

Renowned evangelical preacher – Charles Swindoll- tells a story about a farmer who wanted to impress his hunting buddy,...so he went and bought the smartest hunting dog he could find...He trained this dog to do things no other dog on earth could do...Then he took his super dog on the next duck hunting trip,...and the dog did an amazing thing...Whenever the farmer or his buddy shot a duck out of the sky and it fell into the water,...the dog would leap out of the boat, walk on the water, pick up the bird and walk it back to the boat...After the dog had done this several times, his owner - bursting with pride- looked at his buddy and smugly asked him, “So, do you see anything unusual about my dog?”...His buddy sat back, rubbed his chin, thought about it for a little while...and finally said, “Yah, come to think of it, I do!...That stupid dog doesn’t know how to swim,..does he?”

The dog in this silly story and Peter in our Gospel have something in common: neither one gets the credit for doing something absolutely incredible...Instead, the poor dog gets accused of not being able to swim...And Peter gets criticized for His lack of faith...Most homilies on this Gospel focus on how Peter became so terrified by the wind and the waves that he took his eyes off Jesus and began to sink...Well, I think poor Peter gets a bad rap,...so I’m going to look at this story from a somewhat different angle.

OK, here’s the scene...This little fishing boat is being pounded and battered by gale-like winds and crashing waves under a dark stormy sky...And imagine how the disciples must’ve felt: cold, wet, exhausted, scared ...And if that wasn’t bad enough,...they see this figure walking on the water like a ghostly apparition and they become even more frightened...until Jesus announces that it’s Him walking toward the boat...Now, I don’t know about you, but if I was in that boat, I would’ve said, “Lord, if it IS you,...get us the h\_\_l out of here!...But not Peter...Good, old impetuous Peter says, “Lord, if it IS you, command me to come to you on the water.”...What was he thinking?...Maybe he wanted to show the other disciples and Jesus how strong his faith in Jesus was?...Or maybe he wanted to find out just how power-ful Jesus was. ...He had seen Him do some amazing things, but walking on water, defying the law of gravity, that was taking things to a new level...Whatever Peter’s reason,..when Jesus commanded him, “Cum!”, Peter did!...He stepped out of the boat...He tried...He walked a few steps...Then he sank.

He didn’t make it...He failed... Or did he?...The Gospel passage says he DID start out walking toward Jesus,.. and then the wind picked up and he became frightened...But before he sank, ...Peter became the 1<sup>st</sup> mortal man to ever walk on water...He did it!!!...So, here’s the question. Did he fail? ...Before we answer that,...let me say this about failure...Failure isn’t something that happens... Rather it’s the way we perceive what happened...Take, for example, Dr. Jonas Salk. You all know what he did, right? ..What you might not know is that before Dr. Salk finally discovered the vaccine for Polio, he was unsuccessful 200 times...He was once asked how it felt to fail 200 times,... and he replied, “I didn’t fail 200 times...I simply found 200 ways NOT to treat Polio before I found the right one.”...You see, everyone of those unsuccessful attempts taught him something...so we can’t call them failures.

Getting back to Peter....Did he fail?...Yes, I suppose in one sense he did; he allowed his faith in Jesus, his trust in Jesus, to slip...He shifted his focus away from where it needed to be -on Jesus....He sank. ...He failed....Yet, in another sense, like Dr. Salk’s first 200 attempts,... Peter didn’t succeed in what he started out to do...But look at what he learned...He experienced things the other disciples missed out on because they didn’t get out of the boat. ..Only Peter knew the glory of walking on the water with Jesus, even for just a moment...Only Peter knew first-hand that whenever he sank, Jesus would be there to save him. ...None of the other disciples felt what it was like for Jesus to reach down and pull them up...Only Peter. Peter shared a connection with Jesus that none of his peers did that night... because he got out of the boat...He trusted Jesus...He took a risk...So, in that sense, Peter did not fail.

Now at this point, some of you might be thinking, "Ok, that's all very interesting, but how does it apply to me, to my life as a Christian?"...That's a very good question...and there's probably more than one answer...For me, the main message to take from this Gospel has to do with that part of being a Christian that a lot of people – including me at times - don't like....It's about being more than a believer in Jesus Christ; it's about being a disciple of Jesus Christ...Being a disciple is more than believing everything the Bible and the Church teach about Jesus....Being a disciple is a commitment to learn from Jesus, ..to follow Jesus,..to try to live as He lived,...Being a disciple means there will be times when - like Peter – Jesus will call us to "Come!" He will call us to take a risk... to get out of the boat and take the risk that we may sink. We may fail.

I have to admit I'm not a very courageous person...I'm not big on taking risks...But, you know, many of the good things in life come only when we are willing to take a risk...I remember how scared I was when I wanted to kiss Cathy for the 1<sup>st</sup> time...We were only 15 and I was terrified. What if she said "no"? What if she smackd me in the face?...After debating it a while, I decided to do it,...but I didn't have the courage to ask her...So, instead, I seai to her, "I'll bet you a quarter I can kiss you without touching you."...Luckily, she took the bet....So I bent down , planted a little smooch on her cheek, and handed her the quarter... Pretty smooth move, eh? ...I took the risk and the rest is history... almost 51 yrs.... and over \$20K in quarters.

Taking that risk was easy...Doing what Jesus commands of His disciples is a lot harder...Love your enemies....Do good to those who hate you...Bless those who curse you...Forgive those who hurt you, not one time but 70x7 times...Pray for those who mistreat you...Turn the other cheek...Sell all you have and give to the poor...Wash the feet of your brothers and sisters...Love your neighbor as you love yourself...and neighbor means everyone...everyone. And of course, feed the hungry...clothe the naked...welcome the stranger...care for the sick...visit the prisoner...because what you do to them, you are doing to me...King Jesus says.

All easy stuff, right?....But, that's what Jesus modeled for us, and what He says must be the identifying mark of all who follow Him... To follow Jesus, to live His way is to go against the world's way of doing business...When we do, we take a risk...We risk being ridiculed; we risk being considered weak; we risk looking foolish; we risk being taken advantage of; we risk being hated; we risk being persecuted; we risk being alienated by family and friends; we risk being rejected.

My friends, here's the thing...It's all about FAITH in Jesus Christ...and by that I don't mean "head" faith. Faith is not so much an activity of the brain as it is of the heart,...Not our emotional, feeling heart,...but our physical heart that pumps blood to our hands and our feet...because faith is about DOING...faith is about taking a step...getting out of the boat...taking a risk...In his letter, St. James tells us we must not only be hearers of the Word,...we must be doers of the Word."

A faithful person will say to Jesus, "I know what you are calling me to do...I don't know if I can do it, but I'm gonna try,...because I trust that if I run into trouble – if it gets stormy and my faith falters and I begin to sink -I can call out to You as Peter did on that stormy night, and You will be there to grasp me by the arm and pick me up....You won't leave me alone...I trust You Jesus."

My Friends, trying to live like Jesus,..taking a risk for Jesus....means there will be times when we may sink,...we may fail...But whether we succeed or fail, each time draws us closer to Jesus....Each time we get closer to the abundant life He promises to all who follow Him...That life where I bet we'll find that walking on water will be as easy as walking in the park.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. AMEN.