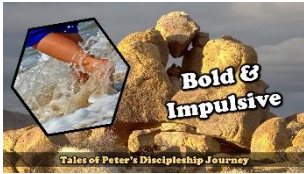


## Bold & Impulsive



<Matthew 17:1-4>

*1 Six days later Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and brought them to the top of a very high mountain. 2 He was transformed in front of them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as light.*

*3 Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Jesus. 4 Peter reacted to all of this by saying to Jesus, "Lord, it's good that we're here. If you want, I'll make three shrines: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."*

<Matthew 14:22-32>

*Right then, Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead to the other side of the lake while he dismissed the crowds. 23 When he sent them away, he went up onto a mountain by himself to pray. Evening came and he was alone. 24 Meanwhile, the boat, fighting a strong headwind, was being battered by the waves and was already far away from land. 25 Very early in the morning he came to his disciples, walking on the lake. 26 When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified and said, "It's a ghost!" They were so frightened they screamed.*

*27 Just then Jesus spoke to them, "Be encouraged! It's me. Don't be afraid."*

*28 Peter replied, "Lord, if it's you, order me to come to you on the water."*

*29 And Jesus said, "Come."*

*Then Peter got out of the boat and was walking on the water toward Jesus. 30 But when Peter saw the strong wind, he became frightened. As he began to sink, he shouted, "Lord, rescue me!"*

*31 Jesus immediately reached out and grabbed him, saying, "You man of weak faith! Why did you begin to have doubts?" 32 When they got into the boat, the wind settled down.*

In both of our scriptures today, Peter is impulsive. He acts quickly, without much thought. He says what he is thinking at the time. I almost did an impulsive thing this week!! Like the rest of you, I expect, my hair is getting long and driving me crazy. I *nearly* let Adrian loose on it but chickened out at the last moment and just did the fringe!



Let's take a look at Peter's boldness and impulsiveness in our two passages. Our first passage was the one that we traditionally hear on the Sunday before Lent. Jesus has taken Peter, James and John up the mountain, and something mysterious happens up there. Moses and Elijah appear to be with Jesus. Peter voices his immediate reaction which is to offer to build some booths/ shelters/ tents / shrines for them. Each year the Jewish people celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles to mark 40 years in the wilderness. They built booths as a reminder of the type of dwelling place and to represent God's protection, provision and faithfulness. Peter has just glimpsed something amazing. He doesn't know quite what to do but he wants to do something, so maybe a booth would be a good choice.

We didn't hear the whole story today, but the passage goes on to describe a voice from a cloud that enveloped them saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen. Listen to him." Booths are not mentioned. Instead they are told to listen to Jesus and to **not** be afraid.

*Can you think of a time when you have wanted to stay in a holy moment and not wanted to leave and only afterwards realized the revelation in that moment for you? Or a time when you wanted to act and God says, just listen and don't be afraid?*



Back in 2012, our youngest son celebrated his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. It was at a difficult time in my life with the church where I was minister having to make some very tough decisions; and I was anxious and fearful for what the future would look like. We gathered as a family in San Francisco for the weekend for Nigel's birthday celebrations. Each of us had travelled between 2 and 6 hours to get there. We had a great time and it was wonderful to have everyone together. On Sunday morning, we met for breakfast and then the children left for their long journeys home. I had the Sunday off – I wasn't preaching and I really did not want to go straight home. Over breakfast we had been talking about Mount Diablo which was one of the directions that we could take to go home. So we decided to take a diversion and go to the top of the mountain. (*Mt Diablo is 1200 m or 3800 ft; which taller than Scafell Pike and not as tall as Ben Nevis*). It is a State Park, and you can take the road to almost the top and then walk the rest.

Only it was a cloudy morning and the top of the mountain was shrouded in fog. We thought the sun might break through, so we went ahead and drove up to it. We got some good views for a while of the valley below as we climbed and then we went into the cloud. And it was still in cloud as we reached the top. I was disappointed that we wouldn't have this great view. But it was an amazing experience with the mists swirling around us. It reminded me of Moses climbing the mountain to get the 10 commandments and of the transfiguration passage. And then the clouds started to move. Not much, but there was a gap that would appear and disappear. And we could peer through and see down below, a little bit at a time. It was beautiful. I was at peace and I didn't want to leave to face what I knew was ahead of me. But eventually, of course, we had to leave.



It was two months or so later, that I got a phone call telling me that the Bishop was going to appoint me to Byron United Methodist Church in July that year. Where's Byron, I said? Byron, I discovered, is one of the places located at the foot of Mt Diablo. We had seen it, or at least that general area, peeping through the clouds on that day when we were up the mountain. Wow. God had shown me the Promised Land, even though I had not recognized it at the time. **I had learned a lesson in listening for Jesus' voice and in not being afraid.**

Peter boldly recognizes the holy in the event and wants to stay in that moment. Peter got a part of the picture at the time. He knew that he was seeing something special. But a fuller understanding would not come until later.



Now let's think about our second scripture and Peter walking on water. I like this scripture. It's a rich passage. It has meant a lot in my life at times when I have taken faith risks. I love Peter and can identify with him. He makes blunders & never quite gets it right, and yet he tries his best.

