

**Meadowbrook Congregational Church**  
**“Walking on Water”**  
**August 22, 2010**  
**Sam Shinozaki, Guest Preacher**

**Matthew 14: 22 - 33**

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

*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 toward 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?” When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”*

I am a retired research scientist at Ford Motor Company where I worked over forty years. So I am speaking to you as a layman in Christ. So please be patient with me this morning. I would like to start my sermon by introducing myself briefly. I was born in a Christian home in Japan. In fact, my father was a Christian minister who graduated from Crozier Theological Seminary in Chester near Philadelphia. So I am one of the PKs in this church. This may not be anything special in the USA, but in Japan it is extremely rare to be born in a Christian home. Even today the total number of Christians, including Protestants and Catholics, is about one half of one percent of the total population, that means, one out of two hundred. Thus, it is a special blessing from God to be born in a Christian home. My father was converted to Christianity by the guidance and prayer of two missionaries from the USA, and my mother was born in a Christian family. I grew up under a strong military government and in an anti-American and anti-Christian environment. A Christian was considered to be a traitor to the Emperor, the Divine Ruler of Japan. However, I was more inspired by these missionaries than by my militaristic teachers and some friends.

When US air raids had become more frequent and severe, our lives were threatened. The Japanese government ordered all children to get out of the large cities. My sister and I were sent to my aunt’s family in Kyushu Island, about 500 miles south west of Tokyo, in order to avoid the life threatening danger by air raids. At that time, my main concern was that I might not see my parents again on earth once we were separated. Before we left, my parents talked to us about baptism and eternal life based on John 3:16. We accepted Jesus as our Savior. At that time, we were strictly forbidden by the government to have any Sunday worship services or any other Christian meetings. So my parents invited a few close friends to our house and my father baptized us in April, 1944.

When I entered a senior high school after the war, I decided to study physics at a university in Japan and then go to the USA for graduate study. When I was a senior at Waseda University in Tokyo, I applied and was accepted by the University of Redlands, California and the University of California, Berkeley, for graduate study in solid state physics. At the suggestions of Rev. Bill Fridell, who was an American Baptist missionary sent to Waseda Hoshien Christian Center

where my father was a pastor, I decided to enter the University of Redlands, a private American Baptist affiliated university, to study English language and get acquainted with university life in the USA. Fortunately, I was granted a full scholarship at the University of Redlands and a scholarship from the College Women's Club in Tokyo, that provided me with a one way ticket from Japan to the USA on a cargo ship. After a long interview, the Bank of Japan allowed me to have \$30.00 for my expenses for the trip. There was a strict restriction against taking US dollars out of Japan at that time. Although I was concerned about the small amount of money that I could take with me, I was excited that my dream had finally come to reality.

It was a long 15 days trip on a cargo ship from Japan to Longview, Oregon. During the trip, we went through almost two days of severe storm. It was a really frightening experience, even though the captain assured us repeatedly that the ship was completely safe as long as the engine was in operation, so that he could maneuver the ship. I stayed in the bridge of the ship to experience the strong winds and high waves that pounded the ship very hard. I finally arrived at Longview, Oregon, after a long journey in August of 1956. I was so eager to get out of the ship and put my feet on the ground of the USA, that I was the first on the line to go through the Immigration and Custom Office. An officer told me, "Young man, you are in America and not in Japan. In this country, ladies go first." This was the first lesson that I learned in the USA.

When I came out of the building, the reality set in and I was frightened. I had to find a hotel and train station. I did not know how to find a taxi to find a hotel that I could afford with the money I had. My excitement turned into fear. At that moment, a lady approached me and asked me if I had a place to stay that night or anything else that she could help me. She told me that she was a member of a local church and this was one of their home mission projects to greet foreign students. I still remember that I was nearly in tears with great relief that I was provided with a place to stay. Here, I would like to say that my first experience in the USA was Christian Love. Since my childhood, I heard that the USA is a country of Christians. On that date, I experienced what the Christian Love meant to me and my faith in Christ was strengthened once again.

Since I experienced a severe storm for almost two days on the ship and Christian love on the first day in the USA, the Bible verses of Matthew 14: 25 - 32 that were read this morning, have become one of my favorite verses. So I chose these verses as a theme for my sermon this morning.

If you compare the four gospels on this subject, it is interesting to find that Matthew explains this event more in detail than the other Gospels, explaining intimate relationships between Jesus and his disciples. Matthew says: Immediately after the miracle when Jesus fed over five thousand men using the five loaves and the two fish, he told the disciples to get into a boat and to go ahead to the other side, while Jesus dismissed the crowds. Jesus went up the mountain by himself to pray. This was the second time that Jesus withdrew for prayer and renewal, by going up to a mountain and prayed to God by himself. At that time, the public crisis in Jesus' ministry was mounting and conflict was growing. Growing crowds searched his ministry and growing numbers of religious officials were seeking to entrap him. Peter did not mind and knew exactly how to get to their destination, as he and the other disciples were fishermen before they joined with Jesus, and were thus familiar with the lake.

