

**Title: Adventurous Faith Risks**  
**Text: Matthew 14:22-29**  
**Date: 10 June, 2012**  
**Preacher: Rev Stu Cameron**

For the last three weeks we have been exploring the nature of Adventurous Faith. We have seen again and again that while Christian faith starts with what we believe, it is much more than just belief. Adventurous Faith is belief enacted. Along the way we have discovered that adventurous faith first responds to the call of God, that it digs ditches anticipating rain from God and that adventurous faith clings to the cross of Christ.

As we have been discovering these things many of us have also been reading through Mark and Luke's gospel as part of our daily SOAP bible reading, as we walk through the New Testament one chapter a day. Just this week I have been amazed at how often the theme of faith comes up in the gospels. Here are five examples from just this last week's readings.

In Luke, chapter 5, after seeing his friend's faith, Jesus forgives the sins of a paralytic man.

In Luke chapter 7, Jesus says that he has never seen faith in all of Israel like that demonstrated by the centurion who sought healing for his servant.

In Luke chapter 7 again, Jesus tells the woman who anoints his feet with expensive perfume and her tears that her faith has saved her.

In Luke chapter 8, while the disciples cower at the wind and waves lashing their boat, Jesus asks where their faith is.

In chapter 8 again, a suffering woman touches Jesus and power goes out from him, and Jesus tells her that her faith has healed her.

That is just this week's readings. Faith is central to Christian discipleship. Without faith it is impossible to please God.

Over the next two weeks we are going to explore another well known story of faith.

Jesus had just led one of the most incredible days in his public ministry. Miles from any villages, Jesus had ministered to a crowd of 5000 men plus thousands of women and children. Late in the day the disciples realized they had a potential panic on their hands; thousands of people and little food. The disciples see potential disaster, but Jesus sees the opportunity for a faith-building miracle. And so after saying grace he transforms five loaves and two fish into a smorgasbord buffet for everyone with enough leftovers to fill a couple of fridges.

Let's turn to Matthew's gospel to see what happens next:

Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them.

(Matthew 14:22-24)

Jesus stays to pray and enjoy some alone time while he sends the 12 disciples to the other side of the Sea. Hours later the disciple's boat was being tossed about by the waves – miles from the safety of the shore. The Sea of Galilee was notorious for the deadly storms that quickly descended from the hills that surrounded it on most sides.

The word translated as 'buffeted' is the Greek word 'basanizo' which literally means to torment or torture.

The image we have here is of 12 disciples crammed into small boat with the sail up, oars in the water rowing desperately trying to find shelter in the storm.

Let's read on:

And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid."  
(Matthew 14:25-27)

To understand the awe the disciples experienced seeing Jesus walking on water, we must understand their attitude to the sea. For ancient Israelites, the sea – even the Sea of Galilee – was a place to be feared. The sea was a place where the forces of chaos always threatened. For ancient Israelites the sea evoked images of death. The sea was an active power that threatens to overwhelm the goodness of life. Superstition said that the sea was where unknown monsters lived. One of ancient Israel's legendary enemies were the Philistines – 'People of the Sea' – seafarers – which made them all the more suspect. Fishermen were considered suspect and looked down upon by others because they spent so much time on the sea

So it is the fourth watch of the night – somewhere between 3am and 6am. The wind is howling and the sea is raging. The disciples are exhausted after battling the elements for at least nine hours. They are wondering if they will survive. And then through the sea-spray they see what seems to be a ghost or an apparition – a trick of the night light.

Jesus is walking on the sea. Please note what is said and not said. Jesus is not walking on water – he walking on the sea. That is, Jesus is doing more than just defying the laws of physics – he is doing what only God can do, he is conquering the sea – the forces of chaos. He is triumphing over all that strikes fear in the disciples.

Still the disciples are unsure. And so they ask if it really is him. Jesus responds:

Take heart.  
It is I.  
Do not be afraid.

Jesus has acted with authority by walking on the sea. He has done what only God can do.

Now he speaks with authority. In saying, 'It is I' he is evoking the name of God – the great I AM.

Based on what he is able to do – triumph over the forces of chaos, and based on what he says – that he is the Lord who is able to save – the disciples should take heart, and not be afraid.

Jesus is Lord. He triumphed not only over the sea, but over the grave. We shall take heart! We shall not fear!

### **(GUIDED MEDITATION)**

Back to the story: Jesus acted with authority, he spoke with authority and now he confers authority.

Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus.  
(Matthew 14:28-29)

Peter is still not sure if his eyesight is failing him or of his mind is playing tricks on him.

'Lord, if it is you...if it is you, command me to come out on the water with you.' I love Peter. I mean, I really love Peter! He is just so human. His story is my story, our story. In this sentence doubt and faith sit side by side. He doubts that it is Jesus but he has faith enough to challenge Jesus to call him out on the water.

