



May 20-21, 2017  
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Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

*Beyond These Walls: Courage*  
*Matthew 14:25-33*

Cyndi and I traveled to Boston last week to celebrate Rachel's graduation from Gordon-Conwell Seminary. Rachel was selected by the faculty to speak at commencement. She told me, "Daddy, so many family and friends are there who do not know the Lord! I'm going to give them the gospel." And boy did she!

Of course, we are very proud of her. But as I soaked it in, I could not help but think with gratitude of the church that made this possible. Chapel Hill is the only church home Rachel has ever known. You are the ones who loved her, encouraged her, prayed for her, and trained her. Your Session took her under care as a candidate for ministry. Some of you provided financial support. And when the time comes for her to be ordained, I hope it will be right here, in this sanctuary, where *our* daughter will kneel and receive the laying on of hands of *our* elders and the prayers of *our* church family.

So, thank you, my Sweetheart Church, for the essential role you've played in the spiritual formation of our daughter. She will likely never serve in this church, but this is a gift you have offered to other churches in other parts of the world, and I hope she makes you as proud as she does us. And, by the way, she'll be preaching here in August.

Rachel's story illustrates one part of the initiative we are calling, "Beyond These Walls-Making Disciples That Make History." If you are visiting with us, you have the opportunity to listen in on family business. We are talking with each other about our future. We invite you to eavesdrop without the slightest expectation that you participate.

Our dream is this: we've reached a point where we are able to say, "We don't need another building or piece of land." Now is the time for us to move *beyond these* walls as never before. And we are doing that in three specific ways: First, by **multiplying LifeGroups** and sending them out into neighborhoods, schools, and the community as ambassadors for Christ. Second, by **loving Gig Harbor** as never before through strategic partnerships with the YMCA, WIC, the Rescue Mission, and other local organizations that we might not even be aware of. And the third strategy is **releasing leaders**. Did you know that Rachel is the sixteenth person in the last 30 years that we have raised up, trained, and sent off into ordained pastoral ministry? Some of them you will recognize. And we have five more in the pipeline! Not to mention the 21 full-time missionaries we have sent out during the same time. That's a remarkable record. More than one per year!

Our denomination has recognized our work. That's why we were selected as one of four churches to beta-test a new program for mentoring young leaders, an approach we believe will transform the way pastors are prepared. Today, out of every 100 seminarians that go into pastoral ministry, **only 10 will retire from pastoral ministry**. That's a 90% wash out; a devastating attrition rate. We think mentoring will make a huge difference, and we are doubling down in the training and releasing of young leaders beyond these walls.

In fact, last week you heard from the most recent product of this initiative. Didn't Pastor Ellis do a fantastic job sharing *his* passion for Beyond These Walls? Ellis is a prime example of what we are trying to do, and for those of you who don't know his story, I'd like for you to hear it from his own lips. (Visit [chapelhillpc.org/beyondthesewalls](http://chapelhillpc.org/beyondthesewalls) to watch Pastor Ellis' video.)

I know that pride is a sin, but if there is a holy version of pride, I'll bet you are feeling some of that right now, realizing the part that this church played in raising up and calling a young man of this caliber. Do any of you doubt that in Ellis, we've had a part in making a disciple that will make history?

That's what we are talking about in this sermon series through Matthew. How did Jesus shape his disciples? And what qualities must he call forth from *us* if we will be used by him to make an eternal difference? Today's answer: **Courage**. Pastor Megan read our text. It is the story of Jesus walking on the water. Three gospels include this story but only Matthew adds the part about Peter walking on the water...and sinking!

Many commentators—including some of the earliest church fathers—criticize Peter for what he did. They consider it rash. Peter was always leaping before he looked, wasn't he? That time when Jesus spoke of his crucifixion and Peter rebuked him for it. Or when Peter boasted that he would stay true to Jesus no matter what. Or the time in Gethsemane when he pulled out a sword and sliced off the ear of one of the men.

Peter was often impetuous and many commentators believe this is an example of that; rash, impulsive. What do you think? Should we be critical of Peter for this stunt? I don't think so, because of Jesus' response to him! Jesus often knocked Peter down a peg or two when he needed it, didn't he? "Put away the sword, Peter. He that lives by the sword shall die by the sword." "Peter, I tell you, tonight before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." Or this ultimate slap down: "Get thee behind me, Satan!" When Peter said or did something stupid, Jesus had no problem rebuking him.

But look what happened here. Jesus identifies himself to the terrified disciples: "*Take heart; it is I.*" But the Greek actually says, "*Courage. I am!*" Remember when God spoke to Moses in the burning bush and told him his name? Yahweh. I am! That's what Jesus says here. "Courage, I am, do not be afraid." And after hearing this, Peter makes the most bizarre request. He cries out, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." And what does Jesus say? "Come!" He might have replied, "Oh Peter, you foolish, impulsive man; there you go again. Just stay in the boat. I'll be right there." It wouldn't be the first time Jesus gave Peter a slap down. But that's not what Jesus said. He said to his eager-beaver disciple, "Come."

