

“A Step Or Two Will DO”
August 13, 2017 – 8th of P./19 Ordinary

1 Kings 19:9-18

19:9 At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there. Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"
19:10 He answered, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away." 19:11 He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; 19:12 and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. 19:13 When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

ROMANS 10:13-15 For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

Matthew 14:22-33

14:22 Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. 14:23 And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, 14:24 but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. 14:25 And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. 14:26 But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. 14:27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." 14:28 Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." 14:29 He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. 14:30 But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" 14:31 Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" 14:32 When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 14:33 And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

A deep breath, a nervous glance to take in the surroundings, an intentional effort to ignore or at least squelch that anxious feeling in your stomach, an acknowledgement either consciously or subconsciously that this is something you have to do, you must do. “Just move feet,” you almost say out loud. “It will be o.k.” Which is, of course, yet to be seen, but it’s at least an honest attempt at self assurance. You know you have the support of those who stand with you, or behind you. Those who encourage you and want the best for you. Steely determination. Just a step to get started. Just a step or two will do and then you’ll be okay. There’s a slight nudge and you’re not sure if it’s someone nudging you or your own internal nudge. Words are spoken – ‘you can do this’ and again you don’t know if they’re in your head or from someone who has your back. ‘Just a step... or two...will do....’”

We rarely give it all that much thought, but so much of our lives have to do with placing our trust in others and stepping out in faith to accomplish something in our living. From our first tentative steps as children, to our first bike ride, to the day we get behind the wheel of a car, to those shaky steps down the aisle at a wedding, and back to watching first steps when as parents we are so glad that diapers pad the fall zone. As life goes on from event to event and experience to experience we find ourselves able to walk because someone is once again beside us, someone is calling to us,

someone is nudging us from behind, some force is inside of us, giving us the necessary confidence to take terribly tentative steps.

You know, or maybe you don't, or perhaps you are sure...or not... that God is watching over you. You know that life is all about trust. It is all about being willing to take calculated and uncalculated risks in our living. Most of the time we go blithely unaware of the unconscious decisions we make, but at other times in our living we find ourselves faced with important, sometimes terrible, troubling, confounding and difficult situations in our lives which call for bigger decisions. Times when we are given and take responsibility for others. Times when we must decide for ourselves how, when, and why we will take steps as tentative as those first ones we took in life.

There are times when for all the world it seems that all control, all ability to be self determining, all our resolve is stripped away by the circumstances of our lives. Days like yesterday in Charlottesville, when loose rhetoric and hate speech turn into violence. When everybody believes their perspective, their agenda, their torch to bear is the right way. And another summer storm, be it a literal wind and wave experience, or a more metaphorical experience of feeling as if in a storm, there is nevertheless the disquieting, disconcerting, alarming, sometimes perplexing, and always upsetting desire to be out of it, to be rescued. We are desperate to see those strong loving arms, that just fed thousands, held out to us saying, "come to me."

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A storm on the sea is a perfect metaphor for the world around us which is sometimes dark and chaotic. For life which has wave after relentless wave pound us. We know we have to act. To step forward. To sink or swim. And the nerve endings of our faithfulness jangle with energy.

In our faith, as in our lives, as if they can be separated, we face times when we have to make decisions. For ourselves. For others. We know we need to focus on the one who beckons us. Who calls us. Who challenges us to be faithful, to trust in him. But it's not always easy. We have that tendency to want to see if we can't figure this life thing out on our own, to see if we can

make our own way. And sometimes we do all right. Sometimes we get away with the bluff. Sometimes we do not. And we must admit our need.

Jesus has just performed a spectacular miracle in front of a crowd of 5000 men, besides women and children, and is about to take leave and give himself some privacy and solitude in order to pray with God. He dismisses the crowd, then he turns to you and your little group and tells you get into the boat, that he'll meet you on the other side of the lake. No problem. You do this all the time.

It is in fact what we do all the time. One step in front of another, day to day, experience to experience. It's life and to borrow a worn out cliché we're all in the same boat. Just like that little boat that day when Peter on behalf of all of us musters the courage, gathers his faith and does his best to walk on water. We're all in the same boat and it would seem almost always we are anxiously aware that there are dark clouds building on the horizon. Some new challenge, some new opportunity, some new threat. Something from which we need to be rescued, to be saved.

In faith we live for those moments when the storm is stilled, when Jesus takes us by the hand and leads us to safety. When Jesus steps onto the boat we're all in – with us. When we know that this one, who is worthy of our worship, who is 'truly the son of God, is with us. So that we, when following his call, will know that he, stand by us whatever storm lays over the horizon.

With that moment of clarity. With that assurance. With that faith. Life will never be the same. And always we are just a step or two away. We want to be able to step out in faith in the myriad of situations in our lives when just a little more courage, just a little more trust would make all the difference in our living. The message of faith is – just a step or two will do. But the steps aren't easy.

We're all in the same boat. Even Elijah, the great prophet, a man of stellar faith, who has championed his God his whole life, stands with us, backs against a wall as around us we witness the wind, and the earth shutters in unbelievable acts of violence and hatred, and when we wonder where the voice of God is and the whole earth quakes and is rocked by war, and still it seems as if God is silent, and then the firestorm of indifference and apathy, the consuming flames of poverty and corporate greed blaze before us as real a wildfire, and we, who would be faithful, must stand resolute and listen. And then it all stops. Earthquake, fire and storm – storm on the lake, tumult in our living – if we'll just listen – if we will allow it....

In the silence, the sheer silence, the still small voice of God is heard. In the stillness Jesus says, "Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid."

And then the voice bids us, invites us, encourages us, nudges us to move from where we are....to come....to commit....to step out in faith and trust in the one who calls us.

Another deep breath, that unheard voice ever more insistent calls, 'you can do this.' Just a step or two.... And off he goes, off she goes, off they go... it's the first day of school...it's the new job... it's retirement day... and life will never be the same...