

Stepping Out

LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church

April 26, 2026 – AM Sermon

Reverend Peter Jonker

Matthew 14:22-33

Is Peter doing something good or bad in this passage? Is he faithful, or is he falling flat on his face? At the end of the passage, because of what Jesus says, it seems like Peter has messed up. Peter sinks, Jesus has to pull him up and put him back in the boat, and then Jesus says, “Peter...how come you doubted me?! Where is your faith?” We hear Jesus say that and we think, “Peter messed up. Peter did the wrong thing! I don’t want to be like Peter!”

But that’s not fair to poor Peter! Peter’s not such a bad guy. Is he a bit headstrong? Yes. Does he sometimes act before he thinks? Sure. Is Peter sometimes a bit woobly-woobly? Absolutely. But at least he got out of the boat!! That’s more than the other disciples could say! The rest of them sat shaking in their sandals. The rest of them were in the boat tightening their life jackets and clutching their oars. So sure, at the end, Jesus says to Peter, ‘O you of little faith!’ But at the moment Peter steps out of the boat, he’s doing something pretty amazing. He’s being brave. It seems like he’s showing more faith than the rest of the disciples. If he’s a man of little faith, then the rest of those boat sitters must be men of microscopic faith. They stayed in their seats; Peter stepped out.

I want to think about stepping out with you this morning. You girls have been thinking about stepping out all year, so we would like to join with you in thinking about this theme this morning. I would like to say 4 things about stepping out that we learn from our passage and from the rest of the Bible.

First, stepping out is something God calls all of us to do. I don’t care if you’re 8 or 98, God calls us to step out in faith. The stepping out looks different for each one of us. Not all of us are called to step out on the water in the middle of a Galilean storm, but all of us are called to step out in some way. You see it throughout the Bible, God comes to ordinary people and he calls us to do things. You’ve learned about some of those people this year. You learned about Moses. Moses was called to leave his comfortable job and go to Egypt and preach to Pharaoh. You learned about Mary. Mary was busy planning her wedding she was thinking about happily ever after with Joseph. But the angel called her to be the Mother of Jesus. Abraham was called to step out – leave your family home and go and live in the place that I tell you. Paul was called to step out – I want you to go and preach the gospel to the Gentiles.

The story of Peter walking on water is in the gospel of Matthew – at the beginning of Matthew Jesus calls us to step out – “Don’t put your light under a bushel; let your light shine before others!” At the end of the gospel Jesus calls us to step out, “Go and make disciples of all nations, teaching them everything I have commanded you.” When you follow Jesus, no matter who you are, no matter how old you are, he will call you to step out.

The second thing we can say about stepping out is that it’s hard. When God calls you to step out, you will want to stay in the boat. I just listed a whole bunch of stories where God calls people to step out. In every case God asks them to do something hard, and in many of these stories, the first thing people say to God when he calls them is some version of: “I just want to stay in my boat!” When he was called, Moses said, ‘I’m not a good speaker. Send someone else.’ When Isaiah was called, he said, ‘Woe is me for I am a man of unclean lips. I’m not a good enough person to do your work.’ Mary said, ‘How can this be, for I am still a virgin.’ When Jesus first called Peter, Peter said, “Go away from me Jesus for I am a sinful man.”

Stepping out is hard, and the boat is safe. Stepping out puts you in the middle of the wind and the waves. There is nothing between you and the deep, deep water. There is nothing between you and the towering waves. The boat has that nice strong boat bottom, those nice high boat sides to protect you from the wind and the deep waters. So, when Jesus calls us to step out you can be sure that there will be an interior

voice saying, "No! You don't have to do that! God wants you to be safe! God wants you to be happy! You've got enough going on! This is too risky." Don't listen to this voice.

Remember the parable of the talents? Three servants are given resources by their master. Two of the servants step out! They take their talents and invest them, and they double what the master has given them! They step out and accomplish great things. The other servant buries his money in the ground. He does not step out, and he has all kinds of excuses. "I'm keeping the money safe! I don't want to risk losing the master's money." When the Master comes back, he is not pleased with the third servant. Yes, stepping out is hard, but the master is not pleased when we stay in the boat clinging to our life jackets.

The third thing to say is, stepping out is often small. Sometimes stepping out is big. Peter got out of the boat in the middle of the storm and started to walk on water! That's big. Abraham left his home and his family behind to follow God's lead. That's big. So sometimes the call is big: Become a missionary and go to live on the other side of the ocean!

But most of the time stepping out will be something smaller than that. You are planning a birthday party, and you are excited about inviting all of the girls in the class except for one. She's a difficult person. She's hard to get along with and she's sometimes mean. You don't really want to invite her. You know that if you do invite her, some of your friends will say, "Why did you do that!?" That's a much smaller situation than Peter walking on water, but you are facing the same question in that moment: Do I step out or stay in the boat?

Or maybe you get a phone call. You look at the caller ID and you realize it's one of your needy friends. She's going through something right now and if you pick up that call, it will be an hour. An agonizing hour. And you were just sitting down with a cup of tea to watch your favorite show. You've been looking forward to sitting down to watch it all day!!! Do you step out or stay in the boat?

You are thinking about making profession of faith. One of the youth leaders asked you about it. In one of the youth discussions she said to you: You should make profession of faith! But you are shy. You have to get up in front of all these people who will look at you. And it's not like you don't love Jesus. You pray. You believe in God! Why should you have to get up in front of a whole lot of people?! What business is it of theirs! Do you step out, or do you stay in the boat.

Every day you will face this choice. Every day there will be encounters, every day there will be moments and in that moment, you will have the choice to step out or stay in the boat, and in every one of those moments Jesus is holding out his hand to you and saying, don't be afraid. I've got this.

Which brings me to the last thing that we need to see about stepping out, and this is the most important thing. We are all called to step out. Stepping out is hard. Stepping out can be small things as well as big, and finally, we don't need to be afraid to step out because Jesus has gone ahead of us into the storm. The only reason Peter is able to do this hard thing is because Jesus is standing out there on the water holding out his hand and saying "Come." Because Jesus is out ahead of him, he is able to take the leap of faith.

Please notice - and this is so important - having Jesus ahead of you in the storm is no guarantee that you will succeed! Does Peter succeed? No. He sinks! He panics. He messes up. Jesus has to pull him up out of the water so he won't drown. Peter falls flat on his face! Having Jesus out in front of you in the storm is no guarantee that everything will go smoothly or that nothing bad will happen, but it is absolutely a guarantee that you will be OK. Because Jesus is out there in the storm ahead of you, and no matter how far you sink, he will go down to get you and lift you up.

I say this whenever I give a new members tour of the building, so some of you have heard this before. One of the many things I love about the windows is the contrast between the Jesus at the front of the sanctuary and Jesus at the back of the sanctuary. At the front of the sanctuary is an image of the ascended Jesus. All authority in heaven and earth is under his feet. He's the king of kings and Lord of Lords. This is the Jesus who walks on the water and commands the waves to be still.

At the other end of the sanctuary behind you is another image of Jesus. Without turning around, do you remember it? It's Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. It's Jesus in anguish and pain and fear. It's not Jesus high and mighty; it's Jesus at the bottom.

In between these two images of Jesus is all of us. Some of us are doing great! We are on top of the world. Some of us are at rock bottom. We are tired, we are cynical, we are fed up. But wherever you are Jesus has got you surrounded. Whether you are low or high, Jesus has got you surrounded. Whoever you are in this room and whatever you are going through, Jesus has you surrounded and he is out ahead of you in the storm and you will be OK.

Remember that next time the moment comes and you have to decide whether or not to step out.

©Rev. Peter Jonker