Here is a key point. Many of us have fallen for the mistaken belief that doubt is the opposite of faith – even the enemy of faith. But this is just not true. More often than not, as it was with Peter, faith and doubt travel together side by side.

I think the true enemy of faith is not doubt, but fear. Doubt questions, whereas fear cripples.

I am passionate that Newlife is a church where it is OK to ask questions and not always have the answers. So if you have come to church with some doubts this morning; fantastic! You are in the right place. This is where in the power of the Holy Spirit we can wrestle together to discover God's answers to our questions. You know what – here is the really cool thing – the more answers I discover, the more questions I find!

Back to the story...

Jesus calls Peter out of the boat and onto the water. Peter steps out, walks on the water (not on the sea – that is for Jesus to do) and comes to Jesus.

And here is where we get to the central lesson I believe God wants to teach us today:

Adventurous Faith risks taking the first step.

Every adventure begins with a first step. This was certainly the case for Peter. Can you imagine what it was like for Peter stepping out of the boat while the wind howled and the waves swirled? I love Peter – love his crazy-brave personality.

To walk on water Peter had to do two things; first he had to let go of safety, and at the same time he had to face and overcome his fears.

Let's talk about safety. Compared with the churning sea, the little boat that Peter shared with the other eleven disciples was relatively safe. You can ride out a storm in a boat. But Peter had to leave what seemed safe behind in order risk that first step of faith.

The tragedy of so many Christian lives is that adventures that God offers us remain un-lived because we don't take the first step.

God did not save us for safety, but so that we might become dangerous. And believe me, there is nothing more dangerous than a follower of Jesus who hears the call of Jesus and risks that first step out of the boat.

The great German theologian Karl Barth said that safety and comfort is the great siren call of our age. We order our lives to be safe and comfortable.

Gary Haugen is one of my heroes. A lawyer, he founded the International Justice Mission, an organization dedicated to fighting sex trafficking. He wrote this a couple of years ago in his book *Just Courage*:

After we have poured into our children all the good food and shelter and clothing, after we have provided them with great education, discipline, structure and love, after we have worked so hard to provide every good thing, they turn to us and ask, "Why have you given all of this to me."

And the honest answer from me is, "So you'll be safe."

And my kid looks up at me and says, "Really? That's it? You want me to be safe? Your grand ambition for my life is that nothing bad happens?"

And I think something inside them dies. They either go away to perish in safety, or they go away looking for adventure in the wrong places. Jesus, on the other hand, affirms their sense of adventure and their yearning for larger glory."

We can look for adventure in all the wrong places, or we can cling to safety, or we can listen for the call of Jesus and risk taking that first step out of the boat and onto the water. Jesus does not call us to play safe, but to become dangerous!

Greg Levoy says this:

Jesus promised those who would follow him only three things...that they would be absurdly happy, entirely fearless, and always in trouble.

(Greg Levoy)

To take that first step out of the boat, Peter had to let go of safety, and he then had to overcome his fears.

Make no mistake; Peter's fear of the sea was real. Peter's fear of the sea was primal. He grew up with the stories of the creatures and spirits that lay under the surface. That night the sea was angry which for the disciples meant the spirits that lived in the sea were angry. To step out of the boat and onto the stormy water, Peter had to overcome a persuasive, life-long, culturally embedded fear.

When we Jesus calls us to step out of the boat in faith we will often confront the things we fear the most.

Fears come in all shapes and sizes, but have in common the ability to paralyze us.

Here is the thing: Jesus-fuelled faith stares down our fears and then tramples all over them.

When Jesus calls us out of the boat and onto the water he calls and empower us to overcome the things we fear the most.

What is it that you fear the most?

Is it the fear of rejection? Perhaps Jesus is calling you to step out and risk asking someone to come to church, or to talk to a colleague about your faith?

Is it the fear of failure? Perhaps Jesus is calling you to step out and do something you never considered possible – something you know will stretch you beyond your current capacity? Let me tell you, seven years ago I almost said no to coming to Newlife because I was scared I would fail – that I would muck up a great church. I was scared that after a few weeks I wouldn't have anything to say. How funny is that?

Is it the fear of losing control? Perhaps Jesus is calling you to step out and trust him with everything you have, including your financial resources. Let's face it – most of us are control freaks. In an uncertain world we are desperate to maintain certainty in our private lives. No more is this the case than with our finances. We want to trust God with our money, but we find it so hard. We cling to our investments, our share portfolios and our property when God longs for us to simply cling to him. God says, 'Put me to the test. Trust me with all that you have. Give generously and just wait and see what happens – see freedom that will come.'

