

Date: May 6-7, 2023

Title: *Asking for a Friend*

Scripture: Matthew 14:22-36

Speaker: Kurt Bjorklund

So, there isn't a lot that I remember well from middle school. But one memory that is somewhat vivid was middle school health class. I don't know if you remember middle school health class, but health classes are generally an arrangement of inane topics that I guess get more important the older you get. But when you're in middle school, they're very inane until that one unit, and that one unit is not inane. But you're a little enamored with it when you're in middle school.

I remember that whoever was teaching it, and I forget if it was the real teacher or they brought somebody in, but their rule was very simple. And that is, you could not ask any question unless you were asking for a friend. And so, if you asked a question and this was before you could text a question or something to the teacher, you had to raise your hand and say, I have a friend who, and then you would ask your question. And evidently, this was done to avoid embarrassment.

So, there were a few guys and I who thought this was great. You know, I have a friend who, and then we would ask the most outrageous questions that we could ask. And this is one of my dominant memories of middle school. But undoubtedly, you've had this situation where you've wanted to ask a question, but you didn't want to put yourself out there. So you think, maybe I'll ask for a friend, and we're going to spend the next several weeks looking at some questions or interactions that Peter had with Jesus.

Peter was one of the disciples, and he was one who impetuously asked questions, said things, and did things that probably a lot of us, if we were in the situation, would either have liked to ask or liked to have done much like Peter did. And so today we're going to begin this journey and you may say, well, why this? Why from the Gospel of Matthew?

The way this came about was a year ago when I was just doing my regular Bible reading. I was reading through the Gospel of Matthew, and I noticed these seven instances where Peter has these dynamic interactions with Jesus. And I realized that each of them pointed to some challenges that are as current as our culture and our lives here today.

Now, when you think about Peter, if you know the text of the Bible, what you tend to think about is Peter cutting off the ear in the garden of the guy who came, the soldier who came to take Jesus. You think about Peter denying Jesus three times, and then you think about the text that you just heard read about Peter walking on water. After that, we tend not to have a lot of Peter in our heads, but those three instances tend to be things that you hear.

And so, this first instance in Matthew chapter 14, verses 22 through 36, is where Peter is in a boat, in a storm in the middle of the night. Jesus comes walking across the water and Peter says that the disciples were afraid. Which of course you'd be afraid, storm in the middle of the night, somebody walking on water, you'd be like, yeah, this freaked me out. And so, now you have this moment where Jesus has come and He says take courage, it's me. And Peter, instead of saying good, get in the boat and calm the storm, he says if it's you, tell me to come. And he gets out and he walks on water. This is a crazy event in the Gospels. And here's, in a sense, the question that I think is behind his telling me to come to you. And that is, what does trust look like? Can I really trust you, God? Jesus, can I really trust you?

And the way that the story is often taught, if you've been around church or even if you haven't been around the church, you've probably heard this taught this way. And that is it's usually taught something like this. And that is you all have a boat, a place that's your safety, a place that's your security, and God wants you to step out of your boat and do something daring and adventurous with your one and only life.

So get out of your boat and walk on water and be a risk taker for God. Have any of you ever heard this kind of teaching on this text? So, the reason that I point this out is not so much to say that that's not appropriate, but to say I think at best that's a secondary application to this text. And at worst this can be used for self-aggrandizing leaps and risks to say I'm going to step out and do something because in a sense I want to experience something.

Here's how one well-known teacher writes about this text. He says this, "The Lord wants to release his miracle-working power in you. He wants to make your life better than your biggest dream." And his context is to say that all you have to do is get out of the boat. All you have to do is walk on water in some way. And so, the challenge, usually when people teach it this way is to say, what is it that you need to step away from?

I have this beater truck that I bought a few years ago. It's like the junkyard is here, this truck is here, kind of a truck. And this is going somewhere. The reason that I tell you this is because whenever I drive the truck, and I had to drive it this week for a little while to haul some stuff, it just feels right to listen to country music. And so, I was driving the truck this week, and here is one of the songs that came on.

This is a song, and it was about a young woman who is 20 years old. She got married. She got stuck in a marriage she didn't want. And the song says she's always lived for tomorrow. She's never lived for today. Oh, she's trying. Dying to try something different, to do something foolish, to do something crazy just to get away. And then the song goes on and talks about how she wants to know if there's life out there.

And I heard that song and I thought, that is the non-biblical version of get out of the boat and be a water walker. It's just saying you can take a big leap and God will catch you. But is that really what this text is about?

