



# BelPres Church

## Faith Walking

Matthew 14:22-36

Speaker: Dr. Scott Dudley

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Well, great to see you guys here. Thank you for joining us. And those of you watching online, thanks for joining us. Happy First Sunday of Advent, my favorite time of the year. So, it's awesome.

The pastor of the church I worked at in the Bay Area told a story of when he'd been offered the job at that church, he didn't want it, because at the time, he was a pastor at a church in Malibu, Southern California, right on the beach. He rode horses every day on the beach, and things were going great, and he loved it. And it was a risk to go to a new church. And one day, he was walking on the beach, praying about this, and he heard God say to him, You can stay, but you won't be blessed. You'll miss what I have for you.

I had somewhat of a similar experience when I was praying about whether or not to come here, because it was a big risk for my wife and me to do that. It was an even bigger risk for you all to get me. So I went to the beach and I prayed and I just didn't feel settled about it. So I called the chair of the search team that had offered me the job, and I said, I think I maybe oversold myself in the interviews. Did any of my references tell you that I don't have a clue how to do this job? And he said, Yes, Scott, we've been informed of your many incompetencies. I mean, that wasn't quite the exact quote, but it was kind of close. And then he said, Don't make me fly down there and get you. Which sounded like a call from God. So I came.

Both of those stories are about taking a risk of faith to do what Jesus was calling us to do. And in both cases, the result was we experienced Jesus' power

in ways we never would have if we had just stayed on the beach. And what God said to my pastor friend, I think he sometimes says to us, you can stay where you are, but you won't be blessed. You'll miss seeing my power. You'll miss the amazing relationships I have in store for you. You'll miss the meaning and purpose. You can stay. I'll still be with you. I'll still love you, but you'll miss the adventure I have for you if you don't take this risk of faith.

God himself is a risk taker, which we celebrate this season of Advent, that God came himself in the person of Jesus, born as a baby to two teenage peasants. That was a risk. They could have botched the whole thing, died on a cross to pay the price for our sins, to reconcile us to God. Huge risk. God himself is a risk taker.

And there is this pattern throughout scripture that faithful risks unleashed Jesus' power. The Israelites took a step into the Red Sea to escape Pharaoh's army, and that was a risk, but God divided the waters in two. David took a risk to fight the giant Goliath and defeated him through God's power. Faithful risks unleashed Jesus' power. And if we've never seen the power of Jesus, it's probably because we're playing it too safe.

This entire fall, we have talked about how Jesus unleashes us from the things that hold us back. The last three weeks, we've talked about these eight projects that our elders, after prayer and fasting, have discerned God calling us to do. And this is about unleashing the greater potential of BelPres. I've talked about them the last three weeks. I'm not going to repeat them. But if you weren't here, you can just catch up online, especially November 9th, Vision Sunday, that sermon. There's also a document out there at the welcome desk that you can pick up that answers some of the top questions we've heard about these eight projects.

And to get all of these done, the invitation, as we've been saying, the invitation is, if you're not tithing, which is the Biblical practice of giving 10% of our time, our money, and our influence to the church we're a part of, for God's purposes, the invitation is to begin tithing or get as close as you can. And we've talked about that the last couple weeks, how that actually sets us free from financial worry. It's a great antidote to that. So if you're not tithing, the invitation is to begin, and if you are tithing, the invitation is to increase the percentage you give to this church to above 10% and or give some large 4, 5, 6, 7-figure gifts, we'll need everything. We'll need 1-figure gifts, 7-figure gifts, everything in between. And what this is ultimately about is discipleship. That's the process by which we become more like Jesus. And by giving time, money, and influence to these projects, I believe, we believe, I know it'll help us know Jesus better and

become more like him and see his power. But they all involve risk of time, money, influence, comfort, but faithful risks unleash Jesus' power.

We see that in a familiar Bible story to a lot of us, where one of Jesus' disciples, Peter, gets out of a boat in a storm and walks on water. And the context of that story is that Jesus had told his 12 disciples to get in a boat and go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee while he stayed behind to pray. And then it says, later that night, the boat was a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. Notice, the disciples are doing exactly what Jesus told them to do, and they still encounter a storm. God didn't cause the storm, it just happened. But there's a truth here that when we take risks of faith, sometimes there will be storms. It won't always be easy. We may face opposition from other people, opposition even from our friends, but just because it's hard doesn't mean that God's not in it.

Then it says, shortly before dawn, Jesus went out to them walking on the lake, and they were terrified. I like the fact that Jesus scares us sometimes. I like the fact that he asked us to do some scary things because it means they're big things. I was talking with a person a while back about these eight projects, and she said, some of these eight projects are a little bit scary. And I said, uh-huh. And that's why we have to do them, to expand our comfort zone into the faith zone. Expand our comfort zone into the faith zone.

