

Speaker 1:

I want to read a passage of scripture to you. I normally don't begin with the passage for reasons I won't bore you with analytically today, but I think you'll see why later. Matthew 14:22-33, "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 and the boat was already a considerable distance from land buffeted by the waves because the wind was against them. Shortly before dawn, 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. But Jesus immediately said to them, 'Take courage. It is I don't be afraid.'

'Lord, if it's you,' Peter replied, 'Tell me to come to you on the water.'

'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 cried out, 'Lord, save me.' Immediately, Jesus reached out his hand and caught him, 'You of little faith,' he said, 'Why did you doubt?' And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down and those who were in the boat worshiped him saying, 'Truly, you are the Son of God.'"

Let us pray. Lord, we thank you for your presence among us here in the gift of this church, the praise and the prayers and the gift of worship. And now, Lord, you've given me the amazing gift and responsibility of preaching a word to these, my friends and your servants, a task I tremble at, to be honest with you, Lord, and I need your strength to do it, so make me equal to it, Lord, that all of us here receive a word from you that will make a difference to our lives. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

There's a crazy story about a wealthy Texan who died and his attorney gathered all the family around for the reading of his will. And as you can imagine, family came out of the woodwork, near and far to see if they were included in the will. Well, when everybody gathered, the attorney opened up the will and somberly began to read, "To my cousin Ed, I leave my ranch. To my brother, Jim, I leave my money market accounts. To my neighbor and good friend Fred, I leave my stocks and finally to my cousin George, who always sat around and never did anything but wanted to be included in this will, I say, "Hi, George."

Poor George. Maybe George was just misunderstood. Maybe George is just one of those guys who likes to play it safe and what's wrong with that? We value safety, don't we? We do. We want to play it safe. Many people like the idea of being conservative with their life and resources. Many folks see the word risk right up there with other four letter words, and it has been my experience that the church is often filled with people just like that, the safe, the cautious.

Most people in church don't want to take many risks, and that has always baffled me, and I'm going to tell you why. I've traveled a lot from Atlanta to Tampa many, many times, and I know 75 North and south real well. Anybody else? I can tell you, every Chick-fil-A, every DQ, you got to stop at DQ, right? Everything. And I'm also very familiar with the billboard ads along the highway. You've seen them. They advertise everything from pecan logs to houses of ill repute. But one ad that's always been curious to me are those ads that advertise Christian radio stations. Have you seen them? They seem to be covered and produced by the same ad company because they always seem exactly the same. There is that upper middle class family in a picture smiling and laughing in a park, and there's the fish insignia, and next to that picture is the slogan, "Safe for the whole family." Safe? Safe?

Whoever created that ad doesn't have a clue about what it means to follow Jesus Christ because it doesn't take you long as you read the New Testament to see that following Jesus is anything but safe. Exciting, oh yeah. Fulfilling? Yes. Challenging? Oh yeah. Risky? Heck yeah, but safe, no. Church, if you think following Jesus is safe, then I've done a terrible job as a preacher preaching the gospel and telling

you about Jesus. So for the record, just let me say it today, following Jesus is risky business. If it's your goal to play it safe, then the last thing you want to do is follow Jesus Christ.

Take the scripture I read earlier, the disciples are in a boat in the middle of a storm. The wind has pushed them there, the waves are crashing against them. They are afraid. It's just before dawn, it's somewhat dark, when all of a sudden they see this figure walking toward them and they don't recognize it's Jesus. And they think it's a ghost and they all look at each other and they say, "It's a ghost." They have no clue that it's Jesus. Get this. These 12 men who have been with Jesus more than anybody else, who have heard Jesus teach and preach more than anybody else, did not recognize him.

