

Somewhere Between Fear and Faith

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Life might be characterized as a struggle between faith and fear. It's all around us in big and small ways. Lately, I have thought about this a lot because of the influx of Syrian refugees seeking asylum in Europe. Contemplating the death defying trip must be terrifying. They have to grapple with their fear of the journey versus the hope and faith they might survive to create a better future for their children. Not all of us have to face such death defying odds but still our circumstances can push us into the gap between fear and faith. Knowing how to navigate our way makes all the difference.

Uncomfortable places

The gap between fear and faith is an uncomfortable place to hang out! That's why it's so important to figure a way out. I was reminded of that this week, in listening to a comedian on the radio. Sometimes humor is the most perfect entrée into a tough topic. This comedian was talking about his mother's death. She was diagnosed with cancer and various doctors had predicted different life spans for her but none of them included dying on her eight day vacation to Las Vegas. This woman was a Catholic, and her son who rushed to be at her bedside, called a priest to administer last rites. The words and ceremony strangely comforted him. I say, strangely, as he hadn't been to church for years and had no expectation of meeting the divine in that moment.

After his mother's death something tugged at him to go back to church. He candidly reported that even though he didn't really believe and was at odds with much of the church's teaching, he would find himself wandering into a neighborhood church at lunchtimes, not quite understanding what he was doing there. He even tucked a "Welcome Back to Church" postcard into his jeans pocket.



He began to fantasize about what he would say to the priest if he went to confession. It went something like this:

"My son, what would you like to confess?" "Well, Father, I haven't been to church for 29 years so I hope you have a packed lunch with you today!"

Despite his misgivings with the church he found himself inexplicably pulled in. He lives in the space between fear and faith; not really sure what to do. I think most of us have visited that space.

Stepping out

There is a story in the Bible that deals with this issue. You could dismiss it as too fantastical to take seriously and fail to see the point behind it. It's the story of Jesus walking on water. You know the one!

Most people remember that story because Jesus is the guy that walks on water and numerous paintings over the years have depicted the scene, burning it into our consciousness. I'm sure SNL has done at least one skit on the topic. The Bible was written before taglines became popular so the story doesn't have one. But a good tagline would not be "Jesus walks on water" as one might expect. Instead, it might be "Against all common sense, and everything his mother told him, Peter gets out of the boat."

What is behind this story? It's more than Peter's risky move – especially as sailors didn't typically learn to swim in those days.

A walk on water or stay in the boat?

The story starts with Jesus dismissing a large crowd he had just spoken to – it was the loaves and fishes day. Imagine, Jesus must have been exhausted. He decided he needed to go into the hills alone to pray. Jesus had fought an intense battle for the 5,000 he had fed that day. I imagine he wanted to express

gratitude for this incredible miracle and offer all that had happened to God. He told the disciples to go ahead together by boat. What happens on that incredible journey is described in **Matthew 14:22-33**

The disciples climbed into the boat. They were huddled together; 12 very different men. They were probably like us. They didn't always get along and they definitely had opinions about each other! Along came difficulty in the form of a storm. They freaked! The waves were high and they feared for their lives. It was the middle of the night and there was no US Coast Guard to call upon. Even though just a few hours prior they had witnessed the miracle of the loaves and fishes such faith seemed a distant memory. They had solidly landed in the realm of fear.

My loaves and fishes moment

Hindsight is always 20/20. On the journey to absolute faith we go up and down. I have experienced many miracles in my life such as the time I landed in the island nation of Vanuatu and had to meet up with the missionary but had no way to contact him. In a moment of clarity, I realized God knows I am here and looking to find him and God knows where the missionary is, so it's simple, God can bring us together. And He did. I simply declared a time and place we would meet the following day, and against all likelihood, we met on the exact spot I determined. I have had other such experiences and I am sure you have too. But, like the disciples, when difficulty comes we panic and faith flies out the window!

What happened on the water?



So the disciples were terrified and to add to their fear they see what they think is ghost coming across the water towards them. Now they are really losing it!

But Jesus' voice reaches them above the roar of the waves. *"Don't be afraid. Take courage. I am here!"* Jesus is trying to fill the gap between fear and faith. He's trying to remind them that he's the guy they can trust and depend on.

Then Peter does something radical. He decides to take a risk. He alone attempts to recognize God's presence in this really difficult situation. We often hear platitudes such as "Don't worry, God is with you." But Peter decided to test it out. He calls back *"Lord, if it's really you, tell me to come to you, walking on the water."* Think about it – this

was a huge dare!

Peter made a conscious decision to move from fear to faith and that became a game changer. Faith is an active thing and must always be in motion. Jesus replied *"Yes, come."* And so Peter climbed out the boat!

Who knows what the other disciples were doing in that moment but it no doubt included the Aramaic version of "You're nuts!" "Get back in the boat." "Don't be so stupid." We have all heard similar statements. It's at moments like this that you have to decide if you can dare to trust the invitation "Yes, come" or settle with fear.

