

Rescue Me from Danger
2nd in the series: *Wandering Heart, Lent 2024*
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February 25, 2024

The year is 1992 and the Summer Olympics are happening in Barcelona. The event is the Men's 400-meter dash, and it's the semi-finals. The runner is Derek Redmond who holds the British record in the sport and is favored to win.

The gun goes off. The racers jump from their blocks and begin their incredible sprint – one full lap around the track. But just over halfway through the race, the unthinkable happens. There is a searing pain in Redmond's hamstring, and he instinctively reaches for the back of his leg, falling to the ground.

Immediately the media begins to close in, cameras and microphones all pointed at Derek while the rest of the runners in his heat, as if in the blink of an eye, cross the finish line. The race is over. But what's this? Redmond stands up and begins to limp towards the finish line, 150 yards yet to go.

Officials try to stop him, but he continues, meanwhile, another man is pushing past security guards as they try to hold him back. The man is shouting, "That's my son!" As the security guards relent, Jim Redmond, comes alongside his limping son, puts one arm around his shoulders and as they continue together, Jim tells Derek, "*You don't have to do this.*"

But Derek, through tears, tells his father, "*Yes I do.*" His father's reply to him: *Then we're going to finish this together.*

Giving in to not having to bear the weight of this unexpected burden alone, Derek turns into his father, crying on his shoulder as they move forward together. Through the pain and the struggle, they continue their race with 65,000 people now on their feet, each one of those onlookers cheering them on every painful step of the way.

...As we look back on that moment, now almost 32 years ago, we reflect on the courage it took for Redmond to stand up again and keep going. and even more importantly, we remember that when he came to the end of himself, he was met by the support of his father. What he could not bear alone, they bore together. And in doing so, despite the numerous discomforts they faced, they were able to keep going. It started with an act of courage. It continued by way of love and support.

...which is very much in line with our subject matter for today. You'll see in your bulletins that the title of today's message is "*Rescue me from danger,*" a line coming from the famous hymn "*Come Thou Fount*" where, in verse 2, we *raise our stone of help* and sing of a Lord who rescues us over and over again.

And so knowing this, we turn our attention to the 2nd Scripture lesson for today which invites us in to yet another moment in the life of Peter. If you were with us last week, you may recall that we'll be looking at the life of Peter throughout this Lenten season, and so just to refresh our memories a bit, Peter is one of those people who tends to think out loud. He's our risk-taker, who on one dark and stormy night, many moons ago, found himself in his own experience of stepping out in courage and then crying out for help. We hear about this particular night in Matthew 14:22 – 33, which says this:

Matthew 14:22-33 (NRSV)

²² Immediately he 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."

RESPONSE

For your words that tell stories, your words that make us laugh and cry, your words that make us think. **Thank you God.**

...So **imagine**, for a moment, that **you are in this boat**. In your mind's eye, allow yourself to picture just how **dark the dark can be**. Consider within yourself the **work** it might take to **weather a storm** on the **churning waters**.

Now...add to this...you've **just hosted a dinner party** for 5,000 men, say nothing of how many women and children that had been accompanying those men. And imagine – that just prior to that dinner party, you had been **trying to get some time away**, having **heard of the death of John the Baptist** – news that had saddened you to the very core of your being.

But **instead of** getting away for some time to **grieve and process**, **crowds** of people have **followed you and your friends, begging Jesus to heal them**. All day long, the crowds have come. And by some (**literal!**) **miracle**, you **managed to feed them**. You **basketed up the leftovers**, and then, by some stroke of luck, **Jesus actually sent you away early** while he said goodbye to the crowds. But now, though you had **visions of rest in your head**, instead you've spent the **entire night** getting almost nowhere.

You're **tired**. The **demands** are forever crowding in, one after the next. And more often than not, it just feels like you're **spinning your wheels...or in this case...your oars**.

