

Taking Those First Steps Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28; Romans 10:5-15; Matthew 14:22-33;
Psalm 105:1-6, 16-22 8-7-05

Have you ever seen a child take his or her first steps? Usually they are pretty tentative and very halting and more than a bit wobbly. If there is a piece of furniture close at hand, the little person will most likely hold onto it and walk along its edge keeping a solid balance. But, when encouraged by a parent with arms stretched out, he or she will actually let go and, with some confidence, venture out beyond the known into the unknown. Of course, the first few or even several attempts end in a glorious bounce on a little bottom. But, in spite of early setbacks, we all seem to learn to walk upright through the rest of life.

Imagine Jesus, arms outstretched to Peter encouraging him to walk to him over the water. Peter had just seen Jesus do what seemed to be impossible. In spite of that, Peter stepped over the side of the boat and walked to Jesus. Having his focus broken by the wind, he found himself a victim of his own fear and he began to sink. Jesus reached out and grabbed him and scolded him for being a person of little faith.

It is a very big challenge to take our first steps beyond a realm we know as familiar and safe. It can be a very fearful thing to do. There are ways of handling that fear.

Do you remember that old song from the old musical, fifty years old next year, "The King and I?"

Whenever I feel afraid
I hold my head erect
And whistle a happy tune
So no one will suspect
I'm afraid.

While shivering in my shoes
I strike a careless pose
And whistle a happy tune
And no one ever knows
I'm afraid.

The result of this deception
Is very strange to tell
For when I fool the people
I fear I fool myself as well!

I whistle a happy tune
And ev'ry single time
The happiness in the tune
Convinces me that I'm not afraid.

Make believe you're brave
And the trick will take you far.
You may be as brave
As you make believe you are.

You may be as brave
As you make believe you are.

If we believe, really believe in ourselves, we will discover that we can do amazing new things as individuals and as a community.

Perhaps, if Peter had remembered to put his trust and faith and belief more fully in Jesus, he would have stayed safely on the top of the waves. But, he faltered, as so many of us do in life when we take our eyes off the prize, off the possibility of what might be. If we are too fearful to go ahead we remain stuck in one place or we even might move backward.

If we become consumed by the “what ifs,” we lose focus of all the wonderful “what will bes.” Frozen in place, we sink beneath the waves of life. We close our eyes to the possibilities that are around us. We often do this because it is simply easier to keep from looking beyond the secure little boxes we live in and refuse to try to do new things. I am not sure God wants us to always be safe and secure.

Joseph’s security was completely taken from him when his jealous brothers tossed him into a pit and sold him to a passing caravan. Joseph was an arrogant young fellow and that might just be what helped him come out on top in Egypt. He adapted and adjusted to a whole new world around him and made the very most of it. From being a very spoiled child he grew into a wise and giving man. I am sure he had times of great fear. Who would not if everything familiar was taken away? But he landed on his feet and moved forward possibly discovering that he was just as brave as he made believe he was.

The power of our minds is an amazing thing. We can think our selves into places and situations where we never need to be. Places that keep us imprisoned and terribly unhappy. On the other hand we can think ourselves into the fullness of life. We can find ourselves happy and fulfilled. We are what we think we are. It is amazing and frightening how we can control what we become just through our thoughts. If we reach out to others with love and acceptance and forgiveness, we not only give the wonderful grace of God to them but also to our selves. All it requires is that we dare to take those first steps from the place where we feel safe and secure to a new place which may be slightly strange at first but is the place God wants us to go and stay for a while.

First steps bravely and boldly taken will carry us all far beyond where we are at this moment in time. Whether we whistle a happy tune to overcome our fear of new places and new spaces or not, we must always understand that life is a process that involves moving from here to there either physically or through entertaining new thoughts. If we have faith that God is with us and beckons to us with open arms, our first steps will take us far beyond where we are right now. Then we can all sing because we’re happy, and sing because we are free from the fears that threaten to bind us. Amen