

**August 9, 2020**

**Scripture: Matthew 14:22-33**

**Title: COME TO JESUS**

Last year, a pair of designers created a whole different kind of fashion statement, when they bought a pair of Nike Air Max 97's and re-designed them as "Jesus Shoes." The "Jesus Shoes" came with little golden crucifixes hanging from the laces and pockets of holy water, from the Jordan River, that have been prayed over by a priest. The designers claim, that they made the shoes to mock the idea of shoe companies partnering with celebrities. And who is a bigger celebrity than Jesus? Daniel Greenberg, one of the designers behind the "Jesus Shoes" said, "We asked ourselves, 'What would a shoe collaboration with Jesus look like?' Obviously, it should let you walk on water. They asked, 'Well, how can we do that? You pump holy water into the pocket of a pair of Air Max 97's, and with that, you get Jesus Shoes, the holiest collaboration ever.'" The "Jesus Shoes" sold for \$1,425.

Our text for today is about Peter trying, and ultimately failing, to walk on water. But, it's about so much more than that. Because the most important thing to notice in today's Bible passage, isn't that Jesus walked on water, or that Peter took at least a few baby steps, on the Sea of Galilee.

**The important thing to notice is, that Peter got out of the boat.** Peter trying to walk on water, is a perfect image, of what it means to become a follower of Jesus Christ. It's the perfect image, of what it means, to commit your life to Jesus. Notice that all the disciples were in the boat, but only Peter, took that step of faith, to go to Jesus.

People attend church, for a lot of different reasons. I'm not saying that to judge anyone. I'm thrilled we are connected in worship. And I hope you experience the presence of God while we're connected. I hope you find what you're looking for. Some of you may have come to worship today, mainly to appease a family member. Some of you came out of curiosity, or a feeling of guilt. Some of you are present because you're looking for hope or comfort. All good reasons. But just coming to church isn't going to answer your questions, or heal your hurts, or change your life. But, committing your life to serving Jesus, will make a real difference, in how you experience life.

I pray with all my heart, that today's service, brings us all closer to Jesus. That's what we're all really looking for, even if we're not aware of it. That's what Peter was looking for too. So, listen to Matthew 14:22-29 to see, if we can learn what Peter learned, as he tried to walk to Jesus on the water.

"Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, and the

boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

“Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. ‘It’s a ghost,’ they said, and cried out in fear.

“But Jesus immediately said to them: ‘Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.’

“‘Lord, if it’s you,’ Peter replied, ‘tell me to come to you on the water.’

Jesus said ‘Come.’”

**The first thing we can learn from Peter’s story, is to come to Jesus, even if we’ve got unanswered questions.** If you’re holding off on making that decision to follow Jesus until you read that one article, or you sit in on that one discussion that answers all your questions about the life of faith, then you will never get out of the boat. It’s never going to happen. Nobody has all the answers.

Jerry Kramer is a former offensive lineman with the Green Bay Packers. He played under legendary coach, Vince Lombardi. Jerry Kramer has written a couple of books about his life with the Packers and his life as a sports commentator afterwards.

In his book *Distant Replay*, Kramer reflected on his own mortality. He confessed, that even though at the time of writing his book, he was in the best of health, he thought about death a lot. Kramer reveals that when his father died, it hit him really hard, it was hard on his whole family. Kramer writes, “. . . I think his death was more difficult for the family, than it was for my father. Dad was a very religious man, and he was ready to go. He had his faith, and he said he was locked in the arms of the Lord. Sometimes I wish I had that kind of faith,” Jerry Kramer continues, “But I don’t. I just have questions.”

I respect Jerry Kramer’s honesty. I respect anyone who confronts and wrestles with questions of faith. An unexamined, untested faith, can’t stand up to the storms of life. The truth is, that Jesus left his disciples behind, with unanswered questions. And he did it deliberately. He wanted us to trust him with our lives, without absolute proof of his existence. He wanted to draw us to God with love, not compel us by force or fear. He wanted us to have the free will, to choose to follow him, or not. The first thing we can learn from Peter’s story, is to come to Jesus, even if we’ve got unanswered questions.

**The second thing we can learn from Peter’s story is, to come to Jesus even if we’re in the middle of a storm.** Notice that this scene takes place in the middle of a storm. Matthew says the boat was “buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.” It would be remarkable for Peter to try to walk on the waves if the sea was calm, but to do it in the middle of a storm, is even more remarkable.

Life has it's storms! How do you respond to a storm? The other eleven disciples took shelter in the boat. Only Peter believed, that it was better to brave the storm with Jesus, than to stay in the boat without him.

