

Natalie W. Bell
August 9, 2026

Can You Walk On Water? Matthew 14:22-33

²² Immediately **Jesus made the disciples get into the boat** and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³ And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain **by himself to pray**. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴ but by this time the boat, **battered by the waves**, was far from the land,^[d] for the wind was against them. ²⁵ And early in the morning **he came walking toward them on the sea**. ²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And **they cried out in fear**. ²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "**Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.**"

²⁸ Peter answered him, "**Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.**" ²⁹ **He said, "Come."** So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he **noticed the strong wind**,^[e] **he became frightened, and beginning to sink**, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "**You of little faith, why did you doubt?**" ³² When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³ And those in the boat **worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."**

We love SUPERHEROES, especially here in America.

The most recent Spiderman movie

achieved the **biggest domestic debut in box office history** with **\$360 million**,

dethroning the previous record held by another superhero movie:

Avengers: Endgame.

Spiderman was the fastest film ever to cross the **\$400 million mark** in North America, reaching the milestone in just four days.

The ODYSSEY MOVIE came in with almost

that much popularity and ticket sales.

Both are beyond blockbusters.

Why does this MATTER to us?

Well, what if understanding our love of superheroes could help us understand Jesus?

We do know that some who saw JESUS during his ministry

considered him to be a kind of superhero---

especially after witnessing his miracles.

Crowds flocked to him from all over—to hear him preach, teach, and heal.

So what's behind our fascination with and admiration of SUPERHEROES?

(besides movie popcorn and a 3-hr escape from daily life?)

Some people say it's the origin stories behind them....

Similar to immigrants making their way and success in this country,

You know, how Superman came from another planet

And made his life here.

Others say it's the personal STRENGTH AND TRIUMPH

over tragedy or darkness,

Think of Batman experiencing the loss of his parents

And how that lead to his crusade of fighting evil.

Others say it's about a desire for ORDER, and GOOD TO DEFEAT EVIL.

And, who doesn't want a world, especially right now,

Where justice is swift, evil is defeated, and innocent lives are protected?

But, I think that underneath all of it is our desire

to believe in ***SOMETHING AND SOMEONE bigger than ourselves.***

And, what if that desire,

Were ultimately met NOT in a superhero, but in JESUS?

Think about it---Jesus is God

who became flesh and blood, coming into our world,

To save us,

To help good defeat evil,

To set up a kingdom and eventually a world,

Where there is true justice, peace, and righteousness.

This is what the PROPHETS foretold about Jesus.

This is what ***John the Baptist*** reminded people who came to him for baptism.

Jesus is God.

So, what if we were ***as EXCITED AND INSPIRED by Jesus,***

As we are by superheroes in the movies?

I think ***WE CAN BE!***

And this story helps us!

Peter helps us re-evaluate our own walk of faith!

This story is INSPIRING because it reminds us

that following Jesus means ***STEPPING OUT of the boat....***

even in the wind and waves of life.

It's a reminder that life is REALLY ALL ABOUT STEPPING OUT of the boat.

If we want to 'walk on water',

if we want to be faithful followers of Jesus,

We MUST step out of the boat!

And when we do-Jesus is there to call us,

to catch us when we fall,

And to reassure us and help us get back up again!

Now some might be wondering,

what about Peter SINKING into the waves?

He really wasn't able to walk on water, right?

He FAILED, didn't he?

Or DID he?

Is it failure when WE TRY?

When we faithfully follow Jesus' call?

Isn't true failure ***NOT trying*** at all?

We DON'T LIKE failure, do we?

We really don't like it in America.

We pride ourselves on pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps,

in making our own way,

in succeeding by pure grit and effort, right?
 Failure is **NOT AN OPTION** in the United States.
 We strive for **perfection**, don't we?
 It's why we hold people to **impossible standards**.

But what if FAILURE is an important part of FAITH?

What if the real sin, the real tragedy, is **NOT TRYING at all?**

What if real failure is **STAYING IN the boat?**

Stepping out of the boat means TRUSTING Jesus.

It means taking a **leap of faith—not a leap of certainty**—but a leap of faith.

Faith means we **cannot see** every step in front of us.

So, we cannot see or understand how we could possibly walk on water,

And that's precisely **THE POINT**.

We CANNOT WALK on water.

Because, **we are not God**.

We are not miracle-workers.

But Jesus is.

And Jesus can call us onto the water.

And with his help, and our eyes on Him, we can do it!

And Jesus is there to catch us when we fail, and encourage us to try again.

What if the real PROBLEM with the church is

not that we **don't believe** in Jesus,

But that we **don't trust him enough** to get out of the boat?

What if the real sin is the **fear of failure**, that leads us to do nothing?

What if the real sin is staying in the boat---or in the walls of the church—
 instead of venturing out in faith and trust?

Aren't we all being INVITED AND CHALLENGED to step out onto the water?

In our lives, and in this church?

Aren't we being invited to walk towards Jesus,

Even if we fail?

Even if we sink?

Isn't it better to **FAIL spectacularly**, than to not try at all?

Andrew Doyle writes: ***“When an institution and a culture no longer has the ability to tolerate failure the organization is dead”***

hitchhikingthebible.blogspot.com/2011

Being part of the body of Christ is a lesson in RISK, AND FAITH, AND TRUST—

In ***trying new things***.