And then Peter says, Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water. That is a weird thing to say. You're in this boat. You're not being—picture yourself, right? You're in this boat in a storm, that little boat, they weren't on a Disney cruise. They had this little rowboat thing in a storm at night. It's dark. It's scary. Is this what you say to Jesus? No! You say to Jesus, stop the storm, Jesus, please. But Peter doesn't ask for safety. He asks for a command. Tell me to come to you on the water.

What would happen if I stopped asking God to fix my circumstances so that my circumstances are the way I wanted them? What would happen if instead I asked him for a command and said, Lord, in these circumstances that I don't like, what is your command to me? What is it you want me to do? How do you want me to respond? Here I am, send me.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water, and came toward Jesus. The storm did not stop, right? Because God doesn't always stop the storms in our lives, but he does give us power to walk on top of the storms. And that's what he does for Peter here. And notice, he got out of the boat while the storm was still raging. Because sometimes I think we want to wait until the

storm stops to respond to what God's calling us to do. When I have more time, when I have more money, when conditions are better, then I will. But there's always going to be a storm of some kind.

Two weeks ago, I told you a story about a man in this church who started to tithe when his business was sinking and failing, and his income was at an all-time low. He never had less money. That's when he decides to give 10%. But he saw God provide, which helped him trust God more and worry less. He got out of the boat in a storm.

One of the projects we're doing of these eight is to participate in God's movement among Muslim refugees in Europe who are becoming Christians by the thousands, some of them going back to the countries they fled from, Iran, Afghanistan, to tell people about Jesus there at risk of prison or even death. Talk about out of the boat. They are out of the boat. And as a result, Christianity is growing very rapidly in places like Iran and Afghanistan and all of that. And I've met some of these people, and they inspire me to live a bolder life. And not a lot of Western churches are involved in this because they're afraid to be. Too much of a risk of time and money and influence. So not a lot of Western churches are participating in this, but it is one of the clearest places in our world right now where Jesus' power is unleashed. Like, legitimate miracles are happening. I do not want to miss that. I know you don't want to miss that either. We get to be part of it. We get to hear the stories. Go ourselves and experience Jesus' power for ourselves.

One of the other projects is to create affordable housing for refugees, including people in our own church in our New Hope African Fellowship. And housing is one of their biggest obstacles. And so we're going to, the short and long-term solutions, will create short-term solutions by having families come and live with us in our own homes for a month or two or three. And some of you have done this. That's using our time, our influence. Some of you have done this, and you know the blessing. You form these deep relationships. Kids from both families become friends, which expands their worldview. But for me, one of the other things this does is it unleashes me from the tyranny of me that I talked about last week.

Refugees are people who are fleeing persecution and horrible violence because of their... They've been persecuted because of their race, their religion, their politics. They've been vetted and approved to be here. And there's nothing like hearing their stories of the horrors that they have fled from and how Jesus met them, sometimes miraculously, that makes that traffic jam on 405 or that issue I'm having with my neighbor or that work or school challenge seem less

intimidating and less frustrating because my world and my heart became bigger because a refugee rescued me from me.

For long-term solutions, it'll take money to buy properties, apartments, houses, things like that. It'll take influence. Some of you may have connections that can help us find those properties to purchase. And we're going to do all this in partnership. This one, in partnership with other organizations, but it will require that we get out of the boat.

All of these projects will take time, because we're not going to hire a bunch of people to do them, because that robs us of the joy of getting to be part of changing people's lives through Jesus' power. There's never going to be a perfect time to get out of the boat. Jesus calls us out of the boat in the storm, which unleashes His power to help us walk on top of the storm, which Peter gets to do for like three steps.

Because many of you know the rest of the story. If only it had stopped there, right? But it goes on. When Peter saw the wind, he was afraid and beginning to sink, cried out, Lord, save me. Because this will happen too. When we take risks to follow Jesus, there will be setbacks, there will be failures. Jesus says to Peter, you of little faith, why did you doubt? And it's at this point that preachers like to beat up on Peter, oh, he didn't have enough faith. That's why he's sinking. Really? The dude got out of a boat in a storm. You try that, preacher boy, if it's so easy. I don't think Jesus is talking about the amount of faith he had. He had tons of faith. It's about the duration. Why did you quit so soon? Why did you stop trusting me?

For some of you, this may be what you need to hear today. In spite of the storm, keep trusting Jesus. And then the text says, Jesus reached out his hand and caught him, because Jesus will always catch you.

