



North Shore  
Congregational  
Church

FOX POINT, WI

*From the Pulpit...*

## ***“The Face of Faith: I Will Trust...”***

**Rev. Dr. Martin Hall – Preaching**

*Matthew 11: 25-30; Matthew 14: 22-33*

*September 28, 2025*

I want to start with a bit of a recap. Coming into fall, my reflections for our Commissioning Sunday service, on September 7, caused me to put a question out on our Facebook page, asking what faith ‘looks like.’ I expected certain answers in return, some of which I got and others I didn’t. I also, however, got a lot of responses that were altogether different than what I had anticipated. So, I decided to broaden the conversation into the fall season and talk about many of these comments that I received about what faith ‘looks like’ in life – what I am calling ‘The Face of Faith.’ This week, I turn our attention to the person who responded to the Facebook question by saying that faith looks like ‘Feeling God’s support and compassion during hard times.’ It’s that concept that brings me to our second reading for this morning.

At the end of the thirteenth chapter of Matthew’s gospel, Jesus travels to his hometown of Nazareth, but he doesn’t receive the warm reception one might anticipate in their hometown. Quickly, there are many who start questioning who and what Jesus is and is doing. Then, as the thirteenth chapter turns to the fourteenth, another wave of strife hits Jesus as he receives word of the beheading of John the Baptist. So, reeling from both of these events, Matthew tells us that Jesus got on a boat and traveled to a deserted location where he could be by himself, only to have the crowds follow him to that deserted place, which is where we get that story of the feeding of the five thousand with five loaves of bread and a couple of fish. It’s there, then, with those people fed and Jesus still longing for a bit of solitude and rest, that we pick up our second reading on Matthew 14, verse 22.

*Immediately [Jesus] made the disciples get into a boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. 23 And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, 24 but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. 25 And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. 26 But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out in fear. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”*

*28 Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” 29 He said, “Come.” So, Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. 30 But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and, beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” 31 Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him,*

*saying to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” 32 When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 33 And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”*

Now, this is the first of two weeks that we are going to spend on this passage. There are many aspects of this story that are worthy of our thought and attention, but two of them speak directly to some of those thoughts that are driving this series, so we are going to spend this week and next looking at two particular details of this narrative. It’s worth stating up front, however, that neither revolve around the piece of this story that typically gets all the attention.

I was reminded in a conversation, earlier this week, about the impact of the editorial hand in our understanding of Scripture. Many of you have heard me talk about this in the past. The chapters, verses, and headings that we see throughout the Bible were not in the original text – they are things that editors added in to help us navigate the Bible as a whole. The challenge is that there are times when those chapters and verses can segregate portions of the text that were meant to be read together, and there are times when the headings steer our minds in a direction that might cloud other potential understandings of the passage. The Tuesday Book group just explored such a circumstance recently, and Lizz Loder and I were talking about it in relation to a project she is pursuing for the Lay Ministry Training Program of which she is a part. All of this is a long way around to saying that this passage in Matthew 14 is one of those.

I can’t, of course, speak to every translation that is out there. I did, however, pull half a dozen translations off my shelf to look, and sure enough, every one of them characterized this passage starting at verse 22 of Matthew 14 in the same way, “**Jesus** Walks on Water.” (admittedly, one said ‘the sea,’ but the point remains.) That’s the story we know. That’s how we hear and tell this story – that **Jesus** walked on water. That’s the story we remember from Sunday School. That’s the story that makes its way into our wider culture. That’s the story that speaks to the wondrous power of God in Jesus – that **Jesus** walked on water. Now, most of you likely know where I’m going with all this, but the problem with that heading – with that popularized synopsis of this story – is that it completely ignores the fact that **Peter** walked on water too!

I don’t suspect that this is necessarily a surprise to a lot in this room, but I would suggest that a huge portion of the population that knows full well that there is a story of Jesus walking on water would be shocked to learn that Peter did as well. Next week, we’re going to talk a bit more about Peter’s stepping into the water but, today, I want to focus on what happened when the waves came!

