

The following is a true story.  
Larry Walters led a fairly boring normal life  
as a truck driver in southern California  
until the fateful day of July 2nd, 1982.

On that day, Larry turned himself into a legend.  
You see ever since he was a boy Larry  
had dreamed of flying, but the US Air Force  
had turned him down from becoming  
a pilot due to his bad eyesight.

After he was discharged from the military,  
he sat in his backyard watching jets fly overhead.  
It was torture to a man who felt the need to fly.  
One day he could stand it no longer  
and so he hatched a scheme.

He went out and purchased 45 weather balloons  
from an Army-Navy surplus store,  
tied them to his lawn chair which  
he dubbed the Inspiration I.

He then filled the 4 foot diameter balloons with helium.  
Then he strapped himself into his lawn chair  
with some sandwiches, a 6 pack of Miller Lite, and a BB gun.

He figured he would pop a few of the balloons  
when it was time to descend.  
Larry's plan was to sever the anchor and  
lazily float up to a height of about 30 feet  
above his back yard, where he would enjoy  
a few hours of flight before coming back down.

But unfortunately, Larry knew a lot more  
about truck driving than physics and  
so things didn't work out quite as Larry planned.  
When his friends cut the cord anchoring  
the lawn chair to his Jeep,  
he did not float lazily up to 30 feet.

Instead, he streaked into the LA sky as if  
shot from a cannon, pulled by the lift of  
45 helium balloons holding 33 cubic feet of helium each.

He didn't level off at 100 feet,  
nor did he level off at 1000 feet.

After climbing and climbing,  
he finally leveled off at 16,000 feet.  
At that height he felt he couldn't risk  
shooting any of the balloons,  
lest he unbalance the load and  
really find himself in trouble.

So he stayed there, drifting cold and frightened  
with his beer and sandwiches,  
for more than 14 hours, 3 miles above the ground.  
He crossed the primary approach corridor of LAX,

Imagine the surprise of the air traffic controller  
when she was informed by Trans World  
and Delta Airlines pilots that they just passed  
a man floating in his lawn chair.  
Eventually Larry gathered the nerve  
to shoot a few balloons, and slowly descended.

Unfortunately the hanging tethers tangled  
and were caught in a power line,  
blacking out a Long Beach neighborhood for 20 minutes.  
But Larry finally got back on the ground  
where he was arrested by waiting members of the LAPD.

As he was led away in handcuffs,  
a reporter dispatched to cover the daring feat  
asked him why he had done it.  
Larry replied nonchalantly,  
"A man can't just sit around."

I believe if the Apostle Peter were here  
with us this morning,  
he would have chuckled at Larry's story  
for his mind may have went back to a stormy sea  
when the other disciples were content to stay in the boat,

Peter in essence said the same thing as Larry Walters,  
A man can't just sit around.  
This experience of the disciples in the storm  
which we talked about last week and  
especially Peter's experience which we are focusing on today,  
are encouragement for the next step on our discipleship journey.

In Matthew's version of the story  
we see several similarities.

Jesus makes the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him. He went up to the mountain to pray. The storm rolls in, the boat is in the middle of the lake is being buffeted by the waves and the wind.

In Matthew's gospel, there is a sense of Déjà vu as they had been out here before, possibly in the same boat. They had come to this same spot on the lake and the boat had begun to sink earlier in Matthew. Remember?

They had woken up Jesus who had been sleeping in the back of the boat and He had stilled the storm. Now they are here again.

I can imagine Peter saying, "I know what to do! We'll wake up Jesus and He can turn the storm off!" John answers, "Uhh Peter, we have a bit of trouble. We left Jesus back on the shore."

In the Bible we discover that there are often 2 kinds of storms. There are storms of correction when God has to discipline us and there are storms of perfection which God uses to help us grow and mature.

Jonah was in a storm because he disobeyed God and had to be corrected but today we see that the disciples encounter a storm because they obeyed Christ and had to be perfected.

Perfection is very important for us as United Methodists. In our theology it is part of Sanctification. Sanctify means to be made holy.

This is the answer to the question or statement that every denomination is the same and we all believe the same thing. The answer to that question is no. We all have many things in common but we do not believe all the same things.

Grace is the most important words for us who follow John Wesley. He believed in three types of grace.

Prevenient grace which is the grace  
that comes before us,  
even before we know Christ in our life.

It is the grace that we sometimes call conscience,  
the call to fill the empty God shaped hole  
in our soul that we try to fill with everything else.  
Like an infant we can see and hear but dimly  
because we haven't really found him yet.

Then there is Justifying grace which is  
that grace that comes to us when  
we make a decision to follow Christ.  
We are made right with God.  
We confess Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.  
But it doesn't stop there.

That is where we ended last week.  
If you want to walk on the water than you  
have to get Jesus into the boat.  
That is as far as some people ever get.  
They accept Christ into their life,  
somebody gives them a bible and  
then says great go learn to be a Christian.

