

Regardless, having finally recognized Jesus, Peter in his characteristically bold and impetuous way said: “*Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water*” (v. 28). As in the story I just told you about the Rev. Michael Breen, Peter in faith and obedience, was willing to step out to do that which he had never done before. If when Rev. Breen stepped out into the streets of London with a cross over his shoulder, he heard someone proclaim, “It’s the vicar. He’s gone mad.” And, if when the disciples saw Jesus walking upon the water, they thought Him to be some kind of spook, what then must the disciples have thought when Peter stepped onto the churning sea? Surely, they must have thought he had gone quite batty. Surely, they must have thought that Peter, the rock, would do just that — sink like one.

Yet, as scripture tells us Peter did not at first sink. No, just like Jesus he was actually walking on the water. As one commentator labeled it in Latin, *imitatio Christi*, imitating Christ. But, how was it possible for Peter to do this? Was there some kind of tractor beam as in a sci-fi movie holding Peter in place? Or, do you remember the movie, *Being There* (1979), starring Peter Sellers in which he played the child-like Chance, a gardener mistaken for an economic guru. Raised on TV, the world and all that was in it were some sort of two-dimensional reality for him. If he saw something in the real world that threatened him or that he did not like, he thought he could make it go away simply by changing the channel with the remote control. In other words, all that he saw whether on television or in the real world were equally images upon a TV screen.

We may guffaw at the ridiculous absurdity of the character played by Sellers. But, at the end of the movie something unbelievable happens, making one question who is really absurd; the character played by Sellers or the rest of humanity. At the movie’s end Sellers approaches a lake. He walks to the water’s edge and then wonder of wonders, he walks straight out across the water as if it were solid ground. No, he doesn’t sink. Seemingly, his two-dimensional view of the world won’t allow the third dimension of depth to plunge him splashing into the lake.

Sometimes the faith to which Jesus calls us may appear to those of the world as if we Christians are of less than sound mind — child-like, like the character played by Sellers. Isn’t it interesting that that is exactly what Jesus requires in Mark 10:15: “. . . *whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.*”

You see, Jesus not only has the power to walk on the sea but also the ability to share his power and authority with others, wherein Peter was also able to walk upon the water (*imitatio Christi*). Such might reminds us of the “Star Wars” movies where Yoda levitated Luke Skywalker’s spacecraft out of a swamp or where Luke levitated C-3PO. The crucial lesson for Jesus’ disciples and for us, however, harkens back to the Book of Job 38:16 where God asked Job, “*Have you come into the springs of the sea or walked in the recesses of the deep?*” It follows that if Jesus can walk on the sea and share that power, then Jesus is God.

So, at first Peter was successfully walking upon the water when, as v. 30 tells us, “. . . *he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!”*” I like how John Chrysostom viewed this, and I paraphrase, “The sea [was turbulent], but [his] fear was caused by the wind. The sea was the greater threat, the wind the less. Such is human nature that we so often feel exposed to the lesser danger but experience it as the greater.” Peter, suddenly perceiving the strength of the wind, begins to waver: his faith has been wrecked by the force of the storm. This in turn prevented him from participating in Jesus’ divine power and so Peter, the rock, sinks like one.

Now, I suspect most of us can identify with Peter here. Our relationship with the Lord seems strong. He is blessing us. We are trusting Him. We feel his presence and care for us. Life seems to be going well. And then bam, out of nowhere this thing comes hurling at us like some kind of rocket

propelled grenade in Iraq. Our health, our finances, our families are threatened. Who is this terrorist that has assaulted our sense of well-being? We had been comfortably walking with the Lord, not across the water, but certainly walking with Him, when out-of-the-clear blue sky this strong wind blows up threatening to sink our lives. As we, along with our hope and trust in the Lord, begin to sink into fear and despair, we like Peter cry out, “Lord, save me!” Save me before I drown. You’ve been there haven’t you? You know what I mean. It’s a bad place to be. Is it not? And, my guess is that some of you are underwater even now as I speak. Sound doesn’t travel so well through water, so, you may be experiencing difficulty hearing what I have to say. Can you like Peter say, Lord save me? Let’s try it right now. Say with me, Lord, save me.

John Stott, the English theologian, notes that: “Peter, the prince of the apostles, shows the way of overcoming failure for others to follow. He did not wait until he was drowning. As soon as he felt himself sinking he called out to the Lord. And at once Jesus reached out his hand to him and caught him.”

So, in saving Peter from drowning, does Jesus cradle Peter in his arms like some kind of enfant? Does He drag Peter behind him, his head just above the surging water? Maybe He throws Peter over his shoulder like an over-sized backpack. If you think about it, none of these suggestions is likely. When Jesus took hold of Peter’s hand, he was once again able to walk on the water. And the truth is, that is what Peter had been doing from the first. He had been able to walk on the water by holding onto the invisible hand of Jesus. Fear and the natural reflex it causes, which is to withdraw and retreat, had caused Peter to let go of Jesus’ invisible hand. You know the feeling when you are threatened. Self-survival becomes your focus and not the Lord.

Yet, Jesus was there to save Peter despite his inadequate faith. As the biblical scholar, Heil writes, “Jesus does not restore a faith Peter once had; Peter never knew or believed that Jesus could save him from sinking in the waters. By rescuing Peter Jesus calls him to a greater faith— to a faith in the power of Jesus to save his people.”

How can you know Jesus saves unless you have experienced Him saving you, whether that be from sin or anything else? Jesus is not some theoretical saviour, but the saviour in fact.

I don’t need to tell you the importance of what I have just said to you, do I? Whatever threatens to sink our lives, if our faith wavers in those circumstances, even though we may look at it as a shortcoming, the truth is that our failings of faith are really opportunities — opportunities for an even greater faith in the Lord and in turn a greater witness of his saving power. Yes, Peter had little faith, but he could not give what he did not have. He could not exercise a faith that he did not have, no more than we give away \$100 if we don’t have it. Still, though, Jesus said Peter had little faith, how many of us would even consider the possibility that with Jesus’ bidding we could walk on water. If Peter’s faith is little, then ours must be very, very tiny.

To use an analogy, the walk of faith can be a little like learning to ride a bicycle, drive a car, do mathematics or anything else. It is a process. When we accept Jesus as our Lord and Saviour we don’t just wake-up the next morning with a full blown faith. It takes persistence and determination and even those things we cannot necessarily claim as our own.

What if we had been there and seen Peter do what he did? Would we have said, Gee, Peter, you really messed up? I don’t think so. I think we would have been impressed with Peter’s courage and willingness to risk walking on the water in the first place. If you have ever watched the TV program “Fear Factor,” you will have seen individuals challenged to accomplish all kinds of feats that involve tremendous height, speed, and agility. Remember Evil Knievel and his insane motorcycle jumps over rows and rows of cars. Well, I think any feat attempted that is beyond the usual human capacity for courage is admired even if the accomplishment of the feat is not successful. You have to

give Peter that much credit, but, obviously Jesus expected more. But, then again, Jesus was talking about something other than courage. Wasn't He? He was talking about faith — faith in that which cannot be seen. Peter knew there was no way he could walk on water. He was a fisherman. Boats float but people do not. Yet, Peter at Jesus' command, obediently walked upon the water.

So, too, did Rev. Breen, of whom I spoke earlier, obediently walk out onto the streets of London. After he had fired his single gospel bullet, declaring that: "Jesus said, I am the light of the world," which he said hit no one, he then proceeded by himself to walk around the block carrying the cross. The next day Breen's youth worker joined him. Before long Breen's staff and others accompanied him, growing to a group of twelve. For nine months, during the noon hour of every week-day, this group would walk with Breen as he carried the cross. Breen said, you would not believe what happened during those months. People came to faith in the Lord right there on the street. People were miraculously healed right there on the street. Church attendance was up.

Reflecting on this experience, Breen said, his obedience to literally carrying the cross, something he did not want to do (It required a certain amount of risk to his ego. He was a proper English clergyman.) amounted to a breakthrough for the Kingdom of God. Perhaps, the highlight to that breakthrough occurred one night around 11:00 o'clock.

Breen said he felt the Lord telling him to do a prayer walk around the neighborhood, while carrying the cross. It was not a safe neighborhood. There had been a car-bombing when he and his wife first moved there. Regardless, wearing his collar and carrying the cross, he proceeded to walk the neighborhood when he heard something behind him. Turning, he discovered a police car. The officer, the Bobbie, came over to him and said, "Good evening, sir. Might ask what you are doing? "Praying," Breen answered. Then, like some ridiculous British comedy, the officer said, "And, what is that object you are carrying?" "A cross," said Breen. "Yes, it is," said the officer. "Well, you be careful with that." And, the officer drove away.

The next morning members of Breen's parish went knocking on neighborhood doors to see if anyone needed assistance or prayers. The whole business with Breen carrying the cross had stirred a real spirit of evangelism within his parish. One member knocked on the door of an old man and was invited in. The old man said, "I am a Jew," showing the tattoo of a Nazi concentration camp. "Last night I was praying to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that He show me the messiah when I felt moved to look out the window where I saw this man carrying a cross." Looking at the parish member the old Jewish fellow then said, "Jesus is the messiah. Isn't He." And, so the old man became a completed Jew, joining the Lord not too long after that.

Further reflecting upon his experience of carrying the cross, Breen observed, "When you hear the Lord call you and you are obedient, then there is no telling what He will do with that." We at St. Bart's have been called on August 13, to walk out in faith into some strange waters and lift high the cross. If we along with the Holy Spirit's help are obedient to this call, then there is no telling what God will do with that. Through our evangelistic outreach event, *Rocks, Rods and Relationships*, we will have the privilege to demonstrate God's love and power through hospitality, fellowship, music, fun, a car show and a healing Eucharist.

As Peter's struggling faithfulness to walk on water has blessed many generations in its telling, as the Rev. Michael Breen's faithfulness in carrying the cross afforded salvation and healing to his neighbors, so too are we presented with the possibility of a legacy that will bless many in the name of Jesus on August 13. I ask you please to continue to pray for this event, but even more importantly, bring your non-Christian friends. As with the old Jewish fellow, one never knows when one's time will be up. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.