

## Walking on water

On vacation I was reading a book by Richard Rohr called "Falling Upwards". It is about the way we come to understand our faith as we get older. I am definitely getting older, I don't know about you!

What he said, in the second half (the better half) of the book, was that as you get older and pass into the second stage of spiritual life, you need less certainties, you need less to know *about* God and more to *know* God personally. You need trust more than knowledge, and love more than belief. You trust feeling and spirit more than teachings and certainties.

This rang bells for me, and looking at today's readings, it seems that I find this here as well.

Look at Joseph.

Joseph, whose story is told in full in the later chapters of Genesis, is one of the great Bible stories. My Old testament Professor called it the first novel we know of. A story in the true sense.

Joseph is a person Jews and Christians have looked to as someone close to God. And he was. But often we think that if we are close to God, then God will look after us and bless us with cash, and family, and no horrible events in life.

Look at Joseph. He is close to God *and* terrible things happen to him. Betrayed by his siblings, imprisoned for the lust of his owner's wife, forced to hide from his brothers and thinking never to see his father, enslaved and owned by another man all his adult life.

The point is that Joseph is close to God even as the ground beneath his feet seems to give way again and again. Perhaps because it gives way, he is close to God.

Look at what St Paul says. He notes that Moses taught that if you keep all the rules, then you will be righteous before God. If we keep all the rules then we are in control of being righteous. We are on the solid ground of being self-righteous.

But Paul says, as a Christian, that in fact righteousness is a gift from God, not earned. It is that "no one who *believes* in him shall be put to shame." It is about believing. Not about earning or doing. Just having that relationship of trust, that friendship. That is the thing that holds you up.

The Gospel is the best. I love this story.

People ask me how being at Grace Church is going. I say, "I have lots of out-of-the-boat moments." Peter and Co are in a fishing dory, there is a storm blowing, rain pelting down, water sloshing into the boat, and they see Jesus, a little off the starboard bow, walking calmly over the water. Peter looks at him and says, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." Jesus says "Come on then."

Pause to think about this.

I took a friend who is visiting with us out onto the lake to look back at the wonderful Water Treatment Plant in my canoe. The waves were maybe 10" high and it was breezy. My dogs were with us and kept moving around. I was anxious, for her, for me, for the dogs, and we had PFD's and were never more than 100yds off shore. But, not for all the tea in China would I have got out of that boat to try and walk ashore. Would you?

In a storm the boat is your friend. It is what keeps you from drowning. It is what is known, hand made, solid in a world of shifting waves and cold, insubstantial water. No one in their right mind steps out of a boat!

I love this story because it is not, for us, primarily about boats and lakes. It is about Falling Upwards.

When the Bishop described the work involved in establishing Grace Church I thought, "No one but an idiot would take this job."

Then I prayed about it, and it was as if Jesus said to me, "David, is that the kind of place I would work in?" And I concluded Jesus quite probably would.

Grace Church is a place where I am frequently "out of my depth". Often I have no previous experience of what we are trying to do here for God. I don't know about multi million dollar building budgets, or how to amalgamate disparate parishes, or how to deal with Second Base, or how to serve all or each of you, and help you find God's tender love of you.

Peter said, "So Jesus, should I try this, even though I know I cannot do it? And Jesus says "Come on then."

I keep on doing things I have no idea how to do, in the same spirit.

But perhaps unlike Peter, I have a Bible-full of followers of Christ stepping out of their "comfort zones", as we say, and finding it works. We have a history of 2000 years of Christians stepping out of what they know and feel safe in, and finding that things go badly, or differently, or unexpectedly...but they end up with blessings that would never have been known other wise. Blessings which go out beyond themselves and transform other lives.

It is as if *this* is the teaching.

A lot of theology, or orthodoxy, or committees and rules, or going to services each week...these things anchor you in God, and you think, "without these I might go too far, I might fall away from faith. I might sink!"

But when you dare to put being safe, being righteous and good and sensible aside, as Peter did, stepping, like a fool into thrashing waves and water 40 feet deep, *it is then* that you lose all the weight of caution and predictable outcomes and the wise advise about being safe that your mother told you, *it is then* that instead of falling down into catastrophe, as any normal person would expect, you are light enough to fall upwards into God's embrace, and do what seemed to you impossible.

You can be like Joseph, who falling into slavery, finds God ever closer and falls upwards into trust in him.

You can be like Paul who drops all the weight of being a good and obedient Jew, and falls upwards into the pure love of God he finds in following the Way of Christ.

You can be like me, a less glorious example of faith, stumbling along in the hope that I will be led to arrive where I am needed, and somehow be given the words or actions that will help in that moment, well outside the boat of my skills and knowledge. But even as I often sink, still I trust Jesus will catch me by the collar and haul me up, and let me fall upwards into his smiling face.

You can be like Peter, the risk taker, the one who dared to ask the questions others thought were "stupid", made mistakes, denied his Lord and still was the rock on which the church of trust and hope and love is founded. Peter, who so often seemed to fall down, ended up falling upwards.

As you get older, we older ones might agree, there is less to prove, less things seem fearful, and there is more freedom to be yourself. We have less to fear losing, now we have lost so much along the way, be it mobility, hair, hearing, short-term memory and so forth. Rohr says we are being introduced to a certain lightness, a willingness to trust God without needing to know what will happen if we do, and an openness to take inner-life risks of trust.

Step out of the boat! Fall upwards!