

Why is faith so difficult?

By [Teri McDowell Ott](#)

August 1, 2011

I am writing a sermon on [Matthew 14: 22-33](#), the passage wherein Jesus invites Peter to get out of the boat and walk on the water with him...in the midst of a storm. Peter has always seemed to me to be the naïve, overeager, overachiever type. He's like the kid who sits in the front of the classroom and raises his hand, hops up and down in his seat, and shouts, "Me! Me! Pick me!" to every question the teacher asks. Peter is far from perfect, but he wants so badly to be perfect, he wants so badly to please Jesus and to prove his faith. So when Jesus approaches the disciples' boat, walking on the water, overeager Peter thinks he should walk on the water too. So he asks Jesus to command him to come to him.

Even if you don't know the story you can see where it is headed. Jesus invites Peter to step out of the boat. Peter gets out, takes a few shaky steps on the water, then panics because the wind, and the storm, and the waves are still raging around him. Peter sinks. Jesus has to save him. Then they both get in the boat and the storm, miraculously, ceases to rage. This is the point where I imagine Peter, wet and water-logged, traumatized by his near drowning, and humiliated for being told he had so "little faith," is thinking to himself, "Okay, Jesus. Couldn't you have made this a little easier? Couldn't you have made the storm cease before I stepped out of the boat?"

Have you ever found yourself asking this question? Why is faith so difficult? Why does Jesus call his followers out of the safety and security of the boat into the middle of a storm? Why does faith require so much courage, and effort, and strength of will? Couldn't you make this a little easier, Jesus?

But faith isn't easy. By its very nature, faith isn't easy. Faith is not something that we can rationalize, or explain, or even obtain with any measure of success. If we were to attempt to explain it we might talk about reaching for the unreachable, finite hands grasping for that which is infinite. Faith is the bridge that is built between stark dichotomies; it is hope in the face of despair; it is love in the face of hatred; it is peace in the face of violence; it is beauty in the face of ugliness; it is justice in the

face of injustice; it is courage in the face of fear. Faith is a dynamic, spirited force that moves us from the place where we are to the place where we ought to be.

Which is why it is so difficult. Faith is supposed to move us. Faith is supposed to change us. Faith is supposed to better us and open us, deepen us and mature us. And that journey isn't easy. In fact, it's the most difficult, most intimidating, most risk-filled journey we will ever take because it means consistently stepping out of the safety of the boat into the wind and the waves and the storm.

Theologian Paul Tillich describes faith as "dynamic." If faith becomes static, if it fails to move us, open us, deepen us, better us, then it is no longer faith. Instead it is an idol; it is simply another idol that we put up on the mantle to worship but with which we don't actually do anything.

Couldn't you make this a little easier, Jesus? Thanks be to God the answer is "No."

*Originally posted at [A Fly on Our Wall](#).*