And notice: what exactly did Peter ask to do? He **didn't** say, "Command me to walk on water." He said, "Command me to **come to you** on the water." It wasn't the spectacle Peter was asking for. He wasn't trying to one-up the other disciples. He wanted to be with Jesus. I think Peter was growing up! He was learning that the safest place to be—especially in times of tumult—is **as close to Jesus as you can get**. And if it meant joining him on top of the water, that's what he would do. And notice this, too. He didn't just jump out of the boat. He said to Jesus, "Command me." Only when he received the command of Jesus, did he move. And then Simon Peter walked on water!

Yes, it's true he noticed the waves, he got fearful, he began to sink. Yes, it's true that he got a chewing out from Jesus. But really...do you think Jesus' heart was in it? Don't you imagine that Jesus was a *little* proud of Peter? That he would rise above his fear, muster up his courage, and step out of the boat toward his master?

One of the most courageous—and scary—things to pray is, "Jesus, command me." Don't you think? To say, "Lord, I want you to tell me what to do. You give the command, and whatever it is, whatever the risk, whatever the cost, I will obey." Does it mean that we might look foolish? Of course it does. We might fail. We might sink! In fact, one ancient theologian criticized Peter for getting out of the boat and praised the 11 disciples who remained inside. He considered the boat an allegory for the church. There they were, huddled together safely within the walls of the church, waiting for Jesus to come aboard so they could worship him.

I'm sorry. I don't see that way at all. I think the 11 were weenies by comparison. We may mock Peter for his impulsiveness. We may criticize him for losing faith when he saw the waves. But give him this: *he* was the only one who was *all in*. He was the one who bid Jesus command him to come. He was the only other human being ever to walk on top of water. And when he began to sink beneath the waves, *he* was the only one who experienced the saving touch of Christ who raised him from death to life and escorted him to safety. Peter was marked by this moment of the supernatural: this moment when, despite the circumstances, despite his fears, he stepped out in courage to be near Jesus.

I consider this a parable for this moment in the life of our church. It is so easy for Christians to remain in the boat, to remain behind walls, safe, secure, coddled, comfortable. It is hard—some might even say crazy—to step beyond these walls and into a tumultuous world. It takes courage. And there's a chance we will fail or sink. **But if it is Christ calling us to come**, what better place to be? The elders of this church—your elders—have prayed to Christ and asked what he commands us to do. We believe he answered. We believe he wants us to step courageously beyond our walls, to give ourselves away as never before. One woman in our church told her husband this week, "You know what I really like about BTW? That we have the courage to dream big."

And when your elders and pastors ask you to step out in faith—to make a sacrificial, commitment to eliminate \$5 million in debt and free up \$600,000 per year to move beyond these walls as never before—we are only asking you to do what we have already done. Every

elder, every pastor, has made our commitment. Cyndi and I will give our largest gift ever to Chapel Hill, and others have done the same. In fact, a group of about 100 families have made advance commitments; have pledged early so as to offer encouragement to the rest of us. This group covers the spectrum. Lay leaders who can write a large check and those whose check will be smaller but just as sacrificial. Every elder, every pastor, staff members, all have joined with these few dozen families to provide inspiration. To be the first ones out of the boat and to invite the rest of you to join us courageously.

Two weeks ago, that group came together for a time of worship when we laid our pledges on the altar and knelt in prayer. When they were totaled up, the amount committed by this small and diverse group frankly blew my mind. Would you like to hear what was pledged that night? \$2,640,450. Doesn't that inspire you? With a few dozen families, we are over half way to our financial goal.

But do you remember our number one goal? 100% participation. An elder and I visited a LifeGroup this week that some questions about BTW including what we mean by 100% participation. Just this: that every person who considers Chapel Hill their church home participates at some level. It might be a three-year sacrifice like you've never made before. (We need a lot of those.) It might be a more modest one-time gift. But what we are saying is, this cannot be the vision and work of a few families. This vision--to eliminate our debt and then move beyond these walls as never before—is a vision for the whole church. Everyone. All we are asking is that you do what Peter did in this story: Ask Jesus to command you. (Not Pastor Mark. Not the Session. Ask Jesus.) And then, whatever he says, obey. Step out in courage.

In two weeks, the rest of us will offer our commitment cards to the Lord. I know you are talking and praying at home. I urge you to fill out both sides. We want to celebrate every person who is taking a courageous step forward in generosity, wherever you are on that journey.

And for the sake of transparency and clarity, the Session will host a Town Hall Question and Answer meeting this Thursday at 6:00 p.m. in the sanctuary. Most of our elders will be here, and we will do our best to answer any questions regarding Beyond These Walls. We believe in this vision. We think it is noble. We think it is courageous. And we invite you to listen for the call of Jesus and to step out of the boat with us.