

Moving Forward in Faith ~ August 8, 2008
(Stepping Out of the Boat) | Kings 19:9-18; Matthew 14:22-33; Psalm 85:8-13

My computer has been driving me crazy. I love using it and depend on it on a daily basis for many things. It keeps me connected with the outside world through the Internet. It keeps me in touch with my daughters scattered from Wisconsin to California. It provides me with lots of information: from needed word definitions to instructions on new ways of casting on knitting projects. It is a source of more information than I will ever use.

But, for some reason, it will not allow me to install a printer on it. Now, before you tell me I need to disable my firewall and virus protection systems to allow a foreign substance in, I have done that. Before you mention that maybe the printer is not compatible with Windows XP, I have checked that out and it is. And, before you tell me to double click on the “troubleshooting” button in the “faxes and printers icon,” I have done that, ad nauseum. But, in spite of all these attempts to make things work, do you think I will stop trying? The answer is, “No.” I persist to move on in the faith that somehow a different little window will finally open up and the connection will be made.

I suspect I might have more luck stepping out of a boat or canoe and finding myself able to stride across the water. However, I think I might have just about as much luck as Peter did when he tried a similar walk. I am not so sure this failed attempt means that we have so “little faith” as is indicated in our scripture reading. If Peter had “little faith” he would not have stepped out of the boat at all. He tried to do what was considered impossible—that takes a lot of faith.



CORNER.

If we faced life with little or no faith we would find that we would grind to a halt. We would never try anything new and would lose a great deal of the joy of life. If we did not have faith that every new day brings another chance to figure things out we would become locked in our own old patterns and designs. We would become stuck and stymied, not aware that better things are just around the next

I have a friend, whom I cherish, who leads a very circumspect, controlled life. He is not at all spontaneous, doesn't take many risks but, at the same time, he does step out of the boat into new environments moving forward in faith that he will be able to make something better. He has been very successful in doing this.

Most recently, he has spent a few years on a project that has never had a clearly defined outcome. Yet, he has persisted in looking for new avenues that will lead to what will be best for all concerned. He has managed to handle many complexities while doing this,

not the least of which have been living in a foreign environment and in a culture with a language that is not his own. I admire him for his strength and courage in doing work that has not always been rewarding. I respect him for his ability to step out of his boat into troubled waters and to keep from sinking in disappointment and despair.

There are times, when we step out of the boat and take a chance on a new direction, that we wonder where God is. We try to hear God's voice within us or from without offering guidance and encouragement. There is so much noise around us that we must feel a little like Elijah standing at the mouth of the cave intently listening but hearing nothing for a while. Finally, when our troubled minds are stilled we can hear God in the deep silence of our souls and we know that we are going in the right direction no matter what distractions might come along. We discern that all will be well in our change of direction and we have the strength to resist the temptation to hop back into our safe boat, to give up and row to a safe shore as quickly as we are able. It is easy to remain safe and secure on shore or in a boat no matter how wildly it may rock. But, we are called from the boat and from the shore in many areas of our lives. How we answer the summons is up to each of us.

We are called to reach out and extend our faith through the way we live our lives and the way we treat others. When we have courage and face whatever it is life deals us with calmness and the assurance that God is on our side, we can make great strides in going about the work we have been given. When we understand that each of us is a precious child of God, we find the faith that grounds us in an uncertain world and that sustains us as we seek to make that world a better place in which to dwell. We make the world a better place one step at a time. One kind action at a time. We look for the presence of God in others and understand that we all have been created in God's image and that others, in boats of their own, are seeking the strength and courage and faith to step out and make their own pathways through the water. We understand and offer our support. We encourage those embarking on a brave new journey.

Some journeys we do not see, they are not physical but spiritual. They move inward before they can reach outward. They are no less journeys than those we may observe. All ventures that move us in a positive direction beyond where we stand are worthy of support and encouragement. There are times when we become the voice in the silence heard by others. At those times we reveal the God that dwells within us when we lend our hearts and hands to those around us.

Remember, that no matter where we may be in life, whether we are running away and hiding in a cave like Elijah, in fear for his life, or whether we are like Peter, boldly stepping out onto the waves to begin a walk in faith, we are supported and upheld by a God who will never let us go.

--Amen