

Stepping into the Stormy Waters
Into the Unknown Week 1: Matt 14:22-33
May 17, 2020

Welcome/intro/vision

Great week to join us if you're new we're starting a brand new series of messages called "Into the Unknown"

If you've got kids, you likely know that this **was Elsa's big song** in **Frozen Two**
We thought about bringing in Elsa to sing the song for us but she was booked

But as we round into mid-May and summer is straight ahead, uncertainty is the word, isn't it?
Uncertainty about the Coronavirus, uncertainty about what will happen when the economy opens up and we start mixing up with crowds again
Parents are uncertain about what to do with the kids this summer as camps are closed but many of us still need to work
uncertainty about the economy and jobs
uncertainty about retirement accounts and vacation plans
uncertainty about a second wave later this fall

If you're the kind of person who craves security and stability, this is a nightmare!
Because **Uncertainty is not a blank slate but a fog machine** that inhibits our ability to see anything ahead of us

And that drives some of us CRAZY—especially those of us who love a good plan and who love it when a good plan comes together! And I might be one of those types of people!
If this was a recovery group, I might open up this morning by saying, "Hi, my name is Alex, and I like a good plan—or even just a half-way decent plan!"
And I had big plans for myself, for our kids, and all that's been blown up and we're t-minus 4-weeks until summer starts and we don't really know what the summer holds

In just about every conversation I've had with people over the past couple of weeks, uncertainty is shaping and affecting them in some way, shape or form

And so the question for all of us is how do we live in light of all the uncertainty? Is there a good way, a better way forward as we plunge into the unknown?

If you're new to the Bible or new to faith we're so glad you're here
throughout the Bible there are a few cardinal virtues that are lifted up and celebrated as organizing principles or ways to act in the world
like in ancient times when people navigated the seas using the stars to make their way through unknown seas

Today, I'm going to name a couple of these stars for us, two virtues that can guide our steps in the midst of uncertainty

And what you see throughout history is that when people act in line with these virtues beauty happens, order is created out of chaos, creativity happens, clarity and certainty happen even when following these virtues leads them into risk and danger

Our hope is that over the course of this 4-week series we might all be equipped to step boldly into the unknown of summer 2020, no matter what it might hold

Today we're going to get started by looking at an account of Jesus's life in Matthew 14 new to the Bible, so glad you're here, 4 biographies of Jesus: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, written by four guys, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John--same story, different perspectives

As we pick up in Matthew chapter 14 it's been a busy day

Jesus has just gotten word that his cousin, John the Baptist, was beheaded—that's a bad day!

But as he was retreating to grieve and process this information a crowd followed him and instead of retreating Jesus ends up teaching them for a good long while

And at the end of the teaching session, Jesus proceeds to do one of his most famous miracles, the feeding of 5,000 people with just five loaves and two fish—and that's a pretty good day

And after he's done with that miracle, Jesus wants to clear everyone out to get that down time with God that he wanted at the start of the day

And this is what Jesus is doing as we pick up the story in Matthew 14:22

22 Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. 23 After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, 24 and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

Okay, so **here's a picture** of where all this took place: you've got the mountains up here, the sea of Galilee here

Jesus sends the disciples away to get that quiet he's been looking for, like some of you parents here in week 9 of quarantine!

But the wind is against the boat and it's a little chaotic out there, let's see what happens next

25 Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. 26 When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

A number of years ago I learned about a disorder that affects about 2% of the population called **Prosopagnosia** also called (**face blindness**), is a **disorder of face perception where the ability to recognize faces is impaired**

For some people, this is so severe that they can't even recognize a parent or a spouse, some can't even recognize their OWN face!

Even Brad Pitt has mentioned that he has this condition even though you wouldn't know it based on how much he seems to appreciate his own face

Can you imagine being married to someone for 30, 40, 50 years and still not be able to pick out their faces from a crowd

Or having a kid with this disorder and know that if you get separated in a crowd their ability to find you again will be significantly impaired because they can't recognize your face?