But then, here comes **Jesus** – *walking on water* – which is clearly impossible, and so obviously, you think to yourself: **GHOST!**

But Jesus tells you, "*No ghost. Just me.*"

Which brings us to Peter, who, clearly being a scientific dude, says, "*We can test this hypothesis: If you are really who you say you are, command me to come to you on the water.*"

What is **Peter doing?**

Is Peter setting up a **test?** Is it Peter just being Peter, **meeting his fears head on?** Cuz that's a thing, right?

There are personality types who do this. Some of us are more **external in our processing**. Some of us **dare our fears rather than mind them**.

Whatever's going on, Jesus takes Peter up on his experiment to discover if Jesus really is who he says he is.

Jesus simply says: *Come!*

And **out of the boat** Peter goes. Headlong he goes over the edge of the boat, and, sort of like those **cartoon characters** who run off the cliff...instead of realizing mid-air that the cliff is behind him, Peter looks down and realizes: boy-oh-boy! These are some **choppy waters!** Peter is beginning to **feel the intensity of his choices**.

If he's not already in over his head, he's about to be, and in this **frightened state** he cries out, "*Lord, save me!*" Now Peter, if he would have had more time, he might have said more than that. He might have said something like: I **tried it**. I came out here. I took the **leap of faith**. But I have very quickly come to the **end of myself**. I am **no match for this storm**.

But thankfully he **doesn't have to be** anything more and he doesn't have to say anything more. Because **IMMEDIATELY – not after** Jesus watches him **flounder** for a bit, **not after** being asked **what the lesson is** that he should be learning here – but – **IMMEDIATELY Jesus reaches out his hand.**

...Perhaps similarly to what we saw with Derek Redmond's father. Jim Redmond didn't say to his son, "*Did you stretch properly before you started?*"

No. Jim simply says, "*If you want to finish, we're finishing together.*" And it's the same with Jesus and Peter.

Jesus says, "*If you want to come out here on the water, then go ahead and come. I will immediately be here to reach out my hand and be with you in the middle of all of it. I'll be with you the whole time.*"

If you have the **courage to step out**, if you are willing to **take that first step**, **I will be there with you for every single step.**

For Jesus, there is **no problem here** that **Peter is limited** in his ability to hold himself up on water.

And for Peter, it's his **courage that leads** him to an experience he is only have by **stepping out into the unknown.** And he takes that step knowing that he can do it because he has the **loving, support** of a Lord that **will be with him every step** of the way.

And for us today, thankfully we **have Peter's story** to refer to...because most of us have probably had more than one "*Lord, save me*" moment! And for many of us, those are the moments that help us to become **more attuned** to what it means for us to live into this great mystery that is *Christ in us, our hope of glory*, as Paul puts it in **Colossians 1:27.**

But that does bring us to an **important question:** *How does a story like Peter stepping out of the boat translate in our day-to-day lives?*

And as I ask that question personally, I'm reminded of a book I read a few years back by **Martha Beck** called "*The Joy Diet.*" And in that book, Beck **offers up a model** to her readers that she hopes will help them walk towards an abundant and fulfilling life.

...which, at least to me, sounds pretty exciting. Who doesn't want to live a life that feels **full of meaning and purpose**?! And so, she begins by telling the reader: *Do nothing for 15 minutes a day.*

This is just the most awesome thing. I've worked with groups of people in connection to what she offers in this book, and you should watch the **air go out of people's balloons** when you suggest to them that they **get still for a whole 15 minutes.** That appears to be just as scary to people as choosing to step out of a boat in a full-on storm!

But nevertheless, that's where the book starts. As the book progresses then, eventually the invitation comes to **name what you are longing for**, to **brainstorm** a few ways you might take one step closer to that thing you're longing for, and then – the **big step** – to **name your one risk for the day.**

Beck, essentially asks her readers to **name one way** they are going to **step out of the boat every single day.**

What is the **one leap of faith** you're going to take today? What **one act of courage** you will say yes to in order to **meet those longings** of the heart?

