

“What’s In Your Hand?”

Matthew 14:13-33

I want to thank Pastor Eric for inviting me to speak here today. Before last week in Painesdale, I hadn’t spoken in church this way since I was 18, so please bear with me as we walk together in the presence of the Lord this morning. My name is Ed Myers. I grew up in Romulus, Michigan, right next to Detroit Metro Airport. After high school, I joined the Army. They asked me to go into Mortuary Affairs, which I agreed to do, and when I got out of the service, I spent some time as an autopsy technician in Detroit.

I earned a bachelor’s degree in Language, Literature and Writing for Secondary Education at Eastern Michigan University and then moved to Georgia, where I met my wife Heather. Our three children are Gabrielle, Paul, and Sarah. We moved up here almost two years ago, and we’re glad we did.

My passions are Christ and stories. Currently, I spend my time with my family, serving God, making art, and writing. When I’m not doing any of that, I play video games, usually with my family. But enough about me. We’re here to worship God and to hear a word from Him.

[54] A Navy captain and a Marine captain go out fishing together. A storm comes up and they both find themselves in the water. The Marine captain pulls himself back into the boat and notices that the Navy captain is struggling. He can’t swim. The Marine helps him back into the boat. As he does so, the Navy captain says, “Please don’t tell anyone. If the Navy finds out I can’t swim, I’ll be disgraced.” The Marine replies, “Your secret is safe with me. I couldn’t stand it if my men discovered that I can’t walk on water.”

[55] When we hear someone use the expression “walking on water,” we think of a comparison to Christ. If a person says someone can walk on water, we understand the speaker means there’s something extraordinary, perhaps even god-like, about that someone or her actions. Conversely, we know the opposite is true as well: Saying someone can’t walk on water suggests something commonplace or even negative about that person.

[56] In Matthew 14, just after the beheading of John the Baptist, we read again the origin of the old expression. Jesus walks upon the water, the disciples become fearful at the sight, Jesus tells them not to be afraid, and then something

happens that we might sometimes forget and that the world overlooks—Peter asks Jesus to command him to come to Him on the water. He does, and then Peter does, at least at first. He then grows fearful and starts sinking, only to be caught by Christ and brought back to the boat. It is not only Christ who walked on water, even if only for a few steps. Peter, the man who said in Luke 5:8, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” and later denied Him three times (Matthew 26:75), walked with Jesus upon the water.

But look at the difference in the two views. The world says there is something extraordinary about a person who can walk on water, but Peter certainly was not extraordinary, unless you mean he was extra-ordinary, as if to say he was plainer than others. What was it then that allowed him to walk on water with Jesus? Did he have an extraordinary faith? In Matthew 14:31, Christ says to him, “You of little faith,” so that’s not it. What made the difference? I think it’s because this man who walked with Christ and witnessed so many miracles knew something we often overlook.

In verse 28, Peter says to Jesus, “Command me to come to you on the water.” Whether the translation you read says, “bid,” “command,” or “tell me,” the word in Greek means “command” or “order.” Why is this important? Think on this a moment. Again and again, time after time, Peter had witnessed something connected to the miracles of Christ—a command obeyed:

- John 2:7 “Fill the jars with water.”
- Mark 5:41 “Little girl, I say to you, get up!”
- John 5:8 “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.”
- John 11:43 “Lazarus, come forth!”
- Luke 9:13 “You give them something to eat.”

Every time someone obeyed the command of Christ, Peter saw the impossible become more than possible—he watched the fantastical become real, and he knew that if Christ gave him a command and he obeyed, nothing could stop him from participating in the miraculous like so many others under the instruction of the Master.

[57] But something stopped him. It says he was afraid (Matthew 14:30). Jesus asks him why he doubted. What stopped Peter? Peter did. Don’t get me wrong. I am certainly not judging the man. I cannot imagine what it must have

been like out there in the dark, the waves rising and falling, and the wind howling, dark clouds hanging over everything, blotting out the stars above. In the darkest moments, how quickly do all of us tend toward fear and doubt? Again and again, we read in Scripture the words, “Do not be afraid.” More than a few times, we also read “have faith,” “trust in the Lord,” and “believe.”

Acts 16:31                      “Believe in the Lord,” which is Christ.

John 1:7, John 12:36        “Believe in the Light,” which is Christ.

Luke 24:25, Acts 10:43    “Believe the prophets,” who testify of Christ.

John 3:11 & 32, John 12:38    Believe the testimony of Christ.

All of this tells us that fear and doubt are common enemies of followers of the Way.

[58] Out there on the water, with the Author of Creation mere feet away, Peter’s faith was tested and found wanting. But the loving hand of the Master grabbed him and bore him up, over the waves, back to the boat. Friends, brothers and sisters, here’s a lesson God would have us learn: When we obey the command of God, nothing can stop us but ourselves. We may be tested, and we may fail the test, but Jesus is more than capable of bearing us up and over the trials of this life, even when we have only a little faith. Remember, faith in God as small as a seed can move mountains (Matthew 17:20).

[59] And what are the commands of God? While we read many in Scripture, the command to love summarizes them all:

Love God with all that you are, think, feel, and do (Luke 10:27),

love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:39), and

love your enemies—pray for them (Matthew 5:44), bless and do not curse (Romans 12:14).

Against love, there is no law (Galatians 5:22-23). Indeed, love is the fulfillment of the Law of God (Romans 13:10). Whatever you do, give it your all for the glory of God (Colossians 3:23). Wherever you go, go humbly in the Name of Christ (Romans 12:3). And love. Ever and always, love, for God is love (1 John 4:16). It is His kindness and goodness that lead us to repentance (Romans 2:4).

