

Matthew 14:22-33

Fear and Faith

I recently learned that there are bridges in which people can request a service to have someone else drive their vehicle over. One such case is the Mackinac Bridge. The following is taken from an article about the service.

"It's a daily routine for some, but for others crossing the Mighty Mack can cause serious anxiety, especially when you add a high wind warning with speeds up to 40 miles per hour.

All they need to do is call the Mackinac Bridge Authority and ask for a ride, and they will send someone within minutes to come and drive your car across for you.

For some people it's the height and for others it's the fear of bridges in general.

About 100,000 people cross the Mackinac Bridge every month, but according to the Mackinac Bridge Authority, about five people a day need to be driven across by one of their employees.

"Some people don't know it until they get out on the bridge actually, or they'll drive and get really close then it sets it," said Todd Mayer, a steeple jack for the bridge authority who helps people get across.

The bridge is just under five miles long and its highest point is 155 feet tall, making it understandable why some would get nervous.

It's part of Todd Mayer's job to help escort weary drivers across the bridge, and he had seen some pretty extreme cases.

"I've seen people that curled up in the fetal position laying on the back seat of their vehicle or hiding their heads or shielding their eyes, covering up with a jacket, because, you know it was that traumatic of a deal for them," Mayer said.

Todd says he feels for the people who are unable to cross the bridge on their own.¹

Fear can be debilitating as many of us are likely aware. If you don't have a fear of something in particular you likely know someone who does. Personally, I have a fear of heights and of enclosed places, along with not being to impressed by snakes, spiders, and moths. For the most part those fears do not impact my daily living, so I am

¹ [Drivers have option to be driven across Mackinac Bridge | WPBN \(upnorthlive.com\)](#) Accessed August 11, 2023.

fortunate, but I have met people whose fears have stopped them from enjoying life or moments in life. I know people who have not been able to leave their homes, or for whom dogs make it near impossible for them to take a walk.

Then there are the fears associated with physical and mental health. You or a loved one get a diagnosis and your lives are turned upside down. Death of a spouse sets you on a path of navigating unknowns without your sidekick. You lose your job or are simply trying to find work and nothing seems to be happening. The concerns of how one supports themselves and family, or just finding meaning and purpose through work seems always out of reach.

Fear is one of those deep emotions that sometimes expresses itself as anger. Fear can be isolating. It can be paralyzing. There are many doctors and psychologists who work to help people overcome their fears. Fear is real.

This may be why the words about fear were what drew my attention this week in the reading about Jesus and Peter walking on water. You can find this story of Jesus walking on water in the gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John, but only in Matthew do we get the addition of Peter.

And you have to love Peter. Throughout the gospel stories, Peter represents humanity as no other. He fumbles and falls, blurts out stuff, praises Jesus, recognizes Jesus' as Lord, and then in another moment wants to protect Jesus, not realizing the full extent to which Jesus has got this ministry thing and more.

In this story, Jesus, who has been trying to get off by himself to pray because he has heard of the death of John the Baptizer, been rejected by his hometown, and on his way to pray sees the need of a multitude of people and so meets that need in what is known as the story of the feeding of the five thousand, finally Jesus sees his opportunity and sends the disciples in a boat to go on ahead to the other side of the lake while he dismissed the crowds. Then you know how the story goes, Jesus went up the mountain by himself to pray. Something to note is that through it all Jesus does not forget that he needs time to be with God.

The story continues. Picture the scene...

When evening came, Jesus 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 Jesus came walking towards them on the lake.²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, 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.'

They were terrified. Now some of these men were fishermen. They knew what to do and how to handle the storm, what they were all terrified of was the person walking on the lake. For Jewish readers water had meaning. In Genesis the world was first covered by water. Life came when God swept away the waters and said, "Let there be light." How

can one forget Noah and the flood. Then there was the parting of the Red Sea that allow the Hebrew people to leave Egypt. Significant historical events that impacted the faith and understanding of the Jewish people had many water stories.

So, Matthew writing about Jesus' walking on water means something to his readers. But the water itself was not what terrified the men, it was that someone could walk on water that got them. It meant that the person, real or not, had power over the water. In just a couple of sentences we heard that the men were terrified and cried out in fear.

Jesus' words to them... "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Take heart. What compassionate and loving words to say. Reassuring words, followed by "It is I." They knew the one coming to them. They had trusted him with their very lives just by choosing to follow Jesus. They had participated with him in feeding the multitude. And now he was there before them in a way they did not recognize in their minds, but certainly his words would have spoken to their hearts. And in the face of their fears he says, "Do not be afraid. "

Still, this was not enough for our impetuous Peter as he answers, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." And Jesus says, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened." There is that fear word again. "And beginning to sink Peter cried out "Lord, save me!" ³¹Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him."

Peter got distracted and that distraction made him afraid. But Jesus was right there. And though the words said by Jesus, can be heard with various tones of voice, I believe, given Jesus' care of people, the tone was one of compassion. "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Fear and faith. They go together. We all fear. It may be a phobia; it may be fearing a change. Yet, fear can also be a motivator. We can choose to fear and have faith anyway. Faith in our own abilities, faith in the help one can received from friends, family, or professions, and certainly faith that Jesus has got you. Just as Jesus reached out to Peter as he began to sink, Jesus saves him. He saves him, not expecting that he will never fear again, but rather so that Peter can once again move from that and with courage step out in faith that God's got this.

And remember, Peter was not alone. He was the one who got out of the boat, but there were witnesses who all were empowered by that experience. They too were strengthened in their faith. And when all calmed down, their breathing and the breath of the winds, they were able to say, "Truly Jesus is the Son of God."

In our own lives fear and faith reside together, just as joy and sorrow, hope and despair reside together. We feel and experience these emotions not as polar opposite, rather as things that can be jumbled up, mixed together. Welcome to being human. Whatever you face this day or in the days to come may the phrase you hear looping through your head

be the voice of Jesus saying, "Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid." Know that Jesus is aware that doesn't take away fear, but may it be enough to calm you, bring peace, courage and motivation to live fully as a person of God, and at the same time those who witness your example of living may too be empowered in faith and through fear.

In Christ, with Christ, and through Christ. Amen