Now, put that on hold just for a moment. I'll come back to that in a second. But it does raise one question. Even if you take the secondary application out of this, it does raise a question, and that is how do you know when God is speaking in your life? And by the way, this is a question that if you're a long-time church person, you've been around church for 30-40 years, you've read your Bible a lot. You've been through *Bible Recap* multiple times. This is a question and it's a question if you are somebody who says, I don't really do church because you still have the moments where you say I think God, whatever God is like, may have moved me in a direction.

The place where we see this is when Peter, in verse 28 says "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." And Jesus says come. So how do you know when what you think is God is actually God? John 16, verse 2 says that there will come a day, Jesus was talking to His disciples, and he says when people will kill you and they'll think they're doing service to God. In other words, there are people who will think that they have God wired, they have it figured out, and they will do the exact opposite of what God wants, which means it's possible for you and for me to think that we're acting in a way that we think is spiritual and may not be spiritual at all.

I don't know if you ever get a moment where you feel like maybe something's an impression from God, God's prompting something, and then you say, is that God or was that something else that just happened? And so, I want to just give you a few questions from some other scriptures to help us think about this.

Here's the first one. Is what you're feeling being moved by God? Is this in line with what the Bible teaches? This should be a fairly straightforward question. Second Timothy 3:16-17 talks about Scripture being inspired. So, this is the only thing that we can say definitively is the Word of God. Now, I'm not suggesting that there isn't such a thing as a prompting or a movement of God, but I've been a pastor long enough that I've worked with enough people who have come up with ideas that they say this is something that God told me to do that I was pretty certain wasn't God.

In fact, there was a guy, this is before I moved to Pennsylvania so none of you know this guy. This was at a church I served before. And there was a guy who was struggling because he kept going to an establishment that he knew was not on the biblically approved list. Okay? I hear you following what I'm talking about here. And what he would say to me was well, I went, I kind of pulled up and prayed, and I would say, God, if you want me to go in today, let me see a yellow car. You're like, I'm pretty sure that's not God.

And so, what some of us will do, and that's a crazy example I get it, but some of us will come up with things and we'll say, well this is my idea of what God wants. And it'll often just be an internal censor that will say God clearly wants me to be happy, and since God wants me to be happy, if I want something that it seems to me that Scripture contradicts, it doesn't matter because I'm going to follow my version of God. Okay? So, is it in line with scripture?

Secondly, does this reflect the character and the priorities of Christ? First Corinthians chapter ten, verse 27, if you're taking notes, is a verse to look up later. It talks about everything being done to God's glory. What I have seen is that usually when God prompts something that is not expressly written in scripture, it reflects his character and his priorities. Now, you may say that doesn't sound like much, but what you'll often see is people will say, well, God told me to do something. And it's often about them. It's about they want to be big, they want to have a chance to walk on water and to show something amazing about what has happened.

Whereas often when God prompts, especially if you look in the pages of the Bible, he asks people to do things that require more humility, more sacrifice, more of themselves, and not making more of them. And so, is what I think God prompting? Is this really reflecting his character and priorities?

Third, am I moving through open doors or am I pushing doors open? In the Book of Acts, there's a section in chapter 16, verse six and following where there's a moment, where the disciples are moving and they're trying to discern God's movement of open doors. And sometimes when we want God to move, we will try to push a door open. I heard one pastor once say, if you knock on a door long enough, Satan will open it for you. And sometimes what we do is we just try to manipulate the situation and then say, oh, God opened the door for me. It's the yellow car circling the forbidden activity.

Here's a fourth question, and that is, is this being used to assert my will or am I really allowing this to not be about my will? Again, in chapter 15, there is a conflict in the church and there was a time in verse 26 and following where the people who were having this conflict were trying to enlist God on two different sides of an issue.

And sometimes we'll try to enlist God to say, this is my will. One of the things that I've committed to not doing and this is not that I don't feel that God sometimes leads or prompts me or the leadership of this church to do something. But one of the things I've committed to not doing is standing in front of you and saying things like, God told me that this is what we should do because if God tells me to do something, He's going to convince leadership and He's going to convince the people to say, yes, this is a good direction.

When you start to throw God into the mix, not that you don't want to know that your pastor or leaders have a sense of spiritual life and are hearing from God but as soon as you throw God in, then how does anybody argue with it? So, take for example, we're planning to build a new

wing on the second story of Kidzburgh over here because we are slammed with kids and during the week everything is filled.

I prayed about it. I feel like that's what God wants us to do. But one of the things you didn't hear me say when we were leading up to and doing everything is God told me we should do a second story. Because how do you argue with it? But if you say privately, this is what I think God has led and then it's confirmed with the leadership, in our case, it's our elders, our servant leaders on our board, our staff leadership, and then other people say, yes, we'll partner with you. Then you can start to say, you know what, this is the direction we've been led.