[60] But someone may say, “I have very little means. What can I do for the One who owns the cattle on a thousand hills?” Only trust and obey. In Exodus 3, when God spoke to Moses from the burning bush, Moses struggled with the idea

that he should be God’s instrument in such an important event as freeing the people of God who had become slaves to the power of this world, represented by Pharaoh. In verse 11 he asks, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?”

[61] In reply, God tells Moses what he is to do and say, what would happen as a result, mentioning the wonders He would perform among the Egyptians before Pharaoh would let them go. Not only that, but in Exodus 3:21, God tells Moses He would make the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the Israelites so that they would not leave empty-handed. As a result, they would carry with them the treasures of Egypt, plundering their oppressors.

[62] And how did Moses respond to this? “What if they do not believe me or listen?” (Exodus 4:1) Like many of us, myself often included, Moses couldn’t grasp the fact that God’s plan for His people involved a specific plan for him. Moses, a murderer raised privileged, apart from the suffering of his own people, who fled in fear, would feature prominently in a confrontation between God and the ruler of Egypt. How understandable and relatable, and yet how frustrating it must be for God when He waits for us to do as He commands because He has a plan for His people unto the very end of the ages. But God is patient. God is kind. What did God say to him? “What is that in your hand?” (Exodus 4:2) Of course, God knew the answer. He asked it, however, not for Himself, but for the benefit of the one He intends to send according to His will for His people, and this includes you and me today.

[63] “What is that in your hand?” It was a shepherd’s staff, a foreshadowing of the cross, and God wrought miracles through it. It was only a staff, and God freed one nation and judged another with it. Much later, when God’s own son came to free His people, wherever they dwelled, we would again hear a very similar message. When the hungry masses followed Jesus, what did He say to His disciples? “You give them something to eat.” They had only five loaves of bread and two fish, but they obeyed. And what happened? “They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.” (Luke 9:17)

[64] Christ took what they had and made it more than they needed. Brothers and sisters, this lesson is no less meaningful today: When we trust and

obey the command of God, He takes what we have in our hands and causes it to be more than sufficient for the tasks before us.

[65] As an example of someone whose life serves as a testimony to the truth of this message, George Washington Carver was merely a man who prayed daily for God to show him things that he might use to help others. You won’t see that fact written about much in the media, encyclopedias, or history books, but it’s true. A visit to his museum at Tuskegee University in Alabama will confirm it. You may have heard of Mr. Carver or Dr. Carver as the man who invented peanut butter, but, because of God, he was so much more. Because of Christ, he did so much more.

I say Mr. Carver or Dr. Carver because during the man’s life, he never completed a doctorate. He said that people often assumed he was more educated because of all he had done and discovered, but it was not the case. Today, some people continue to address him as Dr. Carver from a position of respect and reverence precisely for all he achieved. And how did he manage it? Carver walked humbly with God every day, every hour, every moment. He said, “It is not the style of clothes one wears, neither the kind of automobile one drives, nor the amount of money one has in the bank, that counts. These mean nothing. It is simply service that measures success.”

As a result, from the humble commitment to obedience of one man through the equally humble peanut, Carver developed over 300 useful products that changed the lives of many. Some of his creations include laundry soap, rubbing oil, quinine, shaving cream, dyes for leather and cloth, wood stains, a variety of paper products, insecticide, glue, gasoline, plastics, diesel fuel, printers ink, linoleum, and nitroglycerine. He was also an impressive artist, and I would encourage you to learn a great deal more about the man if you ever find yourself near Tuskegee, Alabama, by visiting his museum at the university there. It’s time well spent. I found it more inspiring and encouraging than I could’ve imagined considering the dried up husk of a life well-lived one usually encounters in history texts and classrooms.

[66] But someone will ask, “What do I do to obey the command of God?” First, read the Bible every day. Why? Because through the Word of God comes increased understanding of the will of God. Paul’s letter to the Romans teaches

that, as our lives and thoughts mature spiritually, we will learn to know God’s pleasing and perfect will (Romans 12:1-2). And what is the command of God? You might as well ask a similar question to the one found in John 6:28: “What must we do to do the works God requires?” The answer is the same to you today as it was to them back then: “Believe in the One He has sent.”

What more does He ask of you than this? To do what is right, love mercy and kindness, and walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8). How do we do that? Love, for God is love. If you do these things and you feel a lack of peace within your spirit, then you must ask God for wisdom and guidance, and listen for answers moment by moment. And when you consider a task before you, remember God doesn’t need more than what is in your hands to work the miraculous through you.

Living a life filled with the presence of God is not a list of do’s and don’ts. It’s not a system of legalities and loopholes. Christ’s burden is light, His yoke easy (Matthew 11:30). Love. Believe. Trust. And obey the commands of Christ. When we do, nothing can stop us but ourselves. When we do, He causes that which is in our hands to be more than sufficient to the task. Friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, our Lord waits upon the tossing waves of this life for us to echo Peter’s request: Oh Lord, please command us to go where you would lead us this day. Please lead us to a place where our trust has no borders.

Brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus Christ, I want to pray for you a prayer prayed every day by George Washington Carver for all of the people the Lord brought into his life, whether he knew them well or not:

May God ever bless, keep, guide, and continue to prosper you in your uplifting work for humanity, be it great or small, is my prayer. And may those whom He has redeemed learn to walk and talk with Him, not only daily and hourly, but momentarily, through the things that He has created.

In Jesus’ Name, amen.