In the mean time, Jesus prayed until late into the night (almost midnight). But by this time, the boat was battered by the waves, and was far from the land, for the wind was against them. It is interesting to note here that we often say if Jesus tells me to do something, the results will be guaranteed to have good results. But the disciples learned that obedience to Jesus' command is no guarantee of being spared from adversity.

Early in the morning around 3:00 AM, Jesus decided to walk on the water to approach his disciples who were trying to stay alive in the boat. According to the Gospel of Mark, Jesus intended to pass them by, and not to come to the boat to rescue his disciples under distress. In a way Jesus' action was totally unexpected. He was revealing his divine presence and power in an unexpected way and time at a distance from the boat. Only God can do such a thing. When the disciples saw the figure walking on the water, they were terrified, saying "It is a ghost!" (or an evil spirit) And they cried out in fear.

But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." One of the disciples, Peter, recognized his voice and God's presence and divine power. He wished to participate in this extraordinary event that he was looking at. Peter was a fisherman and knew how to deal with water and how to swim, but did not know how to walk on the water. I believe that he recognized that God was present even in the most unlikely place. He realized that this was an extraordinary opportunity for spiritual adventure and growth. That is why Peter did not just plunge into the water. But before he got out of the boat, he wanted to make sure that this figure was Jesus, and it was his master's wish that Peter would get out of the boat. I think that this is an excellent example of extreme discipleship between Jesus and Peter. Thus, he said, "If it is you, command me to come to you on the water." In other words, if this is his master's wish, Peter would obey whole-heartedly, even though this was a supernatural event that he could not comprehend under the incredibly severe conditions with high waves and strong winds in the darkness of the night. Jesus, his master, gave his simple and one word command, "Come," or he meant to say, "Come, as you are."

So now it is up to Peter to decide whether he would stay in the boat where professional seaman such as a ship captain and fisherman like Peter knew it to be safe and secure in the stormy condition, or to follow his belief in his master to go out of the boat and have a high adventure following Jesus' command. That means, he abandoned himself completely to the power of Jesus. Whenever Jesus calls someone to get out of the boat, he gives the power to walk on the water. He got out of the boat and suddenly an ordinary human being was walking on the water. Thus he established an extraordinary discipleship with Jesus, his Lord. Peter knew the joy and freedom of experiencing God's power after taking an enormous risk. He knew the power of God, but he experienced it by getting out of boat.

Here, I would like to ask "What is our boat?" I think that our boat is whatever represents safety and security to us apart from God himself. Our boat is whatever we are tempted to put our trust in, especially when life gets a little stormy. Our boat is whatever keeps us so comfortable that we do not want to give it up even if it is keeping us from joining Jesus on the waves. Our boat is whatever pulls us away from the high adventure of our discipleship with Jesus.

Peter came out of the boat, in order that he could walk on the water with Jesus. However, after a while, he was overtaken by the strong winds and high waves and lost his focus on Jesus, because he was a fisherman and knew what the high waves and strong winds could do to him in the water. He started to sink. I do not know whether Peter knew how to swim as a fisherman. But out of fear, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" He said, "Lord, my Master, save me!" Thus, this cry of Peter's shows how strong Peter's discipleship to Jesus was. His failure was not due to lack of his faith in Jesus. He just lost his focus on Jesus.

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him, and said to him "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" Did Peter fail? In a way he did. Was his faith not strong enough? His doubts were stronger? He took his eyes off where they should have been. Here, it is interesting to note that there were eleven bigger failures sitting in the boat (that is, the other disciples). Their

failures went unnoticed and unobserved. They failed quietly. Only Peter knew the shame of public failure. However, only Peter knew the glory of walking on the water with Jesus. He alone knew what it was to attempt to do what he was not capable of doing on his own. Only Peter will never forget the experience of walking on the water with Jesus for the rest of his life. Only Peter knew the glory of being lifted up personally by Jesus. Failure is not an event, but rather a judgment about an event. It is a way we think about outcome.

When I worked as a research scientist at Ford Research Laboratory, I carried out hundreds of experiments to produce the advanced materials for automobile applications, many without satisfactory results. I never considered these experiments as failure, but one step closer to success by analyzing the sources of failure in detail. Failure often gives you the best solution for your attempt. The worst failure is to give it up.

Jesus knew exactly what the cause of Peter's failure was. "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When I read this story over and over again, I found it extremely interesting how Jesus dealt with Peter after Peter was controlled by fear due to the strong winds and high waves and lost his focus on Jesus. Jesus made these comments to Peter privately when they were alone on the water and Peter was safe in his hands. I believe that Peter understood his dependence on faith much more deeply than he would have if he had never left the boat. It was his willingness to risk failure that helped him to grow as a result. Yes, if you find some solutions for your failure, you will gain growth and hope for the future. The Bible says it is only after these conversations between Jesus and Peter that they got back into the boat. Because Peter did this in the stormy night, both Peter and the rest of the disciples came to a deeper understanding of their Master than ever before. The Bible says: "And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'"

God honors our faith and trust, no matter how tentative we are. When we reach out, Jesus reaches back. When Jesus asked Peter near the end of his ministry, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." This is what Peter and the rest of the disciples learned and reconfirmed through this extraordinary event. Indeed, the Bible teaches us that you have got to get out of the boat, if you want to walk on the water.