Years ago, we did a capital campaign here to build the upper campus and to start Jubilee Reach here in Bellevue and the Center for Champions in Rwanda that's gotten a thousand kids off the streets and into jobs and into relationship with Jesus. And as my wife and I have been doing now, we wanted to give as much as we could, and same thing that we're doing now. And so back then, we dug really deep to give as much as we could to that campaign, which was for three years, which is different than this one, because this one's ongoing. But back then, it was for three years. We wanted to give everything we could. So we traveled less. We gave everything we would have saved for our kids' college and for our retirement. We gave all of that to that campaign for three years. We ate

more cheaply. Christina found a recipe for tofu spaghetti, which we ate once. And then decided there were other ways that we could sacrifice.

And every time I go to Jubilee Reach and see families there getting groceries who can't afford them, or kids getting the help they need to thrive in school and in relationship and break cycles of poverty, I am flooded with gratitude that I get to be part of it. One of the eight projects we're doing is the One Roof Gatherings, outside of our Sunday morning worship experience, where we'll get together all our communities, African, Chinese, modern, sanctuary, share a meal together, worship, hear deeper Bible teaching, and create relationships with each other, and expand our understanding of who Jesus is by learning about him through different cultural lenses. Now, that's going to require some getting out of the boat.

In fact, it is possible that in this room right now, some of you may be thinking, I ain't going to those, that will take time, it might be uncomfortable to work through the language and the culture barriers, but here's the thing, I have been blessed to be in relationship with African refugees, and Chinese immigrants, and older people, and younger people, and because of those relationships, my comfort zone is wider, I know Jesus better, and I have more joy and depth of my life. We want that for everyone in this church. And like Peter, we may fail sometimes, we may sink from time to time, there will be setbacks, failures even, and that's a good thing.

In fact, it is possible that Jesus is saying to us, you're not failing nearly enough, because lack of failure usually comes from lack of risk taking. Sometimes you'll hear leaders say, failure is not an option. No, it's a necessity. We can't grow without a few failures, but Jesus will catch us as he did for Peter. And yes, even though Peter failed, he sank, and in that moment, he had a moment of failure.

As you've heard me say before about this text, there were 11 bigger failures sitting in the boat, too afraid to get out, paralyzed with fear. At least Peter took a few steps on the water. And I gotta believe the other disciples regretted this moment for the rest of their lives. Those other 11 disciples that played it safe, every time they looked at Peter thinking, stupid Peter, I could have walked on water. I was about to go, but he went first. He always goes first, stupid Peter. It's what God said to my pastor friend, you can stay where you are, but you'll miss the blessing I have for you.

And what would it have been like if they'd all 12 gotten out of the boat? How much more of Jesus' power would they have experienced together? And then over the years, when they got together for the disciple reunions, they could

have said, man, I'm sure they had them. They could have said, man, remember when we all got out of the boat together and we all walked on water together, that was a good day. Which is why we're doing these eight projects together. Because it strengthens our sense of being part of a community which we all need, especially in our lonely, divided world. To feel part of something, a community that you belong to, that's a good feeling.

Then at the end of the story, it says, And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. The storm did not stop before they got back in the boat, but afterwards. Which means that after sinking, with Jesus' help, Peter got back up and walked back to the boat, on the water. The point of this story is not that Peter sank. It's that he got back up and walked on the water again. It's not about how weak Peter was, it's about how strong Jesus is. And the only way we experience that is if we get out of the boat. As my friend John Ortberg puts it, if you want to walk on water, you gotta get out of the boat.

So, next Sunday is Commitment Sunday. So for one more week, continue this spiritual journey that we've been on that spells the word peace. Pray that we experience God moving powerfully through this. E, engage with God. Ask him, how do you want me to contribute to these eight projects? Next, attend next Sunday. Even if you don't give anything, it's going to be an inspiring service. Afterwards, we'll have a celebration for our 70th year as a church with some really cool dessert things and activities for kids and stuff like that.

And then C, commit what you believe God is asking you to commit. And the commitment card was on your seat as you came in. It's also on our website. You can do it online. And let me just kind of walk you through it. There are some boxes that you can check if you'd like to talk to someone about how to use your time or your influence. We're not going to give you a list of things to volunteer for because that's transactional. And this is about discipleship, which is relational. So we'll have conversations with you.

Also, if you're like, I'd like to tithe. I just don't know how I can. I don't know how I get there. I'm just not sure it's possible. You can check a box there that says, you'd like to talk to someone about that. And we've got coaches and we've got mentors who will pray with you and help you figure out how to do that and encourage you along the way. And then there's a section about the financial commitment. And for accounting purposes, it says 2026, but the intention is this is ongoing. So next year we'll fill out another card. And it doesn't mean you can start giving now. You don't have to wait till January. If that's helpful, you can start giving now.