The Scriptures say that when it comes to our relationship with God, we've all got facial blindness

And our ability to recognize God's face, God's fingerprints, God's movement in our lives is impaired for all of us by sin

The disciples in the boat are so caught up in the storm and waves and they're so surprised to see a person walking on the water

that when Jesus approaches, they don't recognize him, they think he's a ghost

And one principle that we can derive from their experience is this: **when life gets chaotic, Jesus [God in the flesh!] could come to meet us and we might not recognize him—in fact, we might even perceive him as a threat.**

And so this morning, before we go any further, I want to invite you to do a quick scan over your past couple of weeks

Was there a moment or two these past couple of weeks where Jesus MIGHT have come to meet you, might have put out a bid for connection with you

and you blew right past it or even perceived it as a threat rather than an opportunity for blessing? You were too busy, things were too chaotic, you were too flooded to be aware it was God coming towards you?

One of the ways that people with facial blindness compensate for their inability to recognize faces is they pay special attention to other things: voices, to habits of movement--they learn to recognize them not by face but by the things that are characteristic of that particular person

Jesus has characteristic ways that he works in our lives. And even if we struggle to see his face directly, especially in the midst of the fog of uncertainty

we can begin to learn to recognize his voice, recognize his movements, and see that it is the Lord

If you're looking for one way to engage spiritually as we're heading into the fog of uncertainty, I'd encourage you to pray and ask God to help you to get to know the voice and the signature movements of Jesus

And one way to do that is to read through the biographies of Jesus and begin to get accustomed to his voice, how he moves, how he works, what kinds of things he cares about

The disciples are up against a rough night at sea, things are chaotic, and they don't recognize Jesus as he approaches, they're freaked out and scared and cry out that he's a ghost, here's what happens next:

²⁷ But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

²⁸ "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

²⁹ "Come," he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

At the outset I proposed that there a couple of cardinal virtues throughout the Scriptures that people of faith have used to navigate in the midst of the fog that are proven and tested over two thousand years of Christ-followers

And here, Jesus gives us one of the two that we're going to talk about today

And that is **courage**. "**take COURAGE**" Jesus says

Courage is essential because uncertainty is a fog machine and when the future is clouded in a fog our instinctive reaction for most of us is to freeze up and tense up in fear

Sometimes that fear gets masked behind other emotions like anger or frustration

last week I found myself getting really snippy at the kids in my house over small things and I realized that this was one way I was acting out this uncertainty about what the future looked like

looking for something or someone to control when so much feels out of control

And the result was I felt bad about how I responded and I didn't like who I was becoming or how it was affecting the people around me

Fear is our God-given instinct when we're facing a threat and it's very helpful if we're being attacked by a shark or a polar bear or by Sasquatch

but fear makes us hyper-vigilant and hyper-self-focused, it's all about preserving ourselves

and if we're not being chased by Sasquatch, chances are the situation is more complicated and there are people around you that God has made you responsible to

and that you have the opportunity to bless or hurt those people and when fear is dominating our actions, we're innately short-sighted and self-focused

See my friends, **when fear is driving the bus of our lives it almost always leads us into the land of regret. So Jesus says “take courage”**

Courage is the replacement of fear that leads us with strength into the unknown

Throughout history, when great men and women of faith have stared down the fog of uncertainty they've had moments when they could have frozen OR acted out of fear or self-preservation

But often the characteristic of men and women who make a positive difference in uncertain times is those who step out courageously

Now, notice what Jesus does and doesn't say as he approaches the boat

It's not “don't be afraid because there's nothing to be afraid of”—the truth is, there ARE things to be afraid of

Jesus says to not be afraid because he's here. He's present right in the middle of the threats, and he's larger than those threats

How can we act courageously when we're facing a fog of unknowns?

No matter what happens in the fog of tomorrow, Jesus got there first.

Jesus is out there, already standing in the fog. That's how we can be courageous. Don't be afraid. And he's coming towards you. He's calling out to you:

“Take courage!” because courage is what you're REALLY going to need to navigate and live a life that is substantive and strong in the midst of the fog

How? Jesus is here. Jesus got here first.

