s invitation, and by God’s amazing grace may we join Jesus on the water.

Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Max Lucado, “When You Can’t Hide Your Mistakes” <https://maxlucado.com/when-you-cant-hide-your-mistakes/>

<sup>ii</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew: Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Brazos Press: Grand Rapids, Michigan), 141.

<sup>iii</sup> Douglas R.A. Hare, *Matthew: Interpretation A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (John Knox Press: Louisville, Kentucky), 170.

<sup>iv</sup> John Ortberg, *If You Want to Walk on Water You’ve Got to Get Out of the Boat* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, Michigan), 17.

<sup>v</sup> Ortberg, *If you want*, 202.