But sometimes what we do instead is use God to assert our will. And so, this is even something that sometimes happens in relationships where people get abusive, where they start to say, well, God wants you to, and then they'll use God as a club to get somebody to do what they want. So, ask the question, is this being used to assert my will?

Fifth, I would say, what does Godly counsel say? Proverbs chapter 13 verse 10 and Proverbs chapter 20 verse 5 talk about counsel. And when I say this, I'm not talking about just going to your friends who happen to be Christians, because your friends will often say what you think, what they think you want to hear. I'm talking about going to somebody who will be honest enough with you to tell you the opposite of what you actually want to hear. And if you have a friend like that who reads their Bible, and seeks the Lord, that is a gift to ask if you're making a good choice or a bad choice.

And then finally, do you have peace? This is Philippians chapter four. And peace can be something that can go a couple of different directions, but it's at least worth asking when God and the Holy Spirit are involved in something. There should be a spiritual sense of peace in the middle of this. So, all of that is just to say there is a time to hear the voice of God and take a step.

But now let's come back to Matthew 14 just for a moment and see what this text is really driving at. Verse 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. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone..." Notice Jesus went by himself alone. Two different words, two different ideas. One meant that He was completely alone. The other meant without company. And the text, I think, is emphasizing Jesus going to nature to be alone, to seek God because even the Son of God needed some time to be with God in order to do the work of God. So, sometimes that's just an important reminder.

Then it says this, "and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it." So, now the boat's out in the middle of this huge

lake, and they're rowing and trying to come back, and it says shortly before dawn. So now they've been out in the boat all night fighting a storm.

"Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear." So, here they are saying, this is not what we want to be doing right now. And then it says this about Peter saying if it's you and he got down and he started to walk on the water and then he realized what he was doing. It says he saw the wind and he began to doubt. He began to sink, and Jesus reaches out and pulls him back in.

So, what is this driving at? And here's what I'd like to say, and that is Jesus walked on water and he calmed the storm in order to show his character and to reveal his power. You see, this isn't a story about me being able to get out of my boat. This is about Jesus and about what Jesus is able to do and that Jesus has power over the storm. Jesus has power over the circumstances of this world. And what happens a lot of times is you and I will live our lives with a sense of security that's actually shallow. And I would even go so far as to say that Jesus walked on water and calmed the storm in order to show ultimately the futility of what I'm going to call our self-salvation projects.

And what is a self-salvation project? It's the things that we rely upon to give us meaning and hope. And so, a self-salvation project, again, whether you're church-ed or not, are all of the things that in your life you say if I have this, then I will be okay. And if you think about these men, these fishermen, what was contained in this boat for them?

Well, one, it was their expertise. They would have been known to be men who fished the sea, knew when to go out at night, when not to, and when storms were coming. So, if they get destroyed in the middle of the night, their reputation is shot. Even if they swim back to shore and make it, they would lose money because their boat represented their economic well-being. They would potentially have physical damage to themselves. They would lose maybe their ability to make money moving forward. In other words, this boat, in a sense, was their project to say, my life has meaning.

And here's what's true, and this is what I think is going on. And the reason I think this is going on, if you look down in the passage, it says, when Jesus got back in the boat, what did they all do? They worshipped him. And then they said, surely you are the Son of God. What's this text about? It tells us right there they worshiped him, and they said you are the Son of God, not, I can take a big risk for you. But now I know and here's the issue. Many of us will go through this life thinking if I can just be healthy, if I can just have enough money, if I just have a good career, if I have a good relationship, then I will be good. And if I can get God to help me with it by stepping out of the boat, all the better.

What this text is actually saying is, to understand that those things that you put all of your hope, all of your life in, they may last all the way to the end of your life. You may have enough money, enough health, you may forestall relationship damage, and you may make everything work. But sooner or later, you will run into a storm that you cannot solve unless Jesus Christ is your God. The futility of self-salvation. And so, at some level, this is a question of what do you put your ultimate hope and your ultimate trust in? Is it in Jesus Christ or is it in stuff, some kind of a boat for you? Because when you realize that your boat will one day crash or be in a storm that you can't quell, then only then will you say, I can worship Jesus and he really is the Son of God.

And I love the fact that in this text when Peter gets out on the water, the text tells us that he doubts. See, genuine faith is not something that is without doubt. Verse 31 says this, "Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" See, Peter got out of the boat and as he was in the storm on the water, he said this is crazy. I can't really believe this. And sometimes our perception of what faith is, is that if I believe in God, I'll never have doubts, I'll never have questions, and I'll never struggle. But in the Bible, if you read about the disciples and the followers of Jesus, they had doubts. They struggled. They were challenged with the affairs of life.

