

“Jesus Walks on the Water”  
John 6:15-21  
(Preached at Trinity, March 6, 2019)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Jesus has entered Galilee and the crowds have grown greatly. With the presence of women and children there may have been over 10,000 people present at the miracle of the feeding of the 5000. After feeding the crowd the disciples went down to the sea and departed.
2. According to Matthew and Mark's Gospels we read that they departed at the command of Christ.  
**Mark 6:45 NAU** - "Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go ahead of *Him* to the other side to Bethsaida"
  - a. The word for "made" is a word that means "to force" or "compel."
  - b. Perhaps Jesus was trying to protect His disciples from the misconceptions of the crowds, from the temptation of becoming involved in the unholy political scheming. They did not yet understand the nature of Christ's kingdom.
  - c. Or, perhaps Christ was about to teach them of His protective grace in their lives. He was about to increase their faith.
3. After they departed Jesus retired to pray.  
As the evening wore on the disciples were still rowing trying to get to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. They had gone 3-4 miles, about midway – the winds had picked up and the water had become rough. The winds were head winds and so progress was now very difficult. The situation looked gloomy.
4. By the time Jesus came to them they had been rowing through most of the night.  
Matthew's Gospel says Jesus came to them at the fourth watch  
**Matthew 14:24-25 NAU** - "But the boat was already a long distance from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary. <sup>25</sup> And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea."  
The first watch was from 6-9 P.M.  
The second watch was from 9 P.M. to midnight  
The third watch was from midnight to 3 A.M.  
The fourth watch was from 3 A.M. to 6 A.M.
5. Imagine being in the midst of the Sea of Galilee in the middle of the night—the wind was blowing fiercely and they were making little progress. It was dark and they couldn't see either side. They would have been exhausted. When they saw Jesus walking upon the water they couldn't believe their eyes. They were smitten with fear.  
**John 6:19 NAU** - "they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near to the boat; and they were frightened." The word is φοβέω
  - a. The word describes the common experience of humanity. We are often given over to fear. Fear is our reaction to situations over which we have no control, or our minds filled with endless scenarios of what may be.

- b. This verb for fear is used 95 times in the NT.  
The noun form φόβος is found an additional 47 times.
6. Matthew's Gospel adds:  
**Matthew 14:26 NAU** - "When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear."  
Jesus responded firmly to their fear.  
**John 6:20 NAU** - "It is I; do not be afraid."  
It is the same word in the imperative – "Do not fear!"
7. This passage stresses how irrational their fear was.
- A. In the midst of this storm Jesus was on the mountain praying for them. While from their perspective things looked hopeless, in reality they had nothing to fear. There was another storm when their fear was just as irrational.  
**Matthew 8:23-26 NAU** - "When He got into the boat, His disciples followed Him. <sup>24</sup> And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being covered with the waves; but Jesus Himself was asleep. <sup>25</sup> And they came to *Him* and woke Him, saying, "Save *us*, Lord; we are perishing!" <sup>26</sup> He said to them, "Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?"
- B. We often view our life's situations from our limited perspective and fear the outcome. From God's perspective nothing is left to chance. O that we might see our life from God's perspective.
- C. Jesus did more than pray for them – He came to them walking on the sea. He was with them. He told them, "It is I" using the familiar ἐγώ εἰμι – equal to the Hebrew - אֲנִי in Exodus 3:14. According to Leon Morris this Greek phrase ἐγώ εἰμι was "an emphatic form of speech and one that would not normally be employed in ordinary speaking. Thus to use it was recognizably to adopt the divine style."<sup>1</sup>  
**John 8:58** – "Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am." <sup>59</sup> Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple."
8. This passage contains many often preached verses, particularly the parallel passage in **Matthew 14** where Peter also briefly walks on the water. I want us to focus upon the irrationality of their fear. It tells us much about our own fears.
- I. Fear is caused by a by a failure to take into account the presence of Christ
- A. There is a theme of solitude in this passage
1. Jesus departed to be alone  
**John 6:15 NAU** - "withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone."  
Matthew records that the purpose was to spend time in prayer  
**Matthew 14:23 NAU** - "He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone."
  2. Meanwhile, the disciples have been sent off alone.  
They began paddling towards Capernaum. But were they really alone?

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<sup>1</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 420.

3. They paddled hour after hour and made little progress. After most of the night had passed they gaze across the rough sea and thought they saw someone walking on the water. They became terrified. Matthew writes it was so unexpected they considered the possibility that it was other worldly:  
**Matthew 14:26 NAU** - "they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear."
  4. Jesus spoke to them:  
**John 6:19-20 NAU** - "they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near to the boat; and they were frightened. <sup>20</sup> But He said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid."
  5. The implication is their fears were alleviated by the presence of Christ – “Do not fear, I am with you.”
- B. There has never been a time that Jesus has not been with His people
1. There are many mysteries about the incarnation.
    - a. Jesus in His incarnation possessed all of the weaknesses and limitations of humanity. He was a man. In His flesh and blood He was not omnipresent.
    - b. At the same time, in His divinity His presence fills all of creation.
    - c. His presence with us is far more than just saying He is everywhere. He is with us particularly. James Montgomery Boice said it well: “We can say that God is everywhere, and this is right too. But it is far more personal to say that God is where we are. He is here, wherever you or I may be.”<sup>2</sup>
  2. He was with His disciples the whole time. This is the blessing enjoyed by the people of God—God’s abiding presence.  
**Numbers 14:14 NAU** - "They have heard that You, O LORD, are in the midst of this people, for You, O LORD, are seen eye to eye, while Your cloud stands over them; and You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night."  
**Deuteronomy 31:7-8 NAU** - "Then Moses called to Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, "Be strong and courageous, for you shall go with this people into the land which the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall give it to them as an inheritance. <sup>8</sup> "The LORD is the one who goes ahead of you; He will be with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed."
    - a. Jesus is Emmanuel – “God with us.” He is the full revelation of God to man.
    - b. The great promise of the New Covenant  
**Matthew 28:20 NAU** - "and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

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<sup>2</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 460.