In fact, even when Jesus says, "No, no, no, it's I, don't be afraid," they still did not recognize him. What a bunch of idiots, right? Well, before we get all high and mighty about these disciples, let me ask you a question. Would you recognize Jesus? If Jesus was walking down the street, would you say, "Oh yeah, yeah, that's him. He's right there." What would make you recognize him? Remember, we have no pictures of Jesus, no portraits of Him. Jesus didn't take any selfies. He doesn't have a Facebook page we can stalk and look at pictures. And no, those paintings that make Jesus look like Kenny Loggins or Ted Nugent, that that's not how Jesus looked, okay?

Many of us take great pride in knowing Jesus and loving Jesus, but would we recognize Jesus? Well, believe it or not, what happens next in this amazing story gives us some clue as to how we can truly recognize Jesus once and for all definitively. But some of you aren't going to like it, I'll warn you, especially those of us who like to play it safe. For Peter said something very strange. I don't know if you caught it. And to be honest with you, I've read this story many, many times over the years and I've preached on this story many, many times over the years, and I really have never seen it or its impact until recently. And when I saw it, it rocked my world.

Peter said this, "Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water." Don't you find that strange? Don't you find that crazy? "Lord, if it's you... if it's you now, tell me to get out of this boat and defy death and walk on these crazy waves and come to you, if it's you."

"Lord, if it's you, tell me to jump off and out of this airplane." "If it's you now tell me to walk through this fire." "If it's you." Don't you find it peculiar that the only way Peter would know for certain for him, whether or not it was Jesus was by Jesus saying, "Listen, you chicken, you come out here. The water's great." Don't you find it strange? But here is the truth, the hard truth for some of us.

Peter shows us definitively how we will know when it's Jesus, for we will know by someone recklessly outrageously calling us to get out of our comfort zones and take a big huge adventurous risk. That's Jesus. We like to sing and hear that song softly and tenderly. Jesus is calling for you and for me, and it's beautiful, and it's wonderful, and it eases my soul. But the truth is this, usually when Jesus calls us, it's a call to take a great risk for the gospel. It's a call to take a leap of faith and do something that scares us to death. Makes you wonder, doesn't it, about those people who love to brag about how close they are to Jesus and how much of the Bible they read and how much they pray, who never, ever take a risk for Jesus. I mean, after reading this, how in the heck can anyone claim to follow Jesus if they're not willing to join Jesus and the great adventure of faith.

I heard about a woman who lives in North Carolina, runs a ministry for unwed mothers who have nowhere to go to have their babies. No, dad is there to show up. No family is there that shows up to help, nobody. The hours are long, the work is hard, and there's never enough money. And you want to know something just staggering, just outrageous? This lady's father is one of the wealthiest people in the state. He has fixed her for life. Now, what in the heck would possess a middle-aged woman like this to do something like that? What would possess, who would influence a woman like this to do something

like that? I'll tell you who, and I think you know who. The same one who had the gall to say to Peter, "Come on out and foot surf with me, baby."

And the good news is when Peter was willing to jump and take that leap of faith, even when Peter was drowning and sinking and he called out to the Lord, and the Lord picked him up and rescued him and put him back on the boat, and he calmed the storm. Now, if Peter had never done that, he would've never known and experienced the strength of Jesus, the power of Jesus, and been able to recognize Jesus. Honestly, where this convicts me and maybe convicts you, is I think too often many of us in the church just stay in shallow water, splashing about worrying about trivial things and never take a risk for the gospel. Oh, it's easy to do. It's easy for the church to become just a religious shop, just running a shop week to week, day to day, checking the budget, going to a meeting, and before long you've spent 25 years and you say to yourself, "When was the last time I took a risk for Jesus Christ? When was the last time I jumped out of my comfort zone? When was the last time?"

Because I believe the thrust of this text is this, if you want to follow Jesus, you have to risk for Jesus. If you want to follow Jesus, you have to trust his promises by living out his promises and seeing what your faith is really made of. Now, I know this is a hard word. I know, I know some of you right now are saying, Charlie, can you go back to just preaching about worry and fear and inner peace? I like those messages a lot better. I hear ya, because this Jesus guy, He is nuts. This Jesus guy, He's outrageous, He's dangerous.

