

Matthew 14:22-33 N.T. 15 (NRSV)

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

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

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“A Courageous Faith”

Opening Prayer: Please bow with me in prayer. Loving Father, we come into your presence today from a world that can be downright scary. Now as we listen for your voice in this sacred place, grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the facing of each day. In Jesus’ precious name we pray, **Amen.**

Introduction: I’ve told you before than when I think, the first things that pop into my mind are either images or random song lyrics. That’s what lead me to start illustrating my messages with pictures more than a decade ago. **Today’s theme** deals with courage, and when I think of courage I think of a definition of courage contained in a song which became popular when it was used as the theme song of a TV show also **from about a decade ago**. Let’s listen to just two lines of the chorus of that song:

{Play “*Courage Is Chorus.mp3*” [0:20]}

“*Courage is when you’re afraid, but you keep on living anyway.*” That’s a nugget of wisdom worth remembering. The band who wrote and performed that song is ***The Strange Familiar***.¹ They were just a couple of wannabes from Akron, Ohio who didn’t even have a record label before ABC made their song the theme to its hit show “***The Secret Life of the American Teenager***” back in 2008. Anyway, those two band members understand that life isn’t all a bed of roses and even though they’re still young, they’ve already learned one of life’s important lessons. Even when you’re afraid, you still need to keep on living anyway.

PAUSE

¹ <http://www.myspace.com/thestrangefamilial>

Move I.

Fear can take the life out of living. We all have our fears, but when we let our fears take control of our life, it's as if the wind has gone out of our sails. We become so concerned with what might happen that we stop doing anything else. Fear totally consumes our thoughts and drains all of our energy.

Our Bible lesson today is one of the best known miracles stories in the Bible. When it comes to miracles stories, there are a hand-full of stories that most people remember. **People remember the story of Jesus turning water in the wine, or the story of Jesus feeding 5000 people with just five loaves of bread and two small fish, or they remember the story of Jesus walking on water.** Those are among the best known of Jesus' miracle stories. But what I want to focus in on today in the story of **Jesus walking on water**, is how the people reacted. Generally, when people encounter a miracle, they tend to react in one of two ways. Either people are **amazed**, or people are **skeptical**.

How many of you are familiar with the Las Vegas illusionist Criss Angel. He's had a number of prime-time TV specials. One of Criss' many illusions has been to **walk on water** on a swimming pool at the Luxor Hotel there in Las Vegas. Criss wow's the hotel guest as he walked right across the pool. The reaction of the hotel guests are as you might expect. Either people are astonished and amazed, or they're skeptical and eager to discover Criss' trick. People react as people always react when they're witnessing a miracle in the making.

But how do the disciples out on a boat in the middle of the Sea of Galilee react when they see Jesus walking toward them on the water? Were they amazed, or are they skeptical? No, the disciples are afraid. In **Matthew 14:26 (NRSV)** we read, "**But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out in fear.**" Yes, the disciples are afraid.

Now days, psychologist have given scientific sounding names to each of the fears people have. The fear that the disciples were experiencing when they saw Jesus walking on the water in the middle of the night is **phasemophobia**—the fear of ghosts. One moment everything can be fine, and the next moment you can be gripped in fear. Do you need proof, listen to this:

{Play “*Dental Drill Sound Clip.mp3*” [0:09]}

Uhh, that hurts. An awful lot of people have teeth rotting away in their mouths because they have **dentophobia**—a fear of dentist. There are just so many fears that plague the human race. Many people fear going to the doctor because they might find out that they have cancer. That’s **Carcinophobia**—a fear of getting cancer. Or perhaps looking at this list of the names of fears strikes up another fear,

Hip-po-pot-o-mon-stro-ses-quip-pe-da-li-o-phob-i-a – (let me try to pronounce that.) Anyway, it means the **fear of long words**. And the list of human fears goes on and on. **Everyone has fears**, and those fears can become paralyzing. **Yes, fear can take the life out of living.**

End I.

Move II.

But Jesus doesn't want his followers to live in fear. Throughout the gospel accounts of Jesus' earthly life, over and over again Jesus implores his disciple not to be afraid. This isn't just some suggestion or recommendation made by Jesus; it is an imperative. In the Greek, Jesus commands:

μὴ φοβεῖσθε (**me-phob-e-sthe**) “**no phobia**” or in King James English the imperative “**Fear not!**” The men sailing on this ship could justifiably be afraid of the stormy seas. But they aren't sailing the seas alone, Jesus is right there with them along the way.

Of course, our Bible lesson today is also set on a stormy sea. The disciples have been struggling against the wind and waves for hours and have barely made it halfway across the seven-mile wide lake **when they see someone** walking toward them on the water. Now, I don't know about you, but I'd probably be thinking of ghost too if I saw a shadowy-figure coming across the lake toward me in the middle of the night. I'd be scared stiff. But Jesus understood the disciples' fears. In **Matthew 14:27 (NIV)** Jesus immediately calls out to the disciples and says, “**Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.**” Jesus is prescribing the antidote to fear, courage! And showing courage in the face of fear can be downright amazing.

A number of years ago, the story of Randy Pausch, a Carnegie-Mellon computer science professor who was dying of pancreatic cancer gained national attention. The fall before he died, Professor Pausch delivered one last inspirational lecture at my Alma mater Carnegie-Mellon University called, “*Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams.*” Someone videoed the lecture and **posted in on YouTube** and in short order it went viral. You can still watch Professor Pausch's entire lecture on YouTube, just search for “*Last Lecture,*” and it'll be the first hit.