Many years ago now I was dating my now-wife long-distance—I was in Richmond Virginia and she was in Durham

And we were at a pretty critical turning point in our relationship

And I remember one weekend I went down to visit and I was driving back to Richmond and on the way back I was praying in the car out loud to God and my repeated refrain was “I don't know!”

God, I don't know what we should do. God, I don't know where things are headed, I don't know if she's the one or not, I don't know, I don't know, I don't know

And this has only happened to me maybe a couple times in my life, but that night as I was driving and ranting about how much I didn't know to God

God answered me. Clearly, simply, wonderfully—you know what I heard God say to all my “I don't know?”

God said very clearly and simply: “I know” that was it. “I know.”

I was staring into the fog of the unknown .” I didn't know all the answers to all my questions, but God did, Jesus was already there, waiting for me in that unknown future, HE knew

and because I was willing to accept that answer, as vague as it was, it quieted all my fears and gave me the courage to step into the unknown and 20-plus years later, am I ever glad it did!

Today, if you're feeling uncertain or overwhelmed by the winds and the waves or the uncertainty that you're peering into

Maybe this is Jesus's word to you: "take courage! Jesus is already here. Jesus got here first. Do not be afraid." (3x)

Now most of the disciples are stuck frozen in that fear we talked about

and if you're not familiar with the twelve disciples, Peter is typically the impulsive one who talks first and thinks later, which sometimes also describes me quite well

And Peter makes a proposal: **if it's you**, tell me to come on out there with you

Now this has always struck me as an odd way to test if it's a ghost or really Jesus!

I might have said something like: "Hey! If it's really you, Jesus, what did I get you for your birthday last year?"

But you gotta' love Peter's impulsiveness and brashness and his bias towards action

And in response he gets an extraordinary, simple, wonderful invitation: "Come."

And because of his wonderful, brash impulsiveness, of all 12 guys in the boat, Peter is the one who gets to walk on water

One thing that's struck me about it is that I've at points asked Jesus for a miraculous-type experience

lives to be changed, the surrounding community around us to really know the wonders of God's love to us in Jesus, situations in my personal life or family to be transformed

But what I want to do is have the miraculous experience without having to leave the safety of the boat

For Jesus to do something wonderful without it costing me anything, without me having to risk too much or experience too much of a threat

But as one author put it, if you want to walk on water, you gotta get out of the boat.

And part of what's so disorienting for so many of us in this season is that the boats that seemed so safe 10 weeks ago are suddenly getting tossed all over the place

And some of them have capsized completely, others are taking on water at an alarming rate!

And when our old boats are going down, we start scrambling for the safety of another boat which makes sense and is normal

But maybe for some of us, we need to at least consider making Peter's request our prayer:
"Lord, if this is you tossing me out of that old boat that was so comfortable, maybe instead of me looking for the comfort of the next boat, tell me to come out to you on the water."

Lord, if this is you displacing me, getting me moving out of what was comfortable and easy for me in order to re-direct me to something else, I'm willing to

Or more importantly for many of us,

"Lord, if you've turned over my old boat in order for me to know who YOU are, to grow in my understanding and familiarity with you, to trust you in a new way or maybe for the first time ever, I'm willing and eager to be a part of it."

Peter has one of his finest moments of glory here, in this story-- for one shining moment, Peter joins with Jesus in the very select company of human beings who have ever walked on water

But unfortunately it's only a very brief shining moment:

³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

³¹ Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

³² And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. ³³ Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

One summer during college I worked at a camp for kids and there were a ton of activities that the kids could choose from counselors were assigned to work different stations

And I ended up working the high ropes course pretty much all summer long

And there were two problems with that: First, I have a hate-hate relationship with heights—heights hate me and I hate them, the feeling is mutual!

The second problem is I have zero sense of balance at all

I've got three girls who do competitive gymnastics and they do amazing things on the balance beam, if I just LOOK at the balance beam I start to fall over

So it's training week at Camp Willow Run and the first time I went up on the high ropes, the guy running the course could tell I was nervous and he checked out my harness and then he looked at me and said simply:

"You're all harnessed up right so here's the good news: you can trust the equipment."

If you harness up correctly and you allow yourself to put your FAITH in the equipment, the experience of a high ropes course is super-fun

And if you refuse to trust the equipment, it's just one long painstaking push through fear and anxiety

And it took me a couple passes through the course but eventually I grew to trust the equipment and the assignment that I thought I would most dread of working the high ropes became the highlight of my summer

Throughout the gospel stories, the disciples are learning to put their faith not in a piece of equipment but in a person who has come to rescue all of us

The disciples have to learn to trust in Jesus because in just a couple short years they're going to be catapulted into the perilous journey of launching the most influential movement in all of history

And it's going to cost all of them everything. And so they have to learn how to trust in Jesus.

One theme woven throughout this passage is the question of the identity of Jesus [**Who is Jesus?**]

The **disciples initially** think **it's a ghost**

Peter tentatively says, "**Lord, if it's you...**"

Peter walks a bit, then looks at the wrong things—the wind and the waves and he cries out much more **Peter emphatically** "**Lord, save me!**"

And then when they all climb into the boat, you get this exclamation point to end the story as the **disciples worship and declare together: "Truly you are the Son of God"**

And that, my friends, is the moral of this story: not that someone can walk on water as spectacular as that sounds

But that Jesus truly is the unique Son of God who has authority over the wind and the waves—once you know that and trust in that, walking on water is nothing, there are much greater things ahead

Earlier we said we can have courage as we head into the unknown because Jesus got there first

But that's only comforting and courage-building if you know who Jesus is. If you don't know who Jesus is or don't care who Jesus is, then that probably means nothing to you

If you don't yet know that Jesus is the Son of God, THE Son of God sent by God the Father into the fog of a world that was created beautiful but is now broken at every level by sin

Broken economically, broken politically, broken racially as we've seen so clearly in the past couple of weeks

And that brokenness runs right into and through each one of us, none of us is as good and strong and courageous as God made us to be and intended us to be

So God sends his Son to come into the mess to redeem the mess. To bring order out of the chaos that sin introduced and to redeem the whole world

If you don't yet know that good news, then Merry Christmas in May: it's true.

And so as we step into the fog, we say with confidence that Jesus got there first

and if that doesn't bring comfort and solace to you, it's probably because you haven't yet said with the disciples "Truly, Jesus is the unique Son of God."

Or if you said it before, you've lost sight of it in the fog of your busyness or distraction or just drifting spiritually

And we invite you to consider your options—you can either make the fog central to your life and put Jesus on the sideline

OR you can make Jesus, the Son of God central to your life and put the fog on the sideline

and trust and know that no matter what happens, Jesus is there to lead you courageously into your future

Faith in who Jesus is is a theme woven throughout this story

Peter's faltering faith is what Jesus critiques as the reason why he starts to sink

And the disciples proclamation of faith is the purpose and the exclamation point on this story

And no matter what happens to you or to me in the next 3-6-16 months, that's God's goal for your life and my life as well—that we, too, might worship in faith along with the disciples here and we, too, might put our faith in Him

And that faith step, it's hard for many of us, isn't it? We were talking about this in my small group a couple of weeks ago

And a couple of people were talking about their journey of coming to faith, how they were wrestling with evidence and having conversations with people about God and Jesus

And how in the end, there was this last step that had to be taken, that step of putting your faith not in arguments or evidence but ultimately faith into a personal God, faith in the person and work of Jesus

And the truth of the matter is that there's a whole stack of evidence for God and Jesus and the resurrection and people's experience of all of it

And you can look at that stack of evidence through the lens of skepticism or doubt or cynicism or ambivalence or apathy and you can dismiss it all, happens all the time

OR you can look at that stack of evidence through the lens of faith

and if you do, the whole thing comes to life, all of life comes to life, the good news of a God who has come to make all the sad and broken things come untrue and to make all the best parts of every story ever written come even more true than we could ever have imagined

when all that comes together for you, it unlocks vast continents of undiscovered joys waiting to be explored for all eternity

And non-religious people think that only weird religious people have faith but the truth of the matter is all of us live and operate by faith

Just one simple example: Every time you sit on a chair or a stool, you're putting your faith in something else to hold you up

And what's helpful about that example for me is that whenever I sit down, my center of gravity is no longer within the frame of my own body

when I sit down I make myself vulnerable by putting my center of gravity outside of my own control and frame to hold me up

Why would I do such a crazy thing? On what basis would I take this ridiculous risk?

