

Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, February 25, 2024
"Wandering Heart: Rescue Me from Danger"

Young at Heart Message

As most of you know, I've gotten into rock climbing since I've moved to Calgary.

And, perhaps unfortunately for you, I've realized that rock climbing makes for good examples in sermons, weirdly enough.

So, let's talk about rock climbing for a minute!

I'm not a stellar rock climber, but I am getting better at it, a little bit.

I've been working really hard on learning to climb routes that have minor overhangs.

There are lots of different ways that an overhang can look, but I'll show you two examples:

This is an example of an almost horizontal overhang:



Clearly, that's not me.

Here's me:

Here's the
overhang



That might not seem like it would be difficult, but you'll just have to believe me that it is – especially if you are just getting started on learning how to do overhangs.

Now, this picture is from this past weekend, and that climb is at a climbing location that's different than the place I usually go.

So, I was able to do this climb because they have some overhangs at this location that are a bit better for beginners.

But, what I really want to talk about is a climb I've been trying so hard to master at the location we usually go to.

I haven't been able to do it.

Sadly, I don't have any photos, but what's happening is I can get to one particular spot, and I cannot figure out how to get over it to get to the top of the overhang.

I've tried about 10 times now. My arms get too tired and weak before I can reach the next hold.

Metaphorically, I begin to sink.

Every time I try this climb, I think I'm going to do something differently, or I'm going to figure out a new way to move my arms so I can reach the next hold.

Every time, there's a voice that says it will be different this time – just have faith.

And every time, I feel like I fail.

Like Peter, I listened to that voice that says "climb," and every time, I get to that same spot, and I falter and I start to sink.

Unlike Peter, there's no one to reach out a hand and catch me – or perhaps there is, in the sense that I am harnessed in and there's no real risk of falling.



But here's my
question.

Have I failed?

If not, why not?

The Message

Alright, I'd love to talk about rock climbing all day, but let's shift gears and talk about Peter instead.

There are two ways (at least) that I could preach about this passage on Peter, and of course pastors typically choose one of the two ways.

I could preach about Peter's lack of faith.

Peter essentially says "hey Jesus, if you tell me to, I'll walk on water toward you...really! Looks easy..."

And then he starts to walk toward Jesus, and he becomes aware of his surroundings, loses confidence, and begins to sink.

We could talk about how he loses faith in this moment and needs Jesus to rescue him. We could cast him as a sinful doubter.

But looking at it this way leads us to believe that this is a failure on Peter's part.

More importantly, it leads us to wonder if, every time we struggle, God sees us as failures.

I don't care to look at it this way.

First of all, Peter isn't Jesus – he isn't the Messiah, and he isn't the Son of God. He's a normal guy trying to figure out faith, muddling through life just like the rest of us.

He's wrestling with faith and trust in Jesus just like most of us do from time to time.

Not to mention, of all the disciples in the boat, he's the only one who even attempted to walk on water.

Is he a sinful doubter?

Or, is he the only one with the bold courage required to take a leap of faith—or to willingly step into the storm?

I know that my physical ability to get over the overhang climb I've been wrestling with is limited.

And yet, I will continue to try over and over again, and maybe someday I'll get it. Or maybe I won't, but that's not what matters.

Just like sinking isn't what matters in Peter's story.

What matters is two things:

1. That Peter took a leap of faith and stepped out onto the water and tried something that defies the laws of nature and that no human is actually capable of doing in the first place, and,
2. That he knew that if he did falter, Jesus would not let him drown – that Jesus would rescue him.

Peter took a risk because he trusted that Jesus would rescue him if things didn't go as he expected.

It might not have been pretty – he may have been wet and cold, scared and a bit shaky after the rescue. But he was certain Jesus would rescue him.

I think it's easy to get confused when Jesus follows up his rescue with "You surely don't have much faith. Why do you doubt?"

But, I don't think this was intended to make Peter feel ashamed or feel like a failure. It feels more tongue-in-cheek to me.

I could imagine Jesus giving Peter a sly smile here, knowing that what he just did was actually amazing and showed incredible faith.

Doubt is a normal and important element in fostering a healthy spiritual life, and the fact that we see Peter experience it helps us relate to him.

We experience doubt too – all the time!

But, we also see Jesus extending his hand, reminding us that God is with us in every storm.

And knowing that God is there waiting to rescue us when we need it is comforting.

We cannot expect that life won't ever be hard. We all have enough life experience at this point that we know this isn't true.

But, we can know that when we step off that boat, Jesus is waiting, hand outstretched, to catch us.

We may not come out of that water looking like rainbows and roses because life sometimes wears us down.

But if we reach out a hand and ask Jesus to rescue us, he is ready and waiting.

What that looks like may not always be what we expect, and we may not always be able to see that it is Jesus until we are out of the water and safely on land again.

Peter shows us that doubt and questions are not a reason that Jesus would leave us to flounder on our own.

The storm is raging around Peter, the wind is howling – of course he's going to experience fear and doubt. That is a very normal part of human existence and of our faith journeys.

The fact that we get to be flies on the wall – or perhaps seagulls in the air - as we watch Peter struggle with the same things we do is helpful for us.

It helps us to feel normal when we have questions, or when we step off the boat and suddenly feel like we're in danger.

It is reassuring to hear the Good News from Peter's story – that Jesus seeks us and reaches out to rescue us from danger.

Jesus reaches for us even if we have not yet extended our hand toward him.

So, when the storm is raging, when the wind is howling, when you feel like your attempts to stay on the water are feeble at best, and impossible at worst, know that Jesus reaches for you through it all.

Even if you don't have the energy or the courage or the strength, even if you feel like your faith is shaken, Jesus is there to rescue you.

He may be difficult to recognize because he may reach out in many different ways.

But he is always reaching for you.

May you take comfort in knowing that no matter how turbulent the storm may be, Jesus is reaching out his hand for you.

Yesterday, today, tomorrow, and always, Jesus has been there and will always be there for you.

Amen.

Let us pray:

God, we often have Wandering Hearts like Peter - one moment, we feel confident in our faith and certain that nothing could cause us to sink. The next moment, we find ourselves in sinking.

In these moments God, we are so grateful that you are there to reach for us, to pull our heads above water, and to rescue us from danger.

God, sometimes when we are sinking, it can feel to us like we're failing you. But you've shown us that you don't see it as failure. You see it as a leap of faith - a chance to try and even if we don't succeed, we've demonstrated our faith in you by simply trying.

We pray, God, that you will never let us sink and you will always reach for us when we feel uncertain, afraid, or like the storm around us is too much to handle. Rescue us from danger, again and again. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.