To date, nearly 20-million people have watched the last lecture on YouTube. And before Professor Pausch died, a Wall Street Journal columnist helped him turn the lecture into **a book**, which also became an instant bestseller. I highly recommend that you listen to the lecture or read the book. The fear of getting cancer, **carcinophobia**, never consumed Randy's life. And even when he knew he was dying of cancer, Randy never developed **than-a-to-phob-i-a** a fear of death or dying. **While** Randy never talked publicly about his faith, that doesn't mean that Randy didn't have any faith. What I do know is that Randy's father was a Presbyterian who Randy described as the best Christian he'd ever known. I also know that when a reporter asked Randy if he knew any good prayers, Randy replied that he thought "*The Serenity Prayer*" was a really good prayer, adding that it isn't just for alcoholics. Randy of course was refereeing to Reinhold Niebuhr's "*The Serenity Prayer*:"

**God, grant me the serenity to accept
the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can,
and Wisdom to know the difference.**

Randy never said he wasn't afraid. He even spoke of times when he and his wife, Jai, cried together after his diagnosis. But Niebuhr's prayer encouraged Randy to accept his cancer, while it also encouraged him to keep on living while he was dying. Even when Randy Pausch was afraid, he kept right on living anyway. **Fear is very real. But Jesus truly doesn't want his followers to live in fear.**

End II.

Move III.

So take courage, and live by faith. Listen to Jesus, let courage be an antidote to fear. Now I'm not talking about the kind of courage that's blind. **Blind courage** lives in denial. A blind courage doesn't believe in death. Nor am I talking about a macho **kind of courage** that feels it can conquer the world all by itself. Such a courage thinks bad things may happen to others, but they're never going to happen to me. No, the kind of courage **I'm taking about is Niebuhr's kind of courage** that accepts what already is and works to change what's worth changing.

I remember once Time Magazine featured Mark Twain on its cover. Mark Twain was the pen name of the great American satirist, **Samuel Clemens**. People know Clemens because of his dry wit and his uncanny sense of reality. Clemens could state the obvious in refreshing ways. For example one Clemens' quote is, "Buy land, they're not making it anymore." Or, "Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter." That brings me to a Clemens' quote about courage; "**Courage is resistant to fear, mastery of fear, not an absence of fear.**" Having courage don't necessarily make your fears go away, it just allows you to live with your fears, or in other words, to keep on living anyway.

It's now been 17 years since I first became a local church pastor. You'd figure that after 17 years I could do this in my sleep. But I have to admit that there's one task a pastor does that's never come easy to me. That's preparing sermons. It would be easy to **stand up here** and ramble on for 20 minutes, but that wouldn't be preaching. You see preaching is only preaching when people actually hear God speaking. Now there's a scary thought, I'm supposed to stand up here and speak, and you're supposed to hear God. For me, the speaking part is easy, it's the "*what to say part*" that's hard. Most weeks when I first look at the Bible lesson, **my mind draws a blank**. I can't think of a thing to say. **I get scared.**

Some weeks days may pass and although I've been reading and studying, and praying, or perhaps I should say pleading with God, I still have no clue what the sermon's supposed to be about. That's when I remember a bit of **wisdom from my father**. Just as Randy Pausch's children have a copy of his last lecture to provide some wisdom from beyond the grave, I have a copy of my father's last Sunday school lesson to provide some wisdom from beyond the grave too. And just as Randy Pausch was dying of pancreatic cancer when he delivered his last lecture, my father was also dying of pancreatic cancer when he delivered his last Sunday School lesson on April 12th, 1992 in Pensacola, Florida. Here's a bit of wisdom from that last lesson that's helped me find the courage keep on struggling as I prepare a sermon each week:

{Play "*Dad's Last Sunday School Class.mp3*" [0:32]}

To think the thoughts of God after God has thought them. To say the words of God after God has said them. That's what preaching is all about. The fear of not hearing God's word is very real. The fear should be as true for you as it is for me. You should fear coming here and not hearing God. But we're not alone in our fear. **The Spirit of God is with me** as I prepare and with you as you listen to the Sermon each week. We can find courage because Jesus is with us guiding us through the stormy seas. **So yes, take courage, and live by faith too.**

End III.

Conclusion: *“Courage is when you’re afraid, but you keep on living anyway.”*

Our fears are very real. **Yes, fear can take the life out of living.** We all have our fears. Perhaps yours is carcinophobia—a fear of getting cancer. My fear is that God won’t give me anything to say. **But Jesus doesn’t want his followers to live in fear.** Like Randy Pausch, we need to keep right on living even when we know we’re dying. **So, take courage, and live by faith.** Resist letting your fears control your life. Jesus is always there guiding each of you through the stormy seas. Keep right on listening for God’s Word as you live life with *“A **Courageous Faith.**”* A faith that walks on water.

Closing Prayer: Let’s pray. Loving Father, grant us the courage to keep on living even when we’re afraid. Make our faith be a courageous faith. **Amen!**

10:30 Closing Hymn: “Jesus, Savior Pilot Me” Red Hymnal 509

All Three Verses

Sending Forth: God hasn’t given you a spirit of fear. Let God take your hand and lead you towards the Promised Land. Go forth with a courageous faith that keeps on living even when you’re afraid. **And all of God’s people said...Amen!**