

Romans 10:5-15 Peter on the Water
Matthew 14:22-33
August 9, 2026

“Walking on water,” has become an expression associated with divinity in popular speech, often referring to someone who is so highly regarded that they can, “do no wrong,” and have supernatural capabilities. It may have other meanings as well. A test case for belief in the miraculous in an age of unbelief. It is its meaning that we are after, which is more interesting.

In the three gospels known as, “the Synoptics,” that is, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, there is a turning point in the journey of Jesus from Galilee in the north to Judea and Jerusalem in the south for what turned out to be the last week of the earthly life of Jesus (Actually, it can be found in the Gospel of John as well, just presented a little differently).

That turning point begins with the Feeding of the 5,000 and continues with the scene that has been read today, in which Jesus walks on the water; then Peter’s confession of Jesus as the Christ, and finally the Transfiguration.

After this sequence of events, Jesus “sets his face towards Jerusalem.” At least, that is the way Luke phrases it. He begins to prepare his followers for what lies ahead. He tells them about his arrest and execution, and resurrection.

He also tells them about servant leadership, childlike faith, the cost of discipleship, the signs of the times, and mostly through parables, but sometimes through encounters with opponents, the nature of God’s Kingdom, and more besides. It is the scene at the lake where Jesus walks on water that is the reflection for the day,

In Matthew’s account, as soon as the meal is finished, Jesus sends the disciples in a boat to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, while he dismisses the crowd and steps away privately for prayer.

Later, when he was finished praying, the boat was out in the middle of the lake, late, at the final watch of the night, struggling against the wind, Jesus caught up with them on foot, walking on the water. I guess these people didn’t need to sleep. But this scene is not really about night watches or sleeping habits. It is about the identity of Jesus, and the nature of faith.

About 3 am, Jesus sets out to catch up with the boat. As he draws near, the twelve disciples see him coming, but apparently recognize him only after he gets closer to where they are. They became frightened, presumably not only because of the wind and waves but because they thought they were seeing a ghost, a phantom out on the water.

It is always Peter who takes the risk and in this case asks if he *too* could walk on the water out to meet Jesus. The answer was yes. Jesus said, “come on,” and this decision leads to one of Peter’s more notable

mistakes. He is doing well enough for at least a few steps, but then he *takes notice of the wind* . . . and begins to sink.

Before we are too hard on Peter, we might allow ourselves to imagine that the waves on the Sea of Galilee when they were stirred up like that would likely have been enough of a distraction, and that had one of us been in Peter's place, would have likely noticed them as well.

While for Peter they were literal waves, for the rest of us they can also stand for all the distractions that keep us from being completely devoted to Christ, pulled away from our chief end in life. Life is full of many concerns. Anyway, Peter is not the only one who failed from time-to-time. His companions did not even get out of the boat.

Life is like a storm, or the storm is like life, but however one accounts for it, there is risk, and the risk can't be easily avoided, the risk not only of living, but of following Jesus. In life, we face situations; at work and at school, at home and at play, or in any of life's many arenas; in which confidently knowing what to do often reveals an arrogance that covers *not knowing what to do*. It is not so hard to be like Peter.

But why tell this story? I know what you are going to say, it was told because it was inspired by the Holy Spirit. But Luke actually decides to leave it out.

The Feeding of the Multitude is understandable because *hungry* people were fed. Everyone needs to eat every day, and though the world's economy is to be commended because it largely meets the need, it can be criticized because it has never perfectly met the need. There are food deserts, politically inspired famines, entrenched poverty.

And all the healing miracles and exorcisms and resuscitations make sense for the telling because all those people were suffering and Jesus alleviated their pain if only temporarily, and revealed God's concern for people and their lives, a concern that stands at the center of our faith.

Even the Transfiguration makes sense, because, although it was only for three of them, Peter, James, and John, it revealed in greater depth who Jesus was, once he became transfigured before them. It became a foundation for faithfulness when things went bad, and things were about to get bad. Jesus was arrested, and executed. It made it possible to see the reality of Jesus as *God's Son* more clearly.

The story of Jesus walking on water is told in the same spirit as the Transfiguration, that it reveals God's redemptive intent. They even responded by saying, surely this *is* God's Son.

"For God so loved the world," which, before it means the land and the sea and all the creatures great and small, and the mountains and the oceans and the vast reaches of outer space, it means the *people*, "that He

gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.”

This grand statement is accompanied by a command that reflects God’s concern for the world’s people and their lives by instructing all of us;

“The Lord our God is one Lord, and you shall love the Lord with all your heart and soul and strength and mind . . . and *your neighbor as yourself.*”

It is in this vein of thought that the story of Jesus walking on the water makes its best sense. The scene is Revelation, just like the Transfiguration and all the others. It reveals the higher nature of Jesus, that is what all the miracles did.

And in the end this story was not only about Jesus, but about Peter on the water and the other disciples who promised absolute devotion only to end up paying attention to the waves. It challenged their little faith, in order to make it grow, It was going to have to grow. And it did grow. *And it will grow.* It will grow because when God asks of us something, God also provides.

But never mind about that.

For Peter does indeed call on Jesus for help. He says, Lord save me,” which is enough. And Jesus is there to catch him and help him, presumably back into the boat and to the shore; and help us too, through this

life in which we often do not know what to do, to catch *us*, and to help us to safely.

Who can fail to be reminded of the text from the Epistle to the Romans, read in our presence today, in which Paul has proclaimed,

“*Everyone* who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

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