It’s interesting... if you do an image search online for depictions of Jesus walking on water, you find a treasure trove of varied art and imagery of the event. If you search for Peter walking on water, do you know you find? You find him sinking! There are exceptions, of course, but a lot of the content that you see when you search for images of Peter walking on water are images of Peter sinking into the sea and Jesus reaching out to raise him up. To me, however, it is the moment that the sinking begins that clamors for our attention.

Matthew’s gospel shares this story of Jesus inviting Peter out onto the water and Peter successfully stepping out in Jesus’ direction. He walked on water! Peter was successfully

making his way across the sea towards Jesus until, suddenly, he starts to sink, which begs the question, ‘What happened?’ What changed? How did Peter go from walking on water to sinking into the sea? The answer, I suggest, lies in verses 29 and 30. 29 *[Jesus] said, “Come.” So, Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. 30 But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and, beginning to sink...*

That’s the moment! ‘When he **noticed** the strong wind.’ The word being translated there is *blepon* which, importantly, carries a physical connotation with it. It means to perceive, to discern, to look at something – and that is, I argue, the critical moment of this story. When Peter’s attention shifted from Jesus in front of him to the waves beside him – when his sights turned from the promise here to the threat there – when he decided to look at the waves instead of Jesus – that’s when he began to sink! And, verse 30 continues on in a most interesting way, *“and, beginning to sink, [Peter] cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him.”* When Peter’s attention shifted from Jesus to the threat he began to sink. And, when Peter’s attention shifted from the threat to the promise of Jesus, he was raised back up. It is all-too-often overlooked that Peter walked on water! When we turn our attention to that feat, however, what we find is that Peter’s experience of achieving that momentous deed was shaped wholly and substantially by his choice of where he was setting his sights in any given moment – in that fundamental choice of what he was looking at.

In just a couple of minutes, the Uker-Ists are going to sing a song by Lauren Daigle, whom we’ve talked about before, titled ‘I Will Trust in You.’ As I thought about that song and our reflections for this week, it was the ‘will’ in that title that jumped out at me – because it is a conversation I have with every couple that I marry. One small, but I think significant, detail in weddings that I do is that the couple actually never says the words ‘I do.’ Instead, they say, ‘I will.’ It’s a small thing, and symbolic more than anything, but the conversation that I have with couples is that saying ‘I do’ reflects a decision and commitment that they are making in that moment at that time. Saying ‘I will,’ on the other hand, reflects the ongoing and repeated choice that they will make throughout their lives to be true to pledges they make and covenants into which they enter at the moment of their wedding. ‘I do’ is a promise of now. ‘I will’ is a promise for tomorrow as well. The song title, ‘I **Will** Trust in You,’ speaks powerfully to me in that context because, in so many ways, I see our trust in God through very much the same lens as I do those marital vows.

Whether we realize it or not, there is a choice that we make to trust in God. It’s no different than Peter walking on that water, who made a decision of where he was going to set his sights. The choice to set his sights on Jesus and trust in him had him walking atop that water. The choice to focus instead on the waves to his side is what caused him to sink. And the choice to turn back to Jesus is what raised him back up. Now, none of this is to suggest that making that choice to trust in God means that the waves won’t come – it just means that our experience of those rocky waters will depend deeply on what choice we make.

Remember, this whole message began with that individual response on Facebook who suggested that faith looks like, ‘Feeling God’s support and compassion during hard times.’ No one is suggesting that we are going to simply skip over the hard times. What I am suggesting, however,

is that our journey those times, just like Peter on that water, can be substantially impacted by the choice of what we're going to look at.

'Take my yoke upon you,' Jesus says. We need to decide to embrace that help. We need to choose to focus on that hope. We need to be intentional about our trust in God. Every day, there will be choices we make as to where we place our focus. Every day, there will be moments that call for us to be deliberate about whether we are setting our sights on the hope and promise of God before us, or the threat beside us. None of it, I assure you, will keep the waves from coming. The choice we make when they come, however, can make a huge difference on how much we rise or sink amidst the storm.