And, you know, not every day's leap of faith will look exactly the same.

In my life – one day's act of courage might be **cleaning out the closets** – not any too small of a job when you have growing kids in the house, I've come to learn.

But on another day, my leap of faith might be **inviting local spiritual leaders** to a **luncheon** in order to foster more connections in the community.

Yet another day, I might **unwittingly step out** of the boat, breaking up a fight between two 5th grade boys.

But the experience of **having the courage** to take that step is **only one part** of the story. The thing that allows us to take that step has everything to do with the fact that we **can cry out at any time**, "*Lord, save me!*"

"Rescue me!" "I'm in over my head out here!"

Too many sicknesses have come in the household, one after the other, to the point that I don't feel like we can endure one more: *Lord, help! We need a break over here!*

And that list can go on for any and all of us:

Too many things have come due?

Struggling to trust that things will turn out okay?

Buckling under unbelievable grief?

Whatever it is, whenever it is, **crying out that we're in need of rescue** is a **perfectly acceptable option** – just like Derek Redmond did on the track, just like Peter did on the water. We can be completely **vulnerable and human**, overwhelmed, underwhelmed, confused, alienated, hurt, distraught...in the **full spectrum of being alive**...we can cry out, *"Lord, help."*

And just as **today's Psalm** tells us – **the Lord will walk with us in it**. It's been true of those who have **come before us**, it's true for **us now**, and it will be true for **those who come after us**.

Jesus' invitation to Peter remains a **standing invitation** to us today: *Come. Walk with me, and I will walk with you.*

Now practically speaking, **how** Jesus walks with us **will look different** from one moment to the next.

Sometimes, as was true for Derek Redmond, it may be someone **physically walking** next to us. It may be someone dropping off a **pot of soup** when we're feeling ill. It may look like a simple **text message** that says: *Thinking of you today.*

There may be many days where Jesus' *"immediately"* comes in the **form of our community**. Other days, it may be the way the **breeze blows** across the tops of the trees, the **song of a bird** outside our window, or the flicker of the **light of a candle** that brings us the **message that we are not alone in our walk**.

The **way that rescue comes will look different** from one day to the next. But if we look at **today's Psalm**, David, our Psalmist, is so sure that this is what God does for us that he **calls for the entire congregation** – the entire **community** – to **shout it out**, to share about the waves of abundance, love, and care in their lives.

And so then, **the question is: How do we stay connected to this?** In the midst of all the waves that are continually crashing around us, **how do stay connected to the ways in which Jesus is right there walking with us in the midst of it all?**

Sharing our stories together can certainly help with that.

Another thing that I've personally found helpful is to **scale it down**.

Just as Martha Beck helps people find their one leap of faith for the day, I find it helpful to be **present to this moment now**.

I don't know what things are going to look like in **4 years from now**. I don't even know exactly what things will look like in **one day from now**. But boy can **my mind get going**, imagining all the **possibilities**, or maybe better put – all the **worst-case scenarios** that *could* happen.

...which easily **becomes too much**. If I look at **every wave**, like Peter, I'll begin to **panic**. It's inevitable.

But if I can stay with the *"just this,"* I find that I'm much **more able to take the next step** and then the next one.

When we're not feeling well, **just this breath**. Now this one.

When I'm **cleaning closets**: Just this **item**. Now this one.

Whatever we're doing, this act of saying, *"Just this moment now"* is a little touch of saying, *"In this step...Christ in me, my hope of glory. And now in this step. And the next. And the next."*

Just the sound of **that bird bringing a song of joy**.

Just the **beebopping to one tune** together in the car on the way home from school.

Just this **one email**.

All the while, saying as many times as I need to, *"Jesus help!" "Rescue me."*

To which Jesus **immediately** steps in and says, *"You got it. I'm right here with you. Every single time for every single step."*

And so, as we go into our 90 seconds of silence, maybe take a moment to consider:

What leap of faith do I feel prompted to take today?