

Step Up, Step Out, Step On **Proper 14, Year A – Matthew 15:21-28**

preached by Kyle Martindale, seminarian, at St. Paul's, Henderson, August 10, 2014

Lord, give me a heart to know your love, ears to hear your whispers, eyes to see your glory, and lips to speak only your truth. AMEN

Good Morning!

I'm Kyle, and I believe y'all have met my dad. When I decided to come up for this visit, I called him to ask if I could preach here this Sunday, because I thought that would be a neat experience. Of course, as these things often go with me, I didn't look at the scripture for today until after I had committed to preaching. I don't know if that is some flaw, or that I just figure; since I'll soon have to write a sermon every week, I might as well commit headlong and work through the scripture after. This is one of those times when I think I got the good end of that deal. Today's Gospel comes on the heels of one miracle, and immediately brings another. We have just heard the story of the feeding of the five thousand, then when Jesus is done dismissing the crowd, he decides to walk on water to get to the boat that holds his disciples.

Jesus walking on the water, though, doesn't seem to be the central theme of this story to me. Instead, this story focuses around the exchange between Jesus and headstrong Peter. As often as Peter does this throughout the Gospel narratives, what he does here can really teach us something. What this story can tell us about our individual walks through Christianity is that we need to Step Up, to Step Out, and to Step On. Peter seems to excel at the first two of these, so we'll begin there. Especially since Peter reflects a lot of characteristics that many of us have still.

This concept actually reminds me a little of the summer that I have had this year. I found out in mid-April that my summer would not include going home as I had planned. I am required to complete one unit of Clinical Pastoral Education, or CPE, during my time at seminary. I had misunderstood my directions and thought I could do this program revolved around hospital chaplaincy next year. Well, I found out differently. I interviewed a few places and got in, and settled on going to the small town of Rutherfordton, NC. It seemed like the best fit, so I went. But I didn't always have a great attitude about it, and sometimes needed a hand from a colleague or supervisor to keep going.

You see, this "stepping up" that Peter does so well is just the first step in a long process. It's the raw willingness to do something that is out of the ordinary; something that might not work out. At face value, this can be something that could work out, or can turn for the worse, so it's a risk.

Today, Peter's "stepping up" moment takes place when he calls out to Jesus and says, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." Now, for one, Peter clearly has no problem testing Jesus, and Jesus allows for it in this case, calling Peter forward.

This is when we arrive at the next stage in Peter's story today: Stepping Out. Or, perhaps more aptly, stepping out on faith. Peter, again, really has no problem at all with this part of the process. I imagine Peter got pretty excited when Jesus actually looked at him and said, "Come." After all, that's what he was hoping for. He saw Jesus walking on the water and wanted to give it a good try. Here, Peter had enough faith to believe that if Jesus could walk on water, and would command Peter to join him, Peter would be capable of doing so. This is a pretty good example of stepping out on faith if you ask me. He gets out of the boat, and walks to Jesus.

And then we get to the matter of stepping on. This seems to be a bit of a problem for the disciple Peter, here. He can stand up and proclaim his desire to walk in the way of the Lord, he can even step out easily enough when given permission, but then what? Where's his follow through? Peter wants so badly to follow Christ, but today learns that this does not mean that there will not be fear or danger involved. Peter wants everything to be smooth for him in his decision to step out onto the sea with Jesus. So, when the wind blows, he got scared. You see, it's the follow through that gives Peter a bit of trouble this morning. And it's that same follow through that sometimes gave me some problems this summer.

Just as Peter showed great courage to Step Up and Step Out, we also often show this courage in our daily lives in the world. For me, this year, it was taking the risk of living in the middle of nowhere; an unknown middle of nowhere unlike Nebraska; for two and a half months, and being willing to enter into the program there at the hospital. The problem for me, though, was how to react when things didn't happen just the way I was expecting. How to react when an unforeseen situation arose.

This is something that will come up for all of us during the course of our journeys to live the best lives we can. We can desire to be called by the Lord, and we can even respond to that call willingly enough. The story of Peter today helps us to understand that these first two steps alone are not enough to truly follow the way of Christ. In order to do that, we absolutely need to have that third piece as well. We need to be able to Step Up and Step Out, yes. But we must also be able to step on in order to truly make our way on that path.

The ever-important follow through is something that Jesus points out to Peter in this story, scolding him for his doubt and fear. Despite this scolding, Jesus also teaches us another lesson here, that is pretty good to hear. He teaches us that when; no, not if; WHEN we get scared or lose a little bit of faith, we are not alone. As Jesus reaches out his hand to save his disciple Peter from the stormy waters, so too does he reach out for us in our times of need, in our times of doubt, in our times of fear.

To me, this lesson is just as important as the lesson to learn to better follow through with our answering of God's call to us. It is just as important even as the willingness to Step up and offer ourselves to the Lord, just as important as the willingness to step out on our faith, and just as important as our capacity to step on in times of trouble. For this is a lesson that teaches us about the care that Christ bears for each one of us.

So, as you go from this place today and enter into the service of Christ to the rest of the world, remember all of the lessons that can be learned from the Gospel story. Remember more than just the part when Jesus walked on the water and how cool that makes him. Yes, Jesus is pretty outstanding, but a teacher as well. So learn from him. Go out into the world, remembering to Step Up, to Step Out, to Step On, and Know that You are Not Alone. There is a helping hand, ready to help you when your own strength is not enough.