

"Leap of Faith"

An act of believing in or attempting something whose existence or outcome cannot be proved.
Webster's Dictionary

Bobby Crawford was our paper boy. At 14, he was taller than most kids his age, lanky and kind of goofy looking like most kids whose bodies grew faster than their parents could properly clothe them. Bobby was one of the first kids I met when our family moved from a farm in the Kent Valley along the Green River to a new home on the North end of Lake Meridian atop of East Hill in Kent. My younger sister and I had gone from having literally no one to play with on the farm, except each other, to a neighborhood full of kids; some older, some younger, and a whole lot of kids our age.

In the summer-time all the action was on Wilson's dock. A wide dock that stretched into to Lake Meridian some thirty feet complete with a diving board at its end. However, for myself and my younger sister, the action stopped at the end of the dock. Neither of us knew how to swim. And everyone else did.

I was determined to learn how to swim that first summer. There was a roped off area of the beach for kiddie swimming. I would go early in the morning or around dinner time, when no one else would be there to watch, and practice swimming in that roped off area.

One day Bobby Crawford convinced me that I had it down and we should try it. I don't know what I was thinking, but Bobby assured me that if anything happened he would rescue me. I remember pushing off from the dock. One arm over the other, and my legs thrashing like crazy. Five feet from the dock, ten feet from the dock, fifteen feet from the dock and then I made a fatal mistake. I looked back to see where Bobby was. I couldn't see him. Suddenly, I realized I was out in the middle of the Lake in water over my head. I didn't really know how to swim and I had foolishly trusted that idiot Bobby Crawford. So, you know what I did? Having come to my senses, and having realized the peril I was in, I immediately began to sink. Panic set in. I was screaming for Bobby, and thrashing around in the water.

Suddenly, Bobby came up underneath me, put his arms underneath me, and hauled me back to the dock.

He had slipped under the water and was going to follow me under the water. When I was back on the dock, shivering, shaking, and feeling stupid he kept saying to me, "What happened, you were doing fine?" All I could think of was, "I came to my senses, Bobby, and realized where I was; in water over my head, and when I turned back you weren't there! I was depending on you, trusting you in case something happened to me. When I realized, you weren't anywhere to be seen, I began to sink. I trusted you Bobby. I had faith in you."

Faith is a risk. Whenever you put your trust in someone or something you take a risk. This idea that faith is a risk is at the heart of today's Scripture readings. To begin to understand the new ways in which God would be revealed, Elijah had to risk looking for and listening for God in spaces and places other than the familiar, the expected, and traditional.

Accustomed to discerning the presence and power of God at work in the usual ways, using the usual props like a wind with hurricane force, or an earthquake, or fire; Elijah had to risk looking beyond what was known to him to find God in the unknown. That is, in a tiny whispering sound.

In today's gospel lesson, Peter is portrayed both physically and spiritually as risking a similar leap of faith. There was safety in Peter's boat as well as security. He certainly could have reasoned that waiting in his boat until Jesus came to him would be the best thing to do. But that is not faith. **Waiting in the boat is never faith.** Faith means freeing oneself from all else, from everything else one clings to for security, including reason to be bound to God alone. Peter had to leave the boat and risk his life on the sea to learn both his own weaknesses and the power of the Savior, Jesus. Without taking the risk, without getting out of the boat he would have perhaps never learned the power of faith.

But, even getting out of the boat, or pushing off from the dock, doesn't necessarily mean one will stay the course. In fact, it is precisely after one gets out of the boat, or pushes off from the dock to swim that one begins to take stock of his or her decision: "What was I thinking. I can't do this."

It was Jesus who had bid Peter come, and it was Jesus who would save him when he sank and called out, "Lord, save me."

The journey of faith begins with taking that first step out of the boat, out of the comfortable security of whatever it is that keeps you from developing a closer relationship with God.

Jesus bids us all to "Come," as he bid Peter. This is the call of Christ Jesus to each one of us, "Come." "Come." And, unless a definite step is taken, the call vanishes into thin air and the possibility of discipleship with it.

Ours' is a God who doesn't speak in the clap of thunder, or the raging fire, or the gale force winds, but ours' is a God who is found in the small things of life, like ordinary bread and wine that we receive by faith and makes us capable of doing extraordinary things, like granting one another forgiveness or risking personal loss by welcoming the lost, or the stranger, or the immigrant in our midst.

It is in our ordinary routines, our everyday relationships we hear Jesus summon us to "come," not to him, but to all whom Jesus came to save: the lost, the forgotten, the unwanted, the stranger, and the sinner. People just like ourselves. Jesus has come for us, rescued us, forgiven us, washed us in the waters of holy baptism and fed us at his own table; reconciling and reuniting us.

Jesus beckons us come, to get out of the boat, the boat, which by the way is one of the most popular metaphors for the church. To get out of the boat and come, come to brothers and sisters, strangers and

foreigners, the weak and the strong with the good news of the Gospel, the all-encompassing grace of God. This is our leap of faith.

A week after nearly drowning in Lake Meridian. I learned to swim. My father taught me. I knew that he wouldn't go under the water. I knew he would be there to save me.

It is with that kind of trust, that we go forward in faith; whether it is to forgive someone, or share what we have with someone, because we trust, i.e. we have faith in the promises of the Savior, Jesus Christ. This is the one in whom we put our trust even when the winds of change and the fires of danger swirl around us. For we know the God who comes to us in bread and wine. In the small, unassuming ways but always with a powerful love for us.