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UNLOCKING POTENTIAL: THE LIFE OF PETER - DEVELOP Michael B. Beough
Matthew 14:22-33 February 3, 2008
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Have you ever walked on water? Even for a moment? I did my first few years in Southlake. At least I felt like I was walking on water. Like Peter stepping out of the boat, I stepped out of my comfort zone in 1998 to start this new church. Never thought of myself as a new church organizer. Never done that before.

But here I was, invited by a committee of Presbyterians, and almost from the beginning God amazed me. This congregation started growing. We met in schools. And people kept coming. We built this building, and had great plans for the future. We were the darlings of our Presbytery and a model of a successful new church development.

Don't get me wrong! I can honestly say that I never believed it was because of me. I was truly amazed by the awesome God we worship.

Then not long after we moved into this building, the seas got stormy and I grew afraid. Like Peter, I began to sink. Didn't realize it at first. Months went by and then a year and another. Sleepless nights. Bouts of anger. Finally, didn't even know if I should stay here. I asked friends what they thought I should do. All of them told me to listen to God. I tried, but wounded pride got hold of me. I kept sinking.

Then in January 2006, Jesus put out his hand and caught me. I really cannot explain it any other way. It wasn't anything I did. It wasn't because I started praying harder. But a darkness in my soul lifted.

Here is the strange thing. I didn't even realize there was a darkness until it lifted. I thought the darkness was out there. I now actually call it a depression that I was going through. Others who know me called it the same thing. Some of you noticed a change in me and commented on it.

Why am I telling you all of this? Because **two things came out of my dark night of the soul.**

I realized in the clear light of God's grace that this congregation and each one of us in it have such great potential as yet untapped. God has so much more He wants to do through us. God has put us here for a reason. God wants us to get out of the boat and start walking on the water out to where people are hurting and lost.

And, secondly, I have come to realize that God's way of unlocking our potential is to keep us growing as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Remember my 5 D's of Discipleship? **I want you to memorize my little diagram.** This little diagram represents for me the five essential elements of growing disciples – Deciding to follow Jesus, Discovering who Jesus is and what he came to do, Discerning my gifts and call from God, Developing my gifts for effective ministry and life, and Deploying in mission and service to make a difference in the world.

Now please don't see these five elements as levels of achievement, as if taking courses in each of these five areas gives you a discipleship degree. Disciples are engaged in all five all the time, or should be if they hope to realize their potential for becoming life-breathing agents of the Kingdom of God on earth.

But here is where I want to focus this morning, on the 4th D, Develop. This is the cutting edge of my growth as a disciple. If someone were to ask me where I am working hardest to grow, I would say it is in the development of my gifts and skills as a leader. I've got a vision for my life and for this congregation. I have never had problems with having a vision. Sometimes my visions are way out there and others have to reel me back in. I have a vision. Now I need provision. I need to retool, to grow.

This is what Jesus was working on when he invited Peter to step out of the boat. Jesus planned to build the church on Peter and give him the keys of the kingdom, and later in Matthew's gospel tells him so. After his resurrection, Jesus tells Peter to "feed my sheep", "tend my lambs." Build my church. Care for my people. Jesus knew Peter was going to be the first leader of the church. But first Peter needed development as a leader. So Jesus gave him this one day seminar. Here are some things we learn from Peter's experience on the lake that day.

Leaders go first even when it seems impossible.

I admire Peter because he wanted to go first. At the moment of stepping out of the boat, he truly believed he could walk on water. Of course, we know that pride goeth before the fall, and Peter proved the truth of that! But what courage he displayed and irrationality! What a model of discipleship! Disciples of Jesus go first. To meet the need of the world, they go first. To reach the hurting and the lost, they go first. They step out to do the impossible. They know that conventional wisdom is the devil's mind game. Conventional wisdom says, "You can't walk on water!" "Don't go there!" But disciples intentionally work at developing their capacity for courage and irrationality in order to become life-breathing agents of the Kingdom of God. They know the facts. They know that water cannot support the walk. But disciples don't go forth with facts only. They go with faith.

Every one of us knows why we can't do something that God has laid on our hearts to do. We know the facts. We can read the bottom line. But when God gives you a mission, when you discern God's calling in your life,

when you begin to feel the tug of a holy discontent, you can be sure that God will provide the way. Disciples that are changing the world are the ones who have developed the skill of getting out of the boat with nothing but faith for their water-wings.

Another thing we learn is that leaders must learn to keep their eyes on Jesus alone.

Poor Peter! "When he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and he began to sink."

Can anyone else relate to that? Anyone who steps out of the boat will soon experience strong winds. Disciples who want to be life-breathing agents for God's Kingdom have to develop the capacity and skills to stay focused on Jesus. This is another growing edge of my discipleship. I am learning, even at my age, more and more what this means. It means I have to remember it is all about God's mission for us. It is never about what appeals to me or what I am comfortable with in my service to God. It is never about trying to keep everyone else happy. I can tell you that this was the center of the dark night of my soul. I took my eyes off Jesus and fear took his place. Fear kills many a potential for becoming life-breathing agents for the Kingdom of God.

We may decide to follow Jesus. We may discover what he came to do and what he wants from us. We may even discern our gifts and calling. But until we are ready to tackle the tough challenge of keeping our eyes on him alone and overcoming our fear, there will be very little to write home about. We will sink into the stormy seas of this tempestuous life we live. Or worse, we will drown our potential and someone whose life we could have touched, whose heart we could have opened to all their potential, goes wanting.

We also learn that Jesus is always there when we begin to sink.

This may have been the most important lesson for Peter.

As Jesus watches Peter begin to sink, the question that comes to his mind is, "Will Peter start trying to dogpaddle back to the boat, or will he reach out to grab my hand?" What a great leadership model! Peter reaches out as he is sinking, and takes the hand of Jesus. He accepts help.

Peter walked on water, but that wasn't what his life was all about. He never did it again. But when Jesus saved him from drowning, it must have given him a vision that sustained and encouraged him the rest of his life.

- hen he stepped out on the sea of uncertainty and began proclaiming a savior of the world, he knew Jesus was with him.

- When he ended up in prison, he knew Jesus was there with his hand out to him. W
- When God sent Peter into a new mission of taking the gospel to the Gentiles, he knew Jesus would be beside him. W
- If legend is true, when the Romans hung him on a cross upside down because of what he was accomplishing in the name of Jesus Christ, he knew that his Savior was at hand. I

Effective, life-breathing agents of God's kingdom don't succeed because they try to be superhuman. They succeed because they go to the hurting and the lost knowing Jesus is there. They develop their capacity for trust.

And, Folks, there is just no other way to do it. Trust Him, our Savior. I believe Jesus wants us to get out of the boat. I believe he wants us to start walking on water. I believe he is sending us as a congregation on a new journey of ministry to reach the hurting and the lost.

Over the past year and more, we have concluded that we want to make a greater impact through Jesus Christ who changes lives and communities. We really do want others to experience the Peace, Purpose, and Promise of God as we have experienced it through Jesus Christ. We are tired of the sameness of life. We are fed up with the suffering in the world. We want a better future for our children. God has put a "holy discontent" in our hearts. God has something He wants to change through us. We believe that we have more potential just waiting to flow from our hearts like the waterfall of God's peace.

God is working on us to unlock our potential for making a difference in the name of Jesus Christ. Ask God to show you where the growing edge of your discipleship is today. And if you have not started the journey, why not today?