

Youth Sunday
May 3, 2009

Matthew 7:24-27
Matthew 14:22-33

A Leap of Faith

I'd just like to start out with a quick announcement. Tickets for the debut concert of "The Nathan Heeter Experience" will be on sale immediately following the service in the fellowship hall. I'm sure you could tell from the preview you saw of the band in the skit that we've been working incredibly hard.

Joking aside, every year that we put together this service I am reminded of the incredible amount of work that the regular church staff contributes each week. I'd like to think that the youth completely bared the burden of organizing this service, but in truth it was only with the invaluable support and dedication of the staff that we could put all of this together.

The youth as well were extremely dedicated. In fact, Colin Knott, who plays a man who decides not to shower, was so dedicated he has been in character all week.

Everyday we make choices, some which are mundane, and others that have profound significance. Unfortunately for us not all of the choices we are faced with are simple questions. It would be nice if the only decisions we have to make are whether to take a shower, or what we'll eat for breakfast. These simple questions, the ones that only impact us for a few moments, are not real difficult to make. How often do we stay awake

up night and think, “If only if would have had the cheerios?” I suspect not often. These decisions become much more difficult as their implications become greater. Add a hazy line between right and wrong and these choices are even harder to make. Often though the most difficult part of making a choice is not deciding which course of action is the right one, but often the true difficulty lies in actually bringing ourselves to carry out that right decision.

Too often we avoid making the truly difficult choices by finding some fact or reason that dismisses our role in the entire situation. We use one word to distance ourselves from the pressure of making or carrying out a choice. Just one, single word: But. How often do we say, “Sure, I know I should do this, but”? But what? “But I have of these projects for school I need to do”, or “but you know I’m just really swamped at work right now” or “but you know this problem is just so big, I mean how could I even help”.

I think that sometimes we apply this reasoning to our faith and in our discipleship with Christ.

It is essential in our relationship with the lord that we not only to have faith in Jesus, but we must recognize that Jesus has faith in us.

Let us now examine the story of Jesus and Peter walking on water. Interestingly, the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John, all tell this story of Jesus walking on the water, yet it is only Matthew which writes of Peter’s walk as well.

Beginning at Matthew 14: 22, the scripture tells of how Jesus tells his disciples to board a boat and travel to the other side of a lake. While Jesus journeyed to the top of mountain to pray, the boat was battered by harsh waves and wind. The next morning, Jesus walked toward them on the water. At first they mistook him for a ghost, but Jesus quickly reassured them.

Beginning reading Matthew 14:28: 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, started walking on the water, and came towards Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, ‘You of little faith, why did you doubt?’

To gain a better understanding of this passage, it is important to understand its context. By understanding a few things about first century Jewish history we can gain a new perspective on the story.

In one of his sermons in a video series, Pastor Rob Bell of Mars Hill Bible church provides a context for the story by explaining the educational system for first century Jewish boys. The entire educational system of the time in that region of the world was based around learning about the scriptures and oral tradition. The first step of a boys learning was called “bet safar”, which would be taught up to age 10. In “bet safar” the

young boy would memorize the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament. By the time a boy was only 10 years old, he would have Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, all memorized by heart. All five books, memorized, and this is only the first step. Most boys however, just couldn't cut it. By age 10, most boys would be sent back to their families to learn the family trade, as fishermen, carpenters, farmers, ect. But the very best would continue on to the next level, "Bet Talmud". In "Bet Talmud" the very best would continue to learn the rest of the Jewish scriptures, the entire Old Testament. By the end of "Bet Talmud" around age 15, the boys would have memorized the entire Old Testament, that's Genesis to Malachi, that's 39 books, and in my bible that's 875 pages. The entire Old Testament, word for word, memorized. And by this time, the very best of the best of the best, would continue on and follow a rabbi as a disciple, while a large majority would go back to their family to learn the family trade. So here's Jesus and his boat full of disciples. Here's Jesus, and he's the savior and the messiah, and he performs miracles, and is the son of God, so of course he disciples are the best of the best of the best, Right? He's the messiah. Why wouldn't he have the best of the best of the best?