Is it the fear of intimacy? Perhaps Jesus is calling you to step out and open up every corner of your life to Him and to others. One of the more humorously pathetic images in the Bible is Adam and Eve trying to hide from God. We cannot hide from God. Why would we want to? He knows us and loves us and wants the best for us! He longs to live with us like a friend. Some of us have tried to keep God at arm's length, and have done the same with others. Our fear of intimacy never lets anyone else in. Perhaps God is calling you to step out and join a small group, or get a mentor or have a spiritual conversation.

Is it the fear of being disappointed again? With prayer we've asked God for things in the past only to feel like heaven was silent.

Adventurous Faith risks taking the first step.

Adventurous Faith lets go of a preoccupation with safety and overcomes fears.

Time and time again men and women of faith have risked taking the first step.

Noah hammered the first nail on the ark overcoming his fear of the crowd.

Joshua marched the first time around Jericho overcoming his fear of failure.

Moses went to Pharaoh for the first time and said 'Let my people go!' overcoming his fear of death.

Adventurous Faith risks taking the first step.

Sue and I have two great friends back in Adelaide, Heather and Al. They have been blessed with four beautiful boys. Eight months ago their lives were enlarged by two twins – Max and Noah. Here they are.

Heather has been documenting on Facebook Max and Noah's growth with daily photos. Last week she updated her status with these words:

'Oh my goodness I think Max just moved forwards!!'

For a few weeks Max and Noah had been moving, but usually it was backwards or round and round in circles. But then one day Max moved forward. And then Noah did. And together they have discovered crawling. And life for Heather and Al will never be the same again.

God calls us out onto the water. God call us to take the first step of faith. He calls, he beckons, he challenges. And then when we move, I wonder if God says to the angels, 'Oh my goodness I think Stu just moved forwards!!'

Adventurous faith risks taking the first step.

It's cold at the moment. Well, it's Queensland cold anyway. During the week it hit -5 in Canberra. A friend left for work early and a frozen leaf fell and clunked on her car!

When it's cold you do all you can to keep warm. A recent invention, if you can call it that, is the snuggie. The snuggie is a blanket with holes for your arms. Sue, will you come up and help me model this...

There are different varieties of snuggies; there are snuggies with monkey print, camouflage snuggie, leopard print snuggies – and even snuggies for dogs – I kid you not.

I find the advertising photos revealing. With a snuggie you can curl up on the couch in front of the TV watching The Voice with a hot cup of Milo and keep very comfortable and very warm. A snuggie is like a warm cocoon. It's safe and comfortable and nice.

Here is my point. When we fail to take the first step of faith we begin to wrap ourselves in a spiritual snuggie.

We become observers not participants. We walk through life as consumers, not contributors.

We wrap ourselves up in God's promises and never do a damned thing.

We're safe and comfortable and relaxed and completely useless.

This is a sari. A sari is a five metre length of material worn by women in India and Sri Lanka and other places. This is not just any Sari. It is a wedding sari. I've borrowed it from one of our Pac Pines members. Her name is Kiwi Jebaraj. Here is her wedding photo with this sari.

Wedding saris are made with great care. Ravi Zacharias tells the story of a trip to India where he noticed a father and son who were weaving some of the most beautiful wedding saris in the world. Let me read what he saw:

Wedding saris are a work of art; they are rich in gold and silver threads, resplendent with an array of colors.

The place I was visiting was known for making the best wedding saris in the world. I expected to see some elaborate system of machines and designs that would boggle the mind. Not so! Each sari was being made individually by a father-and-son team. The father sat above on a platform two- to three-feet higher than the son, surrounded by several spools of thread, some dark, some shining.

The son did just one thing. At a nod, from his father, he would move the shuttle from one side to the other and back again. The father would gather some threads in his fingers, nod once more, and the son would move the shuttle again. This would be repeated for hundreds of hours, till you would begin to see a magnificent pattern emerging.

The son had the easy task—just to move at the father's nod. All along, the father had the design in mind and brought the threads together.

I don't know about you but I want to live a great story. I want to make a difference. I want to please God.

Great stories are woven one act of obedience after another.

Great stories are lived one step after another step after another step as we hear and follow the call of Jesus who calls us out of our boats and onto the water.

Here is my question. What are you going to do with your life? Are you going to wear a snuggie or weave a sari – something beautiful and good?

For some of us this morning Jesus is saying it's time to get out of the boat and off our blessed assurance and do a little bit of wind surfing!

For some of us it's time to take off our spiritual snuggies and start weaving a sari as we follow the Father's leading.

On Friday my friend Heather posted another photo of her beautiful boys, Max and Noah. Don't they look ready for action? Eight months old. The caption under the photo had three simple words; Ready, Set, Go!

And that is where my message ends and God's challenge begins. He says to us, his children, 'On your marks, get set...Go!'