Author and speaker Palmer Chinchen tells of an excursion rafting the Zambezi River in Zimbabwe with his brothers. It was a scary undertaking. The Zambezi River's huge rapids are fed by the rushing waters of Victoria Falls, the largest waterfall in the world.

As the men prepared to set off into the rapids, their river guide gave them some last-minute instructions, that were a bit disconcerting. He began with the words, "**When** the raft flips . . ." Notice that he didn't say, "**If** the raft flips." "**When** the raft flips," he said, "stay in the rough waters in the middle of the river."

He instructed them to stay in the rough waters in the middle of the river, because, he said, the still, stagnant waters on the edge of the river, that looked so calm and safe, in reality, were filled with crocodiles. A warning like that, would keep me, in the middle of the river, or out of the river entirely.

Palmer made the point, that God calls the church out beyond our comfort zone, of still, stagnant waters. God calls us to follow Him, into the churning rapids, of the world's needs, to make a difference with our lives.

Many of us wait, to make a decision about how seriously, we take the call to follow Jesus. We decide to wait, until we're older. We'll wait, until we have kids. We'll wait, until we get our heads straight. We'll wait, until we're not so busy. We'll wait, until we feel a little more worthy, or until we get our spiritual act together, or until this storm passes. That's, when we'll make a decision about Jesus. When things aren't so crazy.

Here's the problem: there will always be storms. No matter what your friends post on Instagram and Facebook, many of them are experiencing their own storms right now. That fact will never change. But if Jesus really is the Son of God, if Jesus really is the way, the truth and the life, then isn't the purpose of our life, found in facing our storms with him? Don't let unanswered questions stand between you and Jesus. That's what faith is all about. Don't let the storms of life stand between you and Jesus.

**The final thing to learn today from Peter's story, is not to let anything stand between ourselves and Jesus.** Notice that Peter almost made it. He took the first few baby steps of faith. And then he let fear, and circumstances, overwhelm him.

We can't stand in judgment of Peter. We do the same thing. We start to get out of the boat, but then doubt intercedes. Or we're afraid of looking foolish. Or we let our busy schedule interfere. What would Peter have experienced, if he had made it all the way to Jesus? Imagine the abundant life, he could have begun experiencing, that very moment, if he really trusted Jesus. Certainly, he would never have denied Christ, if he

had completed that walk right then. What does Jesus have in store for you, if you commit your whole life, completely to him? What's holding you back?

Author Vince Vitale tells of sharing his faith with a man named Joe who had been diagnosed with a brain tumor. Joe was really struggling with this diagnosis. Joe confessed to Vince that he'd always believed in God, but he didn't think his life was good enough to earn his way into heaven, and he was afraid that God would reject him. He believed he didn't have the right connections to get through the door. He couldn't pay the price of admission.

Vince Vitale writes, that he was able to share with Joe, "the message of Christianity is what makes us right with God, it has nothing to do with anything we do, or ever could do. But, rather with what Jesus has already done, for all." He explained, "if we trust in Jesus Christ, we no longer need to fear judgment, because on the cross, Jesus has already taken the judgment, for everything we have ever done, or will ever do wrong."

When Vince had finished explaining this amazing truth to Joe, Joe bowed his head and prayed to accept Jesus as his Savior. The next day when his family asked him how he was doing, Joe said, "Wonderful! Now I'm actually looking forward to what's next."

The change in Joe's attitude was so remarkable, that his family called Vince and asked him to repeat the whole conversation. They wanted to know what could have given their father so much peace and joy, in the midst of his pain.

Joe was helped, because Vince helped him with some of the basic questions about our faith. The truth is, that Jesus could have answered our every question about God and life and death and suffering. But he didn't. He could have calmed every storm and prevented his disciples' fear in the first place. But he didn't. He could have held Peter's, hand and let him do a little dance across the Sea of Galilee. But he didn't. He didn't make it easy for Peter then, and he doesn't make it easy for us now. There's a reason for that. Faith requires trust and love requires sacrifice.

Every great relationship is built on trust and love. And that's what God wants with you, a relationship. God is doing God's part. God came in the flesh, in the person of Jesus Christ, to show us the quality of life. Now, it's time for us to do our part. Every faith journey, no matter how rocky, begins with getting out of the boat and walking toward Jesus. Are you ready to take that step, even if it's a baby step, like Peter's? Jesus is waiting for you to Trust, Believe, and have an Active Faith in God making disciples of Jesus Christ in the transformation of the world. Amen.