- C. In the midst of the presence of Christ what shall we fear?
1. Does the presence of Christ bring you comfort?  
**Psalm 139:7-10 NAU** - "Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? <sup>8</sup> If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. <sup>9</sup> If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, <sup>10</sup> Even there Your hand will lead me, And Your right hand will lay hold of me."
  2. John Owen – “When Jesus accompanies us in any duty we have to perform, it becomes easy, delightful, and successful; but when he is absent, all is dark, cheerless, and adverse.”<sup>3</sup>
- II. Fear is caused by a failure to take into account the providence of Christ
- A. Jesus had sent them into the storm
1. Jesus was teaching them and refining them. He was building their faith, all by His providence.
  2. This is plain as we look at Mark’s Gospel. Although they had just witnessed the miracle of the feeding of the 5000 they were not applying it to their lives.  
**Mark 6:51-52 NAS** - "And He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were greatly astonished, <sup>52</sup> for they had not gained any insight from the *incident of the loaves*, but their heart was hardened."
  3. Why are you experiencing the details of your life? Nothing happens outside of God’s Divine design. Afflictions are His gracious working in our lives. Trials are proving ground for our faith.
- B. Jesus sent them into the storm, but He knew they would not perish. He was working His purpose in their lives.
1. There was no step in their life that hadn’t been ordered by God
  2. Jesus was one with the Father.  
**John 10:30 NAU** - "I and the Father are one."
  3. The loaves and fish were of His design. He was teaching them of His dominion over all and of His compassion.  
**John 6:5-6 NAU** - "Therefore Jesus, lifting up His eyes and seeing that a large crowd was coming to Him, said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?" <sup>6</sup> This He was saying to test him, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do."
  4. His providence is on display all around us but we see it most often as He works in our lives personally.
- C. Nothing is outside God’s Providence
1. We face many difficult times—times we row hard and make little progress. Perhaps it’s your health, or finances, or an unreasonable boss, or a troublesome neighbor, or a hard-hearted child, or a difficult marriage. Perhaps you just fear the future.

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<sup>3</sup> John J. Owen, *A Commentary, Critical, Expository, and Practical, on the Gospel of John*, (New York: Leavitt & Allen, 1861), 122.

2. Perhaps you suffer from anxiety that you can't escape. You don't know why but the fear is always there.
3. It is important to remember God's providence in every step of life  
God has ordained every difficulty we have ever faced
  - a. God is working out His purpose, His pleasure
  - b. Even our death has been ordained  
What have we to fear?

III. Fear is caused by a failure to take into account the power of Christ

A. Jesus is all powerful

1. Again, in His humanity Jesus possessed all of the weaknesses of His human condition. He knew hunger and pain and ultimately, death.  
But He was also all powerful  
**Matthew 8:24-27 NAU** - "And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being covered with the waves; but Jesus Himself was asleep. <sup>25</sup> And they came to *Him* and woke Him, saying, "Save *us*, Lord; we are perishing!" <sup>26</sup> He said to them, "Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?" Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and it became perfectly calm. <sup>27</sup> The men were amazed, and said, "What kind of a man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?"
2. Jesus commands the actions and movements of the universe.
  - a. Jesus came walking on the water. The laws of nature demand that we sink beneath the surface of the water. That's why we learn how to swim. The laws of nature are suspended at the command of our Lord.
  - b. The laws of nature also demand certain realities. We can only be in one place at one time and we must travel from place to place following all the rules of motion—force, mass, energy, etc.  
Jesus is not bound by the rules of physics.  
As soon as they received Him into the boat they were suddenly at the other side of the sea. Their hours long struggle against the force of the force of the waves suddenly ended.  
**John 6:20-21 NAU** - "But He said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." <sup>21</sup> So they were willing to receive Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going."
  - c. All of their hard work and effort could not do what Jesus was able to accomplish in a moment.

- B. God is able to protect His own in Jesus Christ.
1. They had rowed most of the night to no avail. Their human strength was not adequate. In our weakness He is strong.  
**2 Corinthians 12:10 NAU** - "for when I am weak, then I am strong."
  2. When Jesus entered the boat their trial ended. When we look to Christ we find our sure strength.  
**Psalm 18:2-3 NAU** - "The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. <sup>3</sup> I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, And I am saved from my enemies."  
**Psalm 89:8-9 NAU** - "O LORD God of hosts, who is like You, O mighty LORD? Your faithfulness also surrounds You. <sup>9</sup> You rule the swelling of the sea; When its waves rise, You still them."

#### Conclusion:

1. This passage serves to encourage us. We don't need to spiritualize every passage in Scripture, but we also must not miss the work of Christ in the lives of His people. The Christian life is filled with many difficulties, yet Jesus is with us. He will never leave us. He is continually working to increase our faith and dependence upon Him.
2. Our duty is to press on no matter what the cost; no matter what the difficulty. Our duty is to look to Jesus through every storm. Notice again, when the disciples received Jesus into the boat the trial stopped.  
**John 6:21 NAU** - "So they were willing to receive Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going."  
**Mark 6:49-51 NAU** - "But when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed that it was a ghost, and cried out; <sup>50</sup> for they all saw Him and were terrified. But immediately He spoke with them and said to them, "Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid." <sup>51</sup> Then He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were utterly astonished,"