I remember some years ago I was with a couple of my kids at Kennywood. If you've ever been to Kennywood, you know that it's a great local amusement park. And I was in line for the roller coaster, and as we got up to the front of the line, the thing shuts down. Like literally we were the next people to get into the car. And they said, hey, don't worry, we're just shutting down for maintenance. It'll be about 30 minutes. And so, we did the math.

If you walk away from that spot, you have to go back to the end of the line and come back. So, we just hung in there for about 30 minutes and, you know, it didn't seem like a big deal. And then I saw this guy who went into this little hut, and I don't know how to say this in a way that is kind, but this guy looked like he had lost his last several jobs. And so, he goes in and he comes out of the hut and he's like, got it. And I'm just standing here and I'm thinking, I don't know if I want to get on this roller coaster because at this moment if I get on this roller coaster and thumbs-up guy didn't get it right, this roller coaster may be my last.

So, I'm having this moment. And of course, I've got my kids. I don't even know if they saw the whole thing play out entirely. And I'm like, yeah, we're getting on the roller coaster. So, we get on the roller coaster and as the thing starts to climb and you hear these little cracks, I'm like, oh. And here's my point. That day I got on the roller coaster because I hoped that thumbs-up guy had been trained by somebody that I don't know and have never seen who is certified by somebody to know what makes a roller coaster safe. I had doubts, but I put my faith in thumbs-up guy.

Some of us are afraid to put our faith in Jesus Christ who the Bible tells us walks on water, calms the storm, and has power over everything because we haven't seen him personally. And so, what we do is we spend all of our time building our self-salvation projects, the things that we think will bring us meaning when we know full well that one day will come to an end and that thing will not endure. Yet, we keep going.

I love that in this story, not only did Peter have doubts, but he failed. Genuine faith is not without failure. Sometimes what we tend to think is that if we follow Jesus, there will never be a moment of failure. But if you read the pages of the Bible about the followers of Jesus, what you see over and over again is that there are moments when their faith is not strong, and their behavior is not right.

Verse 29 says, "'Come,' he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink." See, there will be days if you try to follow Jesus with your life when you will lose confidence in Jesus Christ. But being a person of faith means that you say, even when I fail, even when I doubt, I return, and I keep saying this is the best choice.

There is a book that came out years ago called *Art and Fear*, and it talked about failure. And they took two pottery classes, evidently, and in one class they said, you will get a grade this year based on how many pounds of pottery you produce this semester. So, it can be awful pottery, but if you produce 50lbs, you get an A, 40lbs, you get a B, 30lbs, you get a C, and so on. In the other class, they said you will be graded on a single piece, turn in your best piece, and the better that piece is, the better your grade will be.

And here's what they found. All of the best pottery came from the first group, the group that was weighed because the people who didn't have a fear of failure actually created something better than those who were afraid that what they were producing wasn't great. See, when you understand that with Jesus, there's compassion for our doubts and our failures, then you recognize that his power really is better than the other things that you'll want to put your faith in.

I love how in this passage Jesus says, oh, you of little faith. Why did you doubt? Now, I don't know how you've heard that. And obviously, we don't have the exact text of this, like the tone, but my guess is that the tone here wasn't, oh, you of little faith, why did you doubt? That it was, you of little faith, why did you doubt? I've got the power over this. In fact, I'm going to calm the storm here in just a moment. And when I calm the storm, you're going to worship me and you're going to know that I have power over everything. You're going to see the goodness of my character. And when you see that, when you understand who I am, then your fear will not dominate you anymore.

Now, I don't know what your security is. Maybe it's your money, maybe it's your family, maybe it's your health, maybe it's your capacity, your competence, maybe it's your reputation, or maybe it's something completely other. But whatever that thing is, it's like Jesus walked on water to say that project, that thing of saying this is where I get my worth, this is where I get my security, understand that one day it will end.

But if you put your faith and trust in me, then you actually can live without a lot of fear because that thing, as good as it is, you can build it, not build it, as good as it is, you know it is not ultimate. And the way that this even starts is by understanding our need for a savior. That we're sinful and need Jesus Christ in our lives to acknowledge that we don't live a perfect life, but Jesus did on our behalf, and trust Him, and then recognize repeatedly when we start to sink that we're trusting in something that can sustain and hold all of our hopes and all of what our soul hungers for. When you recognize that, you'll understand a little bit of what it is to have genuine faith in the God of the Bible.

Father, we ask today that you would help each of us who's gathered here in Butler, the Strip District, the Chapel, Southpointe, and Online, to understand at the core of our being where we put our hope. And not that we would run away from that hope, but we would have a hope that is much better founded than something that a storm can take away. God, I pray that you would help each of us who's here to see our need for a savior, trust Jesus Christ as our Lord, and then live in that reality rather than building boats that won't last. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Thanks for being here. Have a great week.