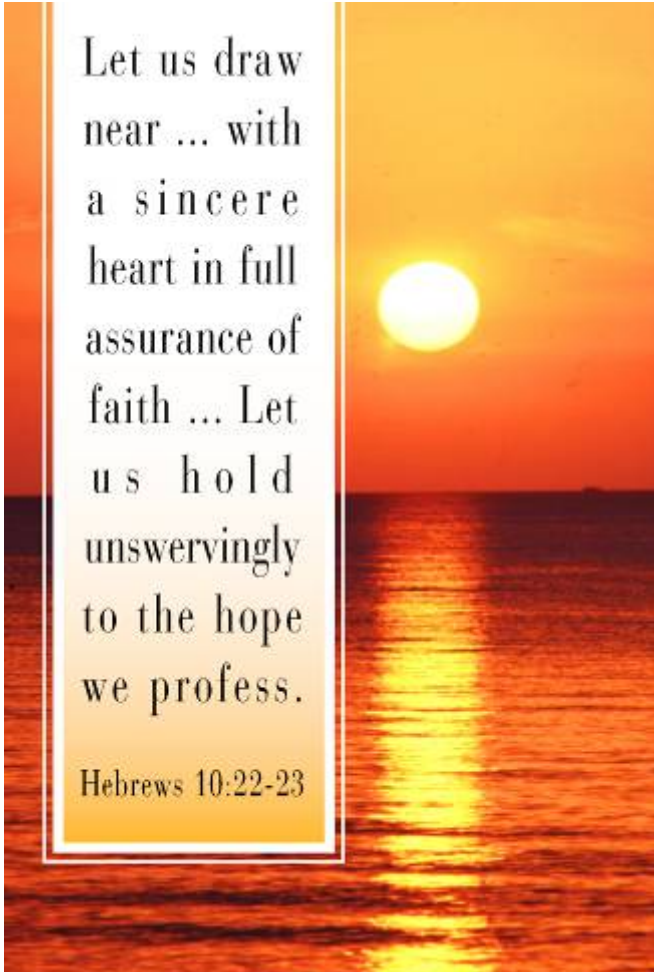


## STEPPING OUT IN FAITH

Dr. Fred Fourie ~Sunday, April 23, 2006



Let us draw near ... with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith ... Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess.

Hebrews 10:22-23

**Matthew 14:22-33** Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus immediately reached out his hand and

caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." Here ends the Scripture reading.

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Many years ago I had the privilege and opportunity to visit one of the most famous, **and also the most difficult to reach Monastery** in the entire world. Monks who wanted to live entirely away from the world built their Monastery in the valley of Meteora, in Greece, **perched high on a cliff several hundred feet in the air**. The only way to reach the monastery **is to be suspended in a basket which was pulled to the top by several monks who pulled and tugged with all their strength**. I will never forget how terrifying that ride up the steep cliff in that basket was. About half-way up I was dead scared, especially when I noticed that the rope by which the basket was suspended looked old and frayed. With a trembling voice I asked **the monk** who was riding with me in the basket **"how often do you replace the rope?"** He thought for a moment and answered brusquely, **"Whenever it breaks!" His little joke didn't help at all.**

Swinging in that small basket, high up in the air, my faith was tested like seldom before. Since those days, back in 1972, I have changed and Christian Ministry has changed. What do you make out of this changing world of ours? Sometimes I **again get that feeling** of swinging in a basket high up in the air! How do you respond **from the pulpit** to a world where terrorism, **changing of values** and **charting of formerly unknown territories** are commonplace? Some times it is difficult not to be overcome

by fear. Ministers and Christian leaders who earnestly study and wish to grow are challenged to adapt, to grow and to keep rethinking traditional concepts of ministry!

There are answers to be found in the Scripture. We have just heard the beautiful Gospel narration of a little group of fearful disciples on a stormy sea. The wind was against them, they were far from land -- and superstitious as they were -- they were convinced that they had seen a ghost --- somebody actually walking on the water!

At that moment they were as **jumpy and squirmy as a long tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs!** Sometimes you and I pretend to be very self assured and without fear. But, if people could only see deeper than the surface they would know that we are really very unsure.

Here is my favorite story about heroism! When a sudden storm blew up at sea, a young woman, leaning against the ship's rail, lost her balance and was thrown overboard. Immediately another figure plunged into the waves beside her and held her up until a lifeboat rescued them. To everyone's astonishment the hero was the oldest man on the voyage.

That evening he was given a party in honor of his bravery. "Speech, speech!" the other passengers cried. The old gentleman rose slowly and looked around at the enthusiastic gathering. "There's just one thing I'd like to know," he said testily. "Who pushed me?"

Many people are not as brave as they pretend to be! The early followers of Jesus Christ were in panic until they heard the voice of Jesus saying, **"Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid."** What beautiful words to the fearful heart: **"It is I."**

Have you discovered in times of deepest distress that you are not alone and that God was much nearer than you ever imagined? When the storms of life are raging, when all of life seems out of control, when we feel totally helpless, Our faith and assurance of God's presence carry us through.

Peter said to Jesus, **"Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."** Faith was beginning to stir in Simon Peter. He was starting to believe that he could do the things Jesus called him to do. **He was willing to step out of the boat.** All Jesus said was **"come,"** and Peter took that first step. To his great surprise he did not sink. He was walking on the water with Jesus. He took another step. It was a moment of triumph. It was a victory of faith.

In the Quo Vadis legend the same Apostle was panicking again, this time fleeing away from the dangers of an Anti-Christian Rome. Once again he saw the Master and stepped back into his challenging Ministry. We also still believe that FAITH INVOLVES OUR VENTURING OUT, DOING THINGS WE HAD NEVER DREAMED OF, TRUSTING THAT GOD WILL TAKE CARE OF US. Faith is not simply a passive trusting that God will come to us when we are down and out. **Faith is an active process of living a vital, full life-- going places we would never go, loving people we would never love, living life to the fullest because we have met the Master.**

You remember how the story ends. Peter steps out on the water and begins his walk of faith. Just then, though, the wind kicks up, and *Peter takes his eyes off Jesus.* As soon as he does that he begins to sink. Truly frightened now he cries out, **"Lord, save me!"** **It's actually kind of an amusing scene.** Impetuous Simon Peter has stepped out on the water, but now he's having second thoughts. The message of the Bible is clear: If you want to step out in faith ---- remember to keep your eyes fixed on your God!

Is this the message you need to hear today? **Keep your eyes fixed on the master!** There are times when the waves beat around us and the storm clouds make visibility very difficult. Jesus calls us to step out in faith trusting in God. **If we keep our eyes fixed on him, and not on the fierce waves beating around us, faith will take over and we will complete the journey, without sinking.**

**Quo Vadis, Domine? Master, where are you heading?  
Call us to walk with you ..... to the very end.  
AMEN**