It's also a ***lesson in FAILURE***.

Most churches hate that.

We want to do things that 'work', that have 'always worked',

Or so we thought....

We often live by ***“if it ain't broke, don't fix it”***.

Churches love the motto: ‘We’ve always done it this way’

But those words, and that motto,

is the motto of a ***DYING church***, not a vital, growing thriving one!

The Presbyterian church, irony of ironies,

Has a different motto: ***Reformed and ALWAYS REFORMING***.

We believe in the power of the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us—

To new places, new opportunities, new experiences!

We believe in the ***Holy Spirit as the wind in our sails***,

leading and guiding us to new places, all the time!

In order to grow in faith, we must TRY NEW THINGS!

Again and again!

We can and will find God in faithful effort!

We find true ***joy and purpose*** in taking a leap of faith!

We LEARN THINGS IN TRYING that we could never learn otherwise!

Staying in the safety of the boat, or inside the walls of the church,

leads to stagnation, and eventually death.

The body of Christ should embrace RISK!

We should ***embrace FAILURE—***

Especially when it happens while faithfully trying to follow Jesus!

It doesn't mean we should give up,

it means we should try again!

Rev. Ernest Campbell, former pastor of Riverside Church in NYC,
once said that ***‘the reason that we seem to LACK FAITH in our time
is that we are not doing anything that requires it’***

Feasting on the Word, Year A. Vol. 3, g.336

Peter, especially in this story, is our MODEL OF FAITH.

He was a big-mouthed, bold, rash disciple—
always quick to speak and quick to act.

But he is our role model,

Because he had the courage to step out of the boat, and onto the waves.

He was a leader—that’s why Jesus told him

that he would be ***the ROCK upon which the church was built!***

You might be thinking to yourself, Well, that’s him, it’s NOT ME.

I’m happy where I am, doing what I’m doing.

Or, I’ve given my time and talent and treasure to the church....

it’s time for the younger ones to do things around here.

Or, I’m not talented enough,

I don’t have enough to give,

I don’t have the time or energy.

Those are all ***really just EXCUSES...to not follow Jesus.***

Instead of thinking of all the reasons we cannot or should not follow,

All the reasons to stay in the boat,

What if we thought of all the ***joy and meaning and purpose*** we can find,
in following Jesus?

Instead of worrying about failure,

what if we faithfully tried NEW MISSIONS AND MINISTRIES?

Last fall, the Officers of the church went on retreat,

And decided to focus on

FAMILIES, FELLOWSHIP, AND FOOD INSECURITY.

When the merger was finalized at the beginning of this year,

We ***gained new financial and people resources*** to do new mission and
ministries in these areas.

We have money to support New Missions, and money to support updating our
building so we can have even more ministry to families and fellowship!

It takes COURAGE to try new things in the church,

It takes courage to get outside the building, and meet people where they are,
To get out of the boat.

And sometimes, taking those steps of faith mean that we might fail.

Sometimes it means getting into trouble—

But like the late great Congressman John Lewis, that is good trouble.

It's ok to do what's right and get into trouble.

That's just walking in the footsteps of our ancestors in faith—women like
Hebrew midwives Shiprah and Puah who refused to kill Hebrew baby boys,
people like the Apostle Paul who ministered against all odds,
People like Jesus.

What would it take for you to step out of the boat, in COURAGE?

And did you know that courage is contagious—we can 'catch' it from
watching others, and they can 'catch it' from us!

We have opportunity ***to ACT ON BEHALF of those in need,***

Those who are being ***marginalized***, those who are being ***left out***.

Families who are struggling, people who are alone, those who are hungry.

Truth is, there are ***so many HEROES among us,***

Doing ***small but courageous things***, every day.

Andy Andrews wrote about this in his book:

The Butterfly Effect: How Your Life Matters.

It's all about how small actions have extraordinary consequences,
that ripple out into the world,
causing more and more people to make a difference.

A teacher might say ***an encouraging WORD*** to a student,
who then shares something encouraging with a friend,
who reaches out to smile and talk with a complete stranger,
who might just decide against committing suicide that day.

How is God calling US TO ACT IN COURAGE?

How is God calling ***YOU to be a leader***, to take a step of faith?

Truth is, WE ARE ALL LEADERS.

Some are bold and quick to speak and act, like Peter.
Others are quiet, and slower to speak, and act.

But ALL OF US ARE LEADERS, somewhere.

Because we all have a sphere of influence---whether we know it or not.
We all have people who watch us, who pay attention to us,
who want to follow us.
It might be our kids, our loved ones, our friends, our neighbors, our church.
You may think of yourself as staying in the background,
But all of us are being watched, and someone wants to live like us.

That's why we NEED TO FOLLOW Jesus.

Because if we are following Him, and people are following us,
Then they come to know Him through us!

Friends, the world is full of STORMS.

Storms that tempt us to stay in the boat, in the church walls, in our homes.
But, ***Jesus is asking us to JOIN HIM*** on the water.
And as long as we keep our ***eyes on Him***...we'll be ok.

May we all take a STEP OF FAITH, out of boat, and onto the waves,

To follow Jesus.

To live and share the ***Good News*** of the Gospel.

For this opportunity to find joy and meaning, all God's people say, Amen.