When Will Willimon was the dean of Duke Chapel, this was before he ruined his life and became a bishop, and he was again a dean of the Duke Chapel and he was bemoaning. He was complaining one time to a group of students that not many students were showing up for worship on Sunday at Duke Chapel, and he didn't understand why. And one bright student said, "Oh, Dr. Willimon, go easy on yourself. Duke is a very selective school that only takes the brightest students." And Willimon thought, "Yeah, bright but not very humble." But it's what she said next, that punched Willimon in the gut. "Dr. Willimon, I think really that most of the students here are smart enough to know that if they follow Jesus Christ, if they commit to Jesus Christ, Christ is just going to make their lives harder, more difficult, more challenging and more daring. I'm surprised you get as many students as you do to come to Christ." It is amazing, isn't it?

Let me tell you something, take a look around. Can you believe that all of us or maybe most of us here, are here willingly saying we follow a guy who says, "Take up your cross and follow me." Can you believe we're here to follow a guy who says, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you?" Can you believe we are here willingly saying, "We follow a guy who says, 'If someone slaps you on the cheek, you turn it.'" Can you believe that? Can you believe we follow a guy who says, "You get out of that boat and you take a risk for me?" Crazy, isn't it? Can you believe that?

I tell you, and sometimes in the church, today in the modern church, we have a way of just trying to kind of smooth off the edges of Jesus and whitewash him. We forget how offensive, how outrageous and how challenging He really is. Have you read the gospels lately? A colleague of mine remembers being very proud of a youth in his church that decided to become an active Christian his senior year. He was active in MYF and his senior year, he was going through a lot of difficult times. And so he went to a youth worship service and it was in that service that he gave his life to Jesus Christ, and it was beautiful. And one of the first things he said when that happened was this, "I have found what I'm looking for."

Well, oddly enough, my colleague ran into him of a few years later at an airport and he discovered with amazement that this same guy was running a ministry to inner city kids in East St. Louis was living in the most dangerous area of East St. Louis, was victim of crimes over and over again, but he didn't care. He kept loving those kids who had no one, and he was amazed at his faithfulness. Who would possess somebody to do something like that? Oh, I think you know who, because my colleague said, "What in the heck are you doing?" You know what he replied? "Well, that's what you often get when you get

Jesus right?" I thought I had found Christ, truthfully, Christ had found me. And I thought Jesus was just going to give me something special, and He has given me good things, but one of the main things he's given me is a job to do for Him instead of what did I wanted to do for myself? Outrageous, isn't it? Risky, that's Jesus.

After the horror of 9/11, a couple was being interviewed on television and they were grief stricken. They lost their daughter in those awful attacks, and they're standing there and the awful rubble is behind them. And after they shared their grief and their deep heartache, the reporter kind of stammered overwhelmed by it and then said this, "Well, I know that this weekend you'll be able to go to your place of worship and maybe there you can find some consolation." And you won't believe what the the mother said in reply. Said, "No, we won't be going to our place of worship this weekend because you see, we're Christians and we know what Jesus commands about forgiveness, and we're just not ready for that." In fact, it's going to be a long time until we want to be with Jesus. Wow.

Well, there's a couple who can recognize Jesus. There's a couple who knows what it's like to follow Jesus. So if on one strange night you hear a very strange voice calling you to do something crazy, calling you to do something outrageous, calling you to do a great leap of faith, it just might be the one you call Savior. Who would dare call us ordinary folks, just like us, to such high adventure, to such challenge to such risk. Oh, I think you know who you know. Let's pray.

Oh, Lord Jesus, we are so grateful for you and we know the reality and the truth of your many good gifts to us. Your grace, your love, your forgiveness, your comfort. Oh, we know it's there. Oh, but Lord, forgive us when we don't receive and surrender to all of you. The part that calls us to jump out of the boat and risk for you, and do something outrageous for you because we know that's the only thing that's going to change this world. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen.