

Walk by Faith

Matt 14²²⁻³³/Josh 3⁷⁻¹⁷/

In many ways this morning we as a congregation are being called, at this time, to cross the Jordan as was Israel after the great escape from Egypt. We are so because we are being called to go where we cannot see and into what we cannot control – or at least, that we cannot be sure we can control. We are being called to step out in faith to raise enough to support a second Minister and there is no doubt that this will require a significant commitment and discipline but also a sense of God's call and prayer. I don't think we can do this in our own strength. This needs, then, to be a step **in faith** – a step **with God**.

Crossing the Jordan was an immensely symbolic action because it not only allowed them to step onto the land God has promised them all those years ago for the first time but it also represented a huge step in faith.

They were not a highly technological society. They weren't trained in warfare. They didn't have a well-developed weaponry and they didn't really know the capacity of their enemies. This was a huge step into the unknown. Even in the desert they had been, in some sense, arbiters of their own faith and in control of their own destiny. Not here. Not now. This was a step **out of control**.

We who live in the 21st century have, I believe, an even greater dependence on control. We've honed our technologies to give us control. We control the night because we can produce cheap and simple lighting. We control the day in ever increasing ways from the way we transport ourselves to the way we produce things. Our lives are used to control and if not control then certainly the illusion of control.

But faith is not about control. It's about trust, about obedience and about relationships. Faith is the hope we have in the **unseen**; control is about what we can see and influence and as Paul says in 2 Corinthians...

⁷for we walk by faith, not by sight. (2 Cor 5)

The question is, **what does it mean to walk by faith?**

Let me give you three stages, if you like, in the process of walking by faith and these I have gleaned from the story of Peter's walking on water which we've heard read this morning.

In the first place walking by faith assumes a call. Faith is the answer to One who calls us to Himself – it is response – response to the Word of God. The object of faith is God – the God of the Bible. We know from the Bible that this God is a God who speaks; who speaks to us; who reveals Himself to us. Indeed, this speaking is not just an action but is a part of who God is because we know not just His speech but we know God as His Word – as Jesus Christ the Word of God. By that Word we have life, life in all its abundance and a part of the Word to us is the call **'to come to Me.'** Jesus spoke that word many times and it is specifically repeated by Jesus in the NT 10 times. God's call is both guidance and salvation. As the Psalmist says, God directs our paths **so that** we might be saved. We know that when God calls us two things are true. Firstly that this must be possible and secondly that God will be with us. God's call is life. God's call represents the true possibility of anything – no matter how long it might take. If God says it – it must be true even if it doesn't make sense. Imagine how the Israelites felt walking around Jericho every day for 7 days blasting their trumpets. Wouldn't you feel a bit silly? Yet this is what they were told to do. The on the 8th day they do it again and this day the walls fall down and the city is open to them. I wonder what **silly thing** God has been calling you to do and you have said 'O no I can't do that – it's so silly – I can't see how it would work!'

In the story of Peter walking on water – Peter specifically asks for Jesus' call.

²⁸Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." (Matt 14)

The seeking for the call of God is, in fact, the first step in faith because it seeks to know that the possibilities ahead are indeed, God's possibilities and only if they are is the call a faithful one. The call not only confirms that God is in the picture – it also gives us a goal – it gives us something to live for. What is the call of God in your life? Have you asked God for a calling? Jesus said, 'You have not because you ask not.' If you want a calling, ask for one.

The second stage of walking by faith is that we must leave something. All leaving is a two edged sword. Often we must leave something good – something we know is good, something we know has been a blessing. Sometimes we get confused by this and we say to ourselves – no God wouldn't ask me to leave something good behind and so, in principle, I am not going to believe in this call. This is silly on two counts. Firstly it's silly because we are invoking a presumption of our own over the Lordship of God. We've already seen that God's logic is miles above ours. Why should we now revert to our inferior logic? Mostly we do because we don't want to leave what we like. But it's also silly because we do this very thing in our own lives as a matter of course everyday. We get out of our warm beds in order to go to work. We leave behind something good – why? Because something better is before us. We leave behind our secure family home when we grow up. Why? Because something better lies before us as we mature into independent adults. Life entails leaving behind good things in order that we might taste something better. Peter must leave the security of the boat if he is to answer the call of Jesus. Before him lies the uncertainty of the water and the waves but also the amazing experience of walking by faith **on the water**. Wouldn't you want that experience? I know I would.

As I said, leaving behind something is a two edged sword because it may not entail leaving behind something good but something bad. This was certainly the case with Israel. They left behind slavery and subjugation, poverty and pain. And we too, when the call of God comes, are often called to leave behind something bad. It might be a bad family situation; it might be abuse, it might be addiction; it might be sin. Whatever it is – the call of God is to leave. The fascinating thing is this. So often even when we're called to leave a bad thing behind – **we regret it!** Only weeks out from leaving Egypt Israel was complaining about what they'd left

behind. **The fact is that so often we're addicted to what we know and so the unknown, no matter how good it might be, is uncomfortable.** And so addicts, despite the destruction their addiction is reeking in their own life, don't want to leave it; and people with violent partners, no matter how abusive they are – will chose time and time to return to the violence of that relationship; and Christians, no matter how ineffective their church is within the wider community, will chose to hide behind the walls of that church rather than be lead out to where the Spirit is working. In the end these things are a counterfeit for life. Something that we count as our life but which is really robbing us of the abundant life God has for us.

When God calls us, we will always be called to leave something – good or bad, we will have to say goodbye.

Finally when we are called by God we need to be prepared to walk in the unfamiliar and, indeed, the dangerous. And the unfamiliar is dangerous simply because we don't know what to expect. Again this is an aspect of faith – that we should live in a manner that makes us rely on God. This is where our church context is so often not helpful. You see we live and, indeed, teach stability and surety. We look for peace in this life when the context is war. We long for rest when the call is to work while it is still light.

When Peter stepped out of that boat he stepped into the biggest unknown he had ever encountered in his life and the one thing, the one thing that he could rely on was the call of Jesus and the person of Jesus out in front of him. And while those things remained, he could do it – he could **walk on water!** What was he doing while he was walking there on water? **He was living – really living – perhaps for the first time in his life** – the very thing which has been his life's boundary, his work's limitation – water – became his servant. Can you imagine how a fisherman might feel about this – a man who'd spent his life fighting the water, scratching to earn a living from the water, battling with the water so that it would give up its meager fruits?

But he was still on unfamiliar ground and the rule here is to watch carefully and to stay focused on the goal. For a moment the enormity of the waves stole his attention and before he knew he was sinking. He called out to Jesus and was

saved but O what a day. Oswald Chambers says this – **“The only piece of God we understand is the piece we’ve obeyed.”** Do you think Peter grew that day in faith? Can you understand why it was through Peter that the Gospel first came to the Gentiles and that Peter became the leader of the disciples in Jerusalem. How much more of God he knew after this experience. How much stronger in faith he became.

We too have to walk amongst the waves – leave behind the comforts of life – insist upon living with some risk and we do this for a couple of reasons. One is that the **risks of an ordinary life are real. They include a passive capitulation to sin; a life of slavery that becomes for us a norm for us.** The other is that this is where Jesus is – **on the waves.**

How many of us find Christ and yet still are enslaved to fears, addictions, guilty pleasures and foolish desires? How many of us never really get out of the boat? Well friends, my hope is that the momentum of this community will help you to do this – that we will be lead in faith, to leave our Egypts whatever they are and that you will come with us onto the water with Jesus.

It is said that **‘God puts no limit on faith but also that faith puts not limit on God!’** Let’s find out about that. Let begin taking the limits off God and step into the Jordan today. Will you come with me?