They feel like they have their ticket punched  
to go to heaven and they will sit around  
until their flight is ready to leave.  
And if the answer to the question  
If you want to walk on water was  
you have to get Jesus into the boat  
then that would be fine  
but being a disciple of Jesus Christ is more than that.

We are to continue our journey to be made holy,  
Santicifying grace.  
To be made perfect not as the world sees  
perfection without error but as God sees perfection  
which is in love.  
And who is our example? Jesus.

But we often say wait a minute preacher  
Jesus was perfect and I am not  
so I can never be like him.  
And you know what? you are right.  
You can never do it.

But God can.  
God can make us perfect in love  
if we depend on God.  
Our job is to make sure that each and  
every day that we are moving forward to our goal.  
We may even have times in our life  
when we move ahead two steps  
and then move back one.  
That's okay.

The most important part is that  
we take the journey no matter how long  
it takes to get to the destination.  
That is radical discipleship.

Once again during the fourth watch  
somewhere between 3am and 6 am  
he went to them walking on the lake.  
The sea there is about 8 miles across.

Now verse 24 tells us that the boat  
was in the middle of the water and  
so that means that Jesus has walked 4 miles  
on the water to reach them.

My research tells me that since this lake  
is only 8 miles wide and with the type of boat  
they would have been traveling in,  
the trip across would normally take 2-3 hours  
and yet we see it may have taken them  
8 hours just to get to the middle.

And once again when they saw him  
they were terrified.  
It's a ghost they said and cried out with fear.  
But like last week I still ask why were they so terrified?  
One reason they were so afraid was  
there was a superstition in that day that right  
before a person drowned they would see a ghost,  
like you're not having a bad enough day already.

Look at that last phrase and they cried out for fear.  
That hardly captures the emotion in the original language.  
The tense in the Greek is  
they screamed at the top of their lungs.  
These aren't just exclamations of surprise.

These are high pitched scared little girl screams

But Jesus immediately said Take Courage!

It is I don't be afraid.

The way in which he says this is particularly interesting.

This can be taken one of two ways.

On the one hand, this is the same phrase that is used by the Greek in Exodus 3:14 to render the words of the Lord: "I am that I am."

Jesus could be saying this to point to the fact of His deity.

On the other hand, the same phrase can be understood in the way it is translated in our Greek text:

"It is I, the same Jesus with whom you have been traveling and eating and sleeping and ministering. You don't have to be afraid of Me. "

Now they see Jesus walking on the water and, instead of seeing Him as the answer to their problems, they view Him with fear.

Just a couple of months ago a small baby bird became trapped in my garage.

I decided that I would try to help him get out and back to his mother.

However, as I approached him, he scuttled across the way and tried to hide under anything he could find.

He was so fearful that he was willing to hurt himself to escape me and I was trying to help.

I wanted to tell him, "Little bird, I'm not the problem; I'm the solution!"

In the other stories they bring Jesus into the boat and they are on their way.

Matthew is different. In Matthew when we ask the question If you want to walk on water

the answer is you have to get out of the boat.

And Peter answered Him

and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water."

If it is you?

Who else would it be walking  
on the water in the middle of the night?  
I mean had Peter been fooled in the past?  
Of course I'm not making fun of Peter,  
but I would have never said what Peter did.

If it were me I would have said,  
Lord if that is you, get in the boat  
and help us bail water.  
So what do we do?

Hopefully the same thing as Peter, verse 29  
So He said, "Come."  
And when Peter had come down out of the boat,  
he walked on the water to go to Jesus.  
Can you imagine that?  
Jesus actually beckoned Peter to step out of the boat.

The other guys in the boat are probably thinking  
I'm glad I didn't say anything.  
Forgive my active imagination,  
but at this point I can just imagine  
John looking at Peter and saying  
go ahead smart mouth!  
We'll be praying for you.

This was maybe one time Peter wished  
he would have kept his mouth shut.  
But we've all opened our mouth  
like that without thinking.  
Peter is now actually walking on the water.  
What could go wrong?

Verse 30 But when he saw that  
the wind was boisterous, he was afraid;  
Despite Peter's great faith this was his downfall.  
He lost focus.  
He took his eyes off Christ and  
looked at the storm instead.

Tom Friends of The New York Times  
asked coach Jimmy Johnson what he told his players  
before leading the Dallas Cowboys onto  
the field for the 1993 Super Bowl.

"I told them that if I laid a

two-by-four across the floor,  
everybody there would walk across it  
and not fall, because our focus  
would be on walking the length of that board.

But if I put that same board  
10 stories high between two buildings,  
only a few would make it,  
because the focus would be on falling."

Johnson told his players not to  
focus on the crowd, the media, or the possibility of falling,  
but to focus on each play of the game  
as if it were a good practice session.  
The Cowboys won the game 52-7.