Write down the number you feel God calling you to, even if it doesn't make sense. Get out of the boat and see what God does with it. And if you want to give a large gift over several years, just make a note about that, and then turn it in next Sunday. Our elders and our pastors, we've already done ours. We're leading the way. Leaders go first, so we've already done ours, and are looking forward to doing this all together with the rest of you. And then lastly, E, everyone is needed. So everyone, please fill out this card.

So these projects can happen because they'll change lives, but honestly, again, for you, for your sake. Jesus is trying to unleash us from all those things we cling to so tightly that then cling to us and become leashes, and he wants to unleash us for the adventure of his kingdom that he has for us. And we will never know that Jesus is real until we act like he's real. And then we discover that he's there, and our trust in him grows, which means our fears grow smaller.

I recently heard a leader of a network of house churches in India talking, and they train people in this network. They train people for three years, send them all over India to start house churches, and thousands of people are becoming followers of Jesus because of it. And one of the pastors was the first to come to Christ in his village, which provoked a group of people in his village to tie him to a tree, beat him, and spit on him until someone had compassion and cut him loose. And then he escaped. But then he went back to that same village and continued to talk about Jesus, and as a result, there are now three churches in that village.

And I know a story like that can sometimes feel remote, like, wow, that's far away, that's not really relevant to my life. But what I hear in that story is freedom. And of course, I don't want to be tied to a tree and beaten, but I'm not likely to be either. But the freedom and the courage that man had, he's not afraid of anything. He is seeing Jesus' power unleashed, changing lives through him. I want to be like that. But of course, he had to take some risks to experience that.

Well, at one point, this network got all of their pastors together for training, and they brought in an influential pastor from the US. He didn't say who it was. It wasn't me, that's all I know. And he said all of these Indian pastors, all they wanted to know from this US pastor, all of them wanted to know what is Christianity like in the United States. And as he began to describe Christianity in the US, these Indian pastors began to cry. Because we're not seeing Jesus' power and the kinds of miracles that they're seeing. But of course, most of us, including me, aren't taking the kinds of risks they're taking.



So now, every Friday, all of these pastors fast and pray for us, for God to awaken the vast capacity of the US Church, its financial capacity, its people capacity, its talents, its skills, its influence, that the Holy Spirit would be poured out on the US Church so that in the words of the prophet Joel, our sons and daughters will prophesy, our young men and women see visions, our old men and women dream dreams, that the Spirit of God will awaken this sleeping giant called the American Church. They're praying for us and fasting for us every Friday. I find that inspiring. And I want what those Indian pastors have, their courage, their freedom. I want to see the power of Jesus the way they are, changing villages and cities and entire countries. And I know you do too.

For 70 years, this church has not slept. We have been bringing Jesus' healing in this church, in our region, and around the world, because we know, and this story shows us, that Jesus isn't in the boat, he's out on the water. He's not in the safe place. He's not in the comfortable place. He's out on the water, healing, changing, making all things new. And if we want to experience him, we have to meet him where he is, which is out of that comfort zone.

And Bel Pres, I know you. I've been with you a long time. And I know your heart. And I know you want this, too. You want to be out there on the water with him, because as followers of Jesus, we believe in life after birth. And none of us want our tombstone to say, well, at least he didn't get hurt. At least she didn't sink. No. Jesus is out there on the water, and he is saying, take courage. It is I. Come on. There's an adventure to have. And you don't want to miss it.

Jesus, thank you that you set us free from all the things that we cling to, that then cling to us and bind us. Thank you that you set us free for a bigger adventure than we would ever dream for ourselves. And Lord, thank you that you work through us to bring your kingdom so that we know you better, see your power, are transformed by you. Jesus, that's what we want. That's what we're seeking.

So help us. Lord, help us. We want it, and yet we don't. We want it, and yet we hang on to our comfort. We want it, and yet we shrink back from the risk. Jesus, save us from ourselves. Because deep in our hearts, we long for that adventure you want to give us. So set us free for all the things you have in store for us, and we'll give you the glory. In your name, Amen.

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**Discussion Questions:**

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or community group.

**Opening Question:** Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

**Scripture Reflection Questions:** Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

**Sermon Reflection Questions:** Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- This story comes immediately after Jesus feeds 5,000 people with a few loaves and fish. How does the larger context of this story affect how we read it?
- Why did Jesus separate himself from the disciples in verse 22-23?
- What made Peter get out of the boat? What made him sink? How did he get out of it?
- What "boat" do you think Jesus' is calling you out of in your life?

**Closing Question and Application:** Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

**Closing group prayer:** Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Take the challenging parts of your conversation to Jesus. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.