There's some great cartoons making fun of Peter sinking.<sup>1</sup>



- Hey Peter, WATER you doing down there?
- Take my hand Peter and don't LEGO
- Peter finds his faith to be much stronger in the winter (when the water is frozen)

In this story Peter is impetuous. He reacts without thinking, speaking from his heart. He spots Jesus and asks, "Hey can I join you Jesus?" Jesus says: sure – come on. Peter starts out with success & then oops, as he starts to analyze and gets scared. Before he knows it, he is sinking and is **in over his head**, and Jesus rescues him, and laughs (or chides) at his incompetence and faith. Jesus plonks him back in the boat, and gets in there with him and the others. It is only after that experience that the disciples recognize Jesus as the Son of God.



Jesus had told the disciples that he would meet them on the far side of the lake. In the midst of the storm, that was not what he did. He appeared walking on the water where they certainly didn't expect to see him. **Jesus just keeps showing up where we don't expect him to. Jesus comes to us in the middle of the storms of life.**

Jesus didn't chastise the disciples who stayed in the boat. He didn't call them unfaithful. Yet there was Peter, touched by his faith, by the spirit. He saw what Jesus was doing and felt a yearning, a wanting to participate. Can I come to you, he says. Yes do, says Jesus. Peter wanted to be there with Jesus. It certainly wasn't an easy option to choose. The sea was rough. He could sink. It was scary, risky and challenging. Every experience changes us. **Peter got wet - head to toe, soaked.** He had a tale to tell, an experience to ponder, and came to a greater understanding of Jesus. Peter's experience shows us that we can expect to waver sometimes. Our hearts will be touched, and as we attempt to do so we'll be in over our heads. When Jesus plucks us back out, he'll set us back on course that's a little different from before.

Many times over the years I have felt like Peter. I really identified with him when first answered call to ordained ministry. I thought I was sailing in the boat going that way. Do you want me to get out and do this scary thing Lord? Shall I come to you? He nodded. I took a deep breath. Ok, here I go! Then came the ministry inquiry process, counseling, mentoring, seminary, endless reading, papers to write, school exams, doctrinal questioning, annual interviews, ... it wasn't long before I felt I was totally sinking.

**I wonder how Peter felt after he was back on dry land?** Stupid? A failure? Did he beat himself up for having doubts? Was he angry with himself? Maybe the conversation went something like this. <Skit: Going Under from a Wild Goose Publications book called *Jesus and Peter, Off the Record Conversations* by John Bell and Graham Maule. *In this skit Peter thinks that he has made a fool of himself. Jesus tells Peter that Peter can only follow him if Peter watches what he is doing and where he is going. If Peter looks at the difficulties, then Peter will sink, look at Jesus and Peter will stay afloat. Jesus also tells Peter that he never feels like giving up on Peter.*> To stay afloat, keep your eyes on Jesus! I should have called this sermon today, *Listening to Jesus & Looking at Jesus!*

<sup>1</sup> <http://christianfunnypictures.com/2016/09/14-hilarious-cartoons-jesus-walking-water.html>

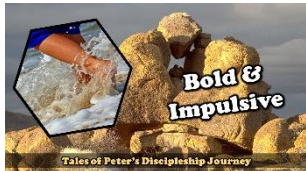
But did you notice or see that the part of Peter that was doubtful, the part of Peter that was unsure, that part that he probably couldn't stand about himself - that part didn't cause Jesus to hesitate even one minute before saving him. Jesus reached right out, immediately, (says the text) and pulled Peter up. Do you know why? Because the part of Peter that "fell short" was just as acceptable to God as the part that was bold enough and had enough faith to get out of the boat. Think about those parts of yourself that fall short - and name them to yourself. Because what I want you to know today, is that the part of you that haunts you and reminds you of the slips ups... of the failures... *That* part of you is just as acceptable to God as the part that always does the right thing and has faith enough to get out of the boat!<sup>2</sup>

So there will probably be moments in our lives when like Peter we step out of the boat throwing ourselves into the disorderly world, expecting an encounter with Jesus. And it is in the nature of faith to **waver** as we ...: lead a Bible Study for the first time, visit someone in hospital, with cancer, on hospice, reach out to a homeless person, sign up for a mission trip, worship in some different ways, extend extravagant generosity for the first time, share our faith with a co-worker / hairdresser / person next to us on the bus, participate in a demonstration, stand up against racism, sexism, and the other 'isms.'



We are in a big life storm right now. Trust that Jesus is and will come to us. Perhaps Jesus is calling you to walk on the water to join him. If you find yourself wavering, remember Jesus will be there to stretch out his hand out to grab yours. *Although in these times of social distancing, it might be a 6' pole that he offers!* As you find yourself back in the boat celebrate that life

looks a little different now. Share your story so that those in the boat experience it too. And if you stay in the boat in the middle of this storm, don't criticize or laugh at those who do get out, but offer them a towel and ask them to tell you their story. Because everyone in the boat is going to be changed by the experience.



I don't know what it is going to be like when this storm finally dies down. But it is going to have changed us. Things will be different. Let's listen to Jesus and keep our eyes on him. Let's be bold and impulsive. This storm is rough now and together we might just have to risk being in over our heads. And as we do, we might just discover God in some new places because sometimes the incredibly turbulent stormy places are the places where God is approaching us and inviting us to join in by doing something new. "**Come!**" says Jesus.

For the witness of Peter, his boldness and impulsiveness:  
Thanks be to God.  
Amen.

#### Resources

Jarvis, Cynthia A. and E. Elizabeth Johnson, Eds. *Feasting on the Gospels. Matthew, Volume 1.* Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.theologicalstew.com/getting-past-that-sinking-feeling.html>