If you have ever resolved to step out in faith and then had second thoughts you are not alone. As soon as Peter left the boat, he was confronted with the decision he had made. The waves seemed bigger and he started to panic. And the more he freaked out the lower he sank.

He cried out "Lord save me!" and Jesus admonished him for his lack of faith. Don't forget they were within 24 hours of feeding the 5,000 so perhaps Jesus had reason to challenge him. We are all in that space between fear and faith. In such moments as these we have to remind each other of the miracles we have experienced so that we don't forget.

The story closes with Jesus asking a really important question "Why did you doubt me?" I read this and thought that must be God's biggest question. Why do we doubt God? We may have all kinds of reasons that stem from the difficulties we find ourselves in but the reality is that God has the purest of hearts and simply wants our trust. It is not a "what do you believe?" test. It's a simple desire for us to trust Him. He hopes that in the middle of difficulty we can ask "Is that you? Are you there?" He is hoping we have the courage to walk toward Him.

What is the purpose of faith?

Sometimes we are fooled into believing that faith is the end goal. We might think for instance, I just want to have faith. But faith has to have a larger purpose behind it. Why do we want faith? Faith is the means to the end; it is not the end itself. Belief is not the Holy Grail. The purpose of faith is to reconnect us to the love of God.

To live a life of faith then necessitates that we live in relationship with God, our Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother. Supported by God's parental love we have the power to do anything. A health and safety warning: don't try walking on water without heavenly parental supervision!

When we have the consciousness that we are living in the presence of God, like Peter, we can have the confidence to find our way.

“Attending God is something you do with your whole heart in your daily life. Wherever you go, you should always feel that your father is in front of you and your mother is behind you, and that Heaven is with you at every moment....When you pray, ask God for His guidance (Be like Peter), and He will show you the way to go....If you entrust everything to God and rely on Him when you face difficulties, keeping a prayerful heart, God will guide you in the right direction through your intuition.” - Rev. Sun Myung Moon

Maybe you have some kind of storm raging in your life right now. But with Heaven's help you can walk above the waves until the sea is calm. It's about staying connected to God in the midst of trouble. Not succumbing to fear but realizing that God is out there. Rev. Moon asked:

“What kind of being is God? He is the God of love. St. Paul said, “Nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”(Rom. 8:39) Even Jesus Christ would be nothing without God's love. This is why we value God's love above everything. God's love is the original source of life, the source of happiness, and the source of peace.”

I don't know exactly what happened on that stormy night on the lake but I do know something special happens when we follow Peter's example and step out of the boat. Like I said earlier, if the story had a tagline it wouldn't be “Jesus walks on water.” It would be “Against all common sense, and everything his mother told him, Peter gets out the boat.” What is fantastic about this story is Peter's willingness to trust in that moment. Nevertheless, the other eleven didn't budge. The reason they didn't is because it's easier to be terrified and even suffer, than it is to step out in faith. Even the pain that we have known for a long time feels comfortable in comparison to the unknown.

Writing your own story

Peter's faith wasn't perfect, he did lose it and began to sink but hey, he was willing to try and because of that he inched a little closer to faith. What mattered was that he gained experiential knowledge. Faith was no longer a theological concept. If only for a brief moment, Peter did walk on water and no-one, not even God, can take that away from him. He will always remember that dark and stormy night. It's Peter's story.



God wants each one of us to have our own story. One of my stories was that moment in Vanuatu. No-one can take that from me or rationalize it away as a coincidence. It was a little modern day miracle.

I want to encourage you to step out of your boat. Rise above the waves. The only way to do that is to stop give and take with every negative thought about your circumstance and decide to trust God. Ask God, just as Peter did, what should I do? Learn to trust the voice of God in your intuition. Create your own story.

Today, we consider the Book of Acts with reverence but the people between the pages were ordinary people like us. From the letters of Paul and others you realize their churches had some crazy problems but the reason the Book of Acts is a testimony that has stood the test of time is because these ordinary people decided to trust God.

Did you know that right after Paul had his incredible conversion, through being touched by the spirit of Jesus, he was thrown in jail for two years? His case became a political hot potato. I don't know whether I

could languish in jail for two years. That's a long time. But he'd stepped out of the boat and his experiential knowledge was so real, no-one could dissuade him. That is what God wants for you; to have your own personal experience with faith. So whatever you are struggling with have a showdown with God. Insist on succeeding. Don't stay in the boat. The only result staying in the boat brings is the promise that nothing will change!

Creating miracles together

Our faith can lead us to create miracles together. It's our collective heart and spirit that will move mountains. We don't need to walk on water by ourselves. What if all twelve disciples had gotten out of the boat together? Who knows what could have happened.

Our tag line at Faith Fusion is "a community where true love creates peace." We are confident that we can create peace only because we know that if we inherit the true love of God then we will indeed create peace and experience happiness. The purpose of our faith is not to commit to this or that point of theology but to discover the true love of God. We need to trust God so that love can flow in our lives.