In order to grow we have to intentionally focus on it.  
It won't just happen we have to actively pursue it.  
Peter lost his focus on the one who  
walks on the waves and he looked at the waves themselves.  
The latter half of verse 30 says  
and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!"

What was Peter thinking?  
Of course he was sinking, his nickname was the rock.  
Peter's prayer of "Lord save me"  
is the shortest prayer in the Bible.  
Its only 3 words but it's a great prayer  
for in it we see, it is not the length  
but the strength of your prayers that matter.  
Prayer is a way we grow.

When you're about to drown you tend to pray fervently.  
We must also give Peter credit for knowing  
that he was sinking and for crying  
out to The Lord for help.

The text says He cried out when  
he was beginning to sink and not when  
he was drowning.  
How come then do we only call out  
to The Lord sometimes as a last resort?

We have the tendency to exhaust  
every worldly avenue before we  
realize I'm about to drown.

How much better would it be  
if as soon as a problem arose we would  
admit that we need God's help and  
just save ourselves from swallowing a bunch of water?

Also, before we criticize Peter for sinking,  
let's honor him for his  
magnificent demonstration of faith.  
He at least dared to be different.  
Anybody can be a boat potato  
and watch events unfold but it takes a person  
of real faith to leave the boat and walk on water.

I doubt the other disciples ever gave  
Peter a hard time about sinking.  
If they did, and I were Peter I would have replied,  
let's see how many people  
in history have walked on water?  
Well, there was Jesus and Oh yeah me,  
so leave me alone.

And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand  
and caught him, and said to him,  
"O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"  
And when they got into the boat,  
the wind ceased.

I wonder if there minds didn't recall Psalm 89  
which says O Lord God of hosts,  
Who is mighty like You, O Lord?  
Your faithfulness also surrounds You.  
You rule the raging of the sea;  
When its waves rise, You still them.

When in Matthew 8,  
Jesus calmed the first storm,  
the disciples said,  
What manner of man is this but now  
the clear testimony is You truly are The Son of God.

The whole purpose of the storm  
was to help the disciples grow in their faith.  
Peter experienced something none  
of the other disciples ever did  
because they stayed in the boat.  
There is knowledge of Jesus that only

comes through the action and experience  
of getting out of our boats.

How are you ever going to walk on water  
if you don't get out of the boat?  
How do we get out of the boat?  
By growing in our faith.

We all need to be involved finding some way  
to grow in our study of the Scriptures.  
These are my dreams.  
I am hoping that the men of our church  
will gather together and study each week with me.

I also hope that there is someone here today  
that would feel led to gather the women together as well.  
I believe we need a stronger focus  
on the growing aspect of our congregation.  
I encourage you as adults to attend Wed nights  
as Amy leads us in the Practices of Fruitful Congregations  
which incidentally I am preaching on in the weeks  
to come or join me as we look  
at the life of Jesus from a very different perspective.

If you have youth its time to get out of the boat.  
The youth are already leading in that direction.  
They will lead our entire worship on Sept 13<sup>th</sup>.  
If you have children you need to get them  
engaged and growing in their faith.

I know that Jen and the Children's Team  
have been working out to find lessons  
that will be spiritually and scripturally meaningful.  
And we need to grow our Sunday School classes  
and offer new ones so everyone can find a place to come.

And for those of you who are older adults  
what if those who are involved in 55 alive,  
the quilters and the knitters came together for a time  
each week during the day where we studied  
and shared the prayers and thoughts of our hearts.

Those are the kinds of ways we can get out of the boat.  
That is radical discipleship.  
It is more than what happens on Sundays in worship.  
If you are relying on Sunday mornings

to be the only time you get out of the boat  
there is so much more to the Christian life you are missing.  
If you want to walk on water  
you have to get out of the boat.  
Say that with me.

Of course that can be scary especially  
when our feelings tell us to stay  
in the boat and avoid the risk.  
But feelings can be unreliable.

I read of a helicopter pilot who flew  
from an aircraft carrier in the Pacific  
who told this story.

He said, "I was flying the helicopter back  
to the ship when a blinding fog rolled in.  
Flying at a low altitude, I knew that a single mistake  
would plunge my crew and me into the ocean.  
Worse yet, I was experiencing a complete loss of balance –  
which is common for pilots flying by instruments.

This loss of balance was so bad  
that despite the instrument readings  
I was certain that I was lying on my side.  
For 15 minutes I flew the helicopter by its instruments,  
fighting the urge to turn it according to my feeling.

When we finally broke safely through the fog,  
I was deeply thankful I had been trained  
to rely upon my instruments rather than on my feelings.

In order to grow in our faith  
we have to follow the instruments  
that God has provided for us.  
So what are you going to do?

Its time to step out of the boat,  
join Larry Walters and Peter because life  
is too short to sit around.  
Won't you come join Jesus and walk on the waves?  
He is waiting for you. Amen.