In fact Jesus' disciples weren't he very best; they were ordinary fisherman and despised tax collectors. They weren't the very best.

The scripture tells of Peter's calling in Matthew 4:18-20:

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.’ Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

So Peter and his brother are out fishing and along comes Jesus, and he tells them to follow him, and immediately they drop their nets and just followed him? Why? It seems strange doesn't it? We often think of a disciple as a student or someone who knows what the teacher knows, but in the first century the term meant someone who was like their rabbi, and could do what the rabbi does. So a rabbi would choose from among the best of the best of the best, only those who he thought could do what he did.

So here's Jesus, the son of god, performing miracles, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, walking on water, and he says to Peter, “Follow me”.

Rob Bell refers to a saying about disciples of the time. “May you be covered in the dust of your rabbi”. Since the disciples would follow their rabbi and do what they did, they would be covered in their dust, so any good disciple would therefore be covered in the dust of their rabbi.

So Jesus calls Peter, a fisherman, to be his disciple. He's not the best of the best, but Jesus calls him anyway. Jesus says to Peter, I think you can do what I do.

So when Jesus walks by the boat and he identifies himself to the disciples, Peter sees Jesus walking on the water. Peter knows that Jesus has called him to do what he does, so Peter wants to walk on the water as well. Peter takes a literal leap of faith and jumps out of the boat and begins walking on the water.

The scripture says that Peter then noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

It seems as if Jesus is asking Peter why he doubted him, but it makes more sense that Peter is doubting himself. Why would Peter doubt Jesus? Jesus isn't sinking. When Peter looked around and saw the storm and the waves he doubted his own abilities to do what Jesus does, and he sinks.

A similar lesson can be found in the Exodus. While Moses is wandering on a mountain, he comes upon God in the form of a burning bush. God commands Moses to go to Egypt and free the Israelites from bondage.

In Exodus 4: 11-13 Moses says to the Lord, 'O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.' Then the Lord said to him, 'Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go, and I will

be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak.’ But he said, ‘O my Lord, please send someone else.’

So Moses doubts his own ability to carry out God’s will, but God explains to Moses that it is he who gives men all their talents and abilities, so he will have what he requires in order to do god’s work, but he still doubts, and begs God to send someone else.

Jesus explains in his parable of the houses on sand and rock that it is through faith that we can persevere through hardship. He explains that a man who acts on God’s word is like a wise man who built his house on a rock, while a man who hears his word and doesn’t act on them is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The storms came, the rains fell, the floods came, and the winds blew against the houses. The house built on the rock stood through the storm, while the house on sand collapsed in a great fall. If we have faith we can survive the storm.

We must remember that God believes in us! And if we believe in God and in ourselves, we can act on his words. Everyday God calls us to carryout his will, and the choices we make reflect whether we choose to act upon the word of God. Will you be the foolish man who builds his house on sand, or the wise man who builds his house on the rock that is faith, and perseveres through the storm? We need to stop making excuses for ourselves. How much longer will we say to God, “you know god, I know this is what I should do, but”! For how much longer will we say , “well, I know I should be like Jesus,

but common, he's the son of god and everything, and who am I?" For how much longer will we doubt ourselves. Moses had faith in god, and god had faith in Moses, and ultimately he overcame his doubts and freed the Israelites. Peter and the other disciples, a ragtag group of everyday fisherman and tax collectors, went on to be like Jesus and they established the early church. With the rock of faith we can do anything that God calls us to do. We can all be like Jesus. We can all act upon his word. We must make the choice, and take a leap of faith, to do what god calls us to do, no matter what storm lies in our way, and know that Jesus has faith in us, and we must have faith in ourselves.

Let us pray:

Dear God, "When we leave here today, command us to feed the hungry, to heal the sick, to house the poor, to walk on water, and let us all be covered in the dust in our lord, Jesus Christ. Amen"