Because it provides blessed relief, that's why. I risk putting my faith in chairs and stools all the time and in so doing I receive the blessing of sitting down

Whenever your center of gravity is not within yourself for something you believe to be true—that's faith

whether that's in a chair or your high school physics class and they tell you a law of physics that you accept as reality without running the experiment yourself

That's faith. Faith is the gift of not having the weight of your life on your own two feet all the time but trusting in the reliability of something or someone else to bring truth and meaning and purpose and order into our lives

The first disciples did that—and it changed not only their lives, but all of human history forever.

My friends, we're all staring into the unknown the fog of summer 2020, how do we know what steps to take? How do we navigate life as we head into the unknown?

There's no easy formulas or quick-fixes, but there are some postures and patterns that are better than others for navigating the unknown

And I want to propose to you that the Scriptures gives us a set of time-tested 3-D glasses that people have used for centuries to step into the unknown

to see the next step ahead of them and to meet the God who got there first and was waiting to meet them

Whether that was ancient Christians who risked their lives to start the church

to the great Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, these glasses have been shown to lead people into lives that are extraordinary in the midst of uncertainty

And the two lenses on these 3-D glasses helping us to see in the midst of the fog are **Courage and Faith**

Courage is a gathering up of emotional and spiritual energies for difficult action

And Courage is important but people can be courageous and stupid, courageous but naïve, and make all sorts of bad decisions,

Courage requires a ground and an aim it's a means, not an ends

And so in the Christian tradition, faith comes first and is what steers and guides those energies and those steps

But as important as faith is, it can sound all internal, inert, not moving, just a thing happening in your head or your heart

People say they have faith while clinging to our own boats for dear life, never putting our center of gravity outside of ourselves—you can claim to have faith while stalled out staring into the fog ahead

And so we need both and here's an arm-chair definition of Christian **Courage: is faith-informed action**

And the call to faith-informed action reminds us that if we want to walk on water we have to get out of the boat

That's how it was for Peter that windy night on the boat, that's how it's going to be for you and for me as we step into the unknown of summer 2020

Today's Take-WITH

What can we do to navigate life in the fog as we head into the unknown?

Put on the 3-D glasses of faith and courage

those a couple of cardinal virtues that God gives us to navigate into the unknown

Not a formula but something that positions us to thrive as we step into the unknown

Wearing these glasses isn't going to show us the whole path, or magically give us the ability to see way into the future

But what these glasses will do is enable you to do two things:

- 1. Help you to see what the next step into the unknown could be and to TAKE that step**
- 2. Help you to see Jesus, who is already out there, already in the fog, wherever it might take us**

And to help you to remember all of this, I want to encourage you to **Print out a picture (or order a set) of 3-D glasses, label the parts, and put it somewhere you'll see it often** over the next few weeks

If we were all together I'd give you a set of glasses and in fact I had to order a box of 50 to get this one so if you want one just let me know and I'll get it to you

But I want to invite you to find a picture online or get a set yourself and write on it: love and hope on the arms, faith this front frame, wisdom and courage as the lenses

And come back to this over these next couple of weeks as a way to navigate this fog and come out of it not weaker but stronger, not more confused but more confident

And ultimately to know more fully who Jesus is and what God is up to.

My friends, NOBODY KNOWS what the fog of the future holds and given that, I want to encourage you to wear these time-tested glasses that lead to God and to human beings flourishing

watch how they might help you to take that next step into the future and see how they might help you to see the Son of God who is standing there waiting for you

PRAY

Offering/back to worship team