

When I was 8, my family joined my grandparents for a day of swimming at Lake Winnepesaukee in New Hampshire. I was very excited, because I loved to swim and—unlike the ocean water in Maine—this was warm.

The water was somewhat shallow, so I could swim out quite a way and it still wasn't over my head. I swam and swam, enjoying the day—watching my brother and sister, but then I decided to get daring and go out a little further, a little deeper. When I put my feet down in the water I realized that the ground was covered with green long-tendrilled grasses.

They had a kind of slippery feel to them, and the sensation they produced in me when I stepped on them terrified me. I saw a small spot of sand, and rooted myself there. Then I couldn't force myself to move again. All I could see was lake grass.

I'm not sure how long I stood there; it seemed like hours. Finally everyone was getting ready to leave, and my mother called me in. I told her I couldn't, because I was scared of the grass. She told me to come in *now*. I began to cry.

My father told me to swim in-- and not to look down until I came to the shore. I wouldn't have to touch the grass at all. I was too scared. I couldn't do it. I knew my parents were getting really angry, and that scared me – but the grass scared me more.

They threatened to leave me. I cried harder, but I couldn't move. I had visions of having to stand there in the dark.

Finally, my father swam out to me and told me to climb on his back. I did, and he swam me back to shore. He couldn't understand why I couldn't just swim back in. My feet wouldn't even have needed to touch the ground. I didn't know why I couldn't either. I had been paralyzed by fear. I was challenged by the new experience of foliage in a lake. And I couldn't move.

Peter was challenged by a new experience in today's Gospel.

Have you ever noticed how many times God calls people to go from the familiar to the unknown? Christ is the ultimate holy adventurer who wants us to do new things, go new places, and dream new dreams. Christ makes it clear that it is not only him that can do these amazing, wonderful, impossible things- -we can do them too. Christ tells us that we can do whatever he has done—and more. And he proves it in this lesson to Peter.

Jesus tells Peter to step out onto the water. Peter believes Jesus, and steps out—and he is actually WALKING ON THE WATER. I want to emphasize this. Peter is ACTUALLY walking on the water. I have heard a lot of preachers emphasize Peter sinking into the water when he was frightened—but hardly anyone emphasizes that for a little while at least—Peter was walking on the water. And that is important.

Jesus, like any good mentor, like any good parent, was undoubtedly thrilled – “Oh my gosh, he’s doing it, he can do it, come on--- YOU CAN DO IT... I KNOW YOU CAN DO IT!”

That’s when Peter suddenly notices how windy it is, and stormy too, and “OH MY GOSH, there’s only water under my feet....” And he no longer believes he can do it. In fact he is SURE he can’t do it.

He forgets to focus on the eyes and voice of Jesus, and focuses instead on the things he is afraid of. And he sinks. He is terrified, paralyzed, and sinks.

I know I can understand how Peter feels—I think we all can--but what do you think Jesus was feeling?

I imagine he was feeling pretty much what my father was feeling all those years ago at Lake Winnepesaukee.

My father told me years later that the overwhelming feeling he had – watching me from the shore—was one of frustration. He said he wasn’t angry at me—he was just frustrated that he couldn’t convince me that I could get to shore myself. He KNEW that if I had just started swimming-- and didn’t give in to my fears and look down at the grass—he KNEW I could do it. And that’s what he wanted so much for me to find out—that I could do this thing. He wanted me to know that I had the power to do something I only thought he could do for me.

But I was too scared, and he loved me, so he came and got me.

I was struck- during our conversation- that my father had such faith in ME. Does Jesus have that much faith in us?

How often do we get stuck, because we think we can't