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WATER WINGS Michael B. Beough  
Matthew 14:22-33 August 3, 2008  
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We are talking about "Locker LifeSavers." Things our kids can put in their lockers or book bags and keep in their hearts to help them stay strong, safe, and successful in the crowded hallways of life.

In previous sermons, we talked about a birthright that guarantees they are a child of God with the right to eternal life and the right to a prosperity that changes the world. We said, "Don't let anyone take that from you."

We talked about a party invitation to the greatest party ever given where everyone belongs and experiences the Father's love. This party is for those who don't seem to deserve it and for those who think they are the only ones who do deserve it.

**So what else could our kids possibly need in their lockers?**  
*Water wings, of course.* Otherwise they will sink when the going gets tough.

Now the story of Peter walking on water in Matthew 14:22-33 is a story about the need for water wings. It begins with the disciples of Jesus in a boat. They are trying to row their boat from the east shore of the Sea of Galilee to the northwest shore to where Jesus has sent them. Unfortunately, the wind and the waves are roaring from west to east. In the Bible, the wind and the waves represent chaos. It is chaos trying to keep the disciples from completing their journey and fulfilling God's plan for their lives. They are rowing against chaos. Their muscles ache as they try to keep the bow of the boat and their lives headed in the right direction.

Has anyone ever been in a boat in a storm like that? Have you ever felt that way about your life? Like the whole world is going against you? Your mental muscles start aching. Your spiritual muscles start to fail. You know where you are trying to go but just when you think you are headed in the right direction, a big wave shoves your bow around. Your boat suddenly rocks. You feel like it is going over as the waters of chaos start filling the boat. You are ankle deep in it. Then knee deep. Pressures from your parents, or your coach. Deadlines. A paper due. A test tomorrow. Girl trouble. Boy trouble. Grades. Hormones raging or just quietly changing everything about you. Self-doubt. You can't think straight. And you start losing the way. What will you do? What can you do?

Maybe you try to row harder, but that only exhausts you more. Maybe you give up. Maybe you try to ignore the chaos with drugs and alcohol or outrageous behavior. Or maybe you do what Peter did. You get out of the boat to see if you can just walk over it.

Now wouldn't that be dandy? Peter sinks when he takes his eyes off Jesus, but suppose for a moment that Peter hadn't sunk in the waves. What if he had been able to walk on water? Just think of the fun he could have had. He could have run to the top of a tall wave, and slid down the other side just for the fun of it. He could have walked across puddles of water without getting his feet wet. He could have gone fishing right in the middle of the lake without having to bother with a boat. Okay, that would be a little weird.

But you know what else I think would have happened? He might have started thinking that he was – God. Can you imagine living with someone who could walk on water, who never got touched by the chaos, who never got dumped on by the storms of life? It is bad enough living with someone who thinks he or she walks on water. Or going to school with someone like that. And you can spot those people at school. They are so high up on the food chain that they are simply untouchable. Always in control. Always on top of things. Hello, handsome, don't you never die! You know who they are, don't you? They may not see themselves that way, but we do. Wouldn't it be fantastic if we could walk on water like them?

Guess what? This story is not about being able to walk on water if we just keep our eyes on Jesus. I think Jesus was teaching Peter a lesson.

Here's the deal. You can't walk on water. No one can, but Jesus. The reality is that we all start to sink. Life is tough. None of us can stand up to the wind and waves. None of us can get to where God wants us to go on our own. Peter had to learn that lesson, and I'll tell you why. Because Jesus was preparing Peter and the others to be leaders of the church that would transform the world.

### **Jesus does two things to help Peter learn his lesson.**

1. Jesus throws him some water wings. Well, not really, but sort of. Jesus really just reaches out to Peter and saves him. What I want our kids to know is that Jesus will always reach out to them when they start to sink. You see, Peter actually doubted that it was really Jesus out there standing on the waves going up and down, up and down like a hobby horse on a carousel. "If it really is you, Lord . . . ." That's why Jesus said, "O, you of little faith." Peter simply did not believe Jesus was with them. He wanted some kind of miraculous proof. Well, he got it, but not like he thought he would. Jesus said, "Here. Put on these water wings. Take my hand." He proved he is always with us when he reached out to the sinking, sputtering Peter.

Oh, sure, you can swim without water wings because you are a big boy now. But try swimming a mile or two or three or a lifetime without them, and unless you are, well, God, you will sink without them.

2. The other thing Jesus does is to put Peter back in the boat. I wonder what that looked like? Did Jesus put him over his shoulder in a dead man's hold, or did he grab Peter's collar and drag him through the water?

However he did it, Jesus put Peter back in the boat with his friends, with the little church that was on its way across the lake through the seas of chaos to accomplish a mission that no one thought possible.

You know, it always amazes me when I see whole families getting out of the boat and trying to walk on water by themselves. I have seen it many times. Families start having problems at home. The problems may be with their teenagers. Surprise, surprise! Instead of committing themselves to growing as disciples of Jesus, the one thing that can turn their lives around, they abandon the boat that can get them to where they want to go. The teenagers want to get out of the boat, and the parents say, okay, maybe that will make life easier. They are tired of fighting it. And they let their kids try walking on water, and it is not a pretty sight. Look, I don't want to make this sound easy. I have never found a magic formula that will make all teenagers perfect little angels. *But I do know that if we stay in the boat and go with Jesus, we have a lot better chance of reaching the other side.*

Jesus put Peter back in the boat. And notice what happens. The wind and waves calm down AFTER Peter gets back in the boat. Lesson learned.

**I don't want our kids to forget that they cannot make it on their own.** I want them to know as they navigate the crowded hallways of life that they have a boat and friends who will row with them to get them to wherever God wants them to go. And this is so important because God has a purpose for every one of our kids. A mission. God has plans for them to be the next generation that transforms the world through their relationship with Jesus Christ. God has an exciting future for them filled with all kinds of winds and waves that will beat against them and try to turn them back and into which they will sink from time to time. It is the challenge of life.

But I am confident they will not turn back. They will not give up. They will slip on their water wings of faith and get back in the boat and just keep going to become the generation that transforms the world because they know that Jesus is with them.

And if anyone here does not know this Jesus, I encourage you to take his hand this morning. He has given his life for you. He has a purpose for you. He reaches out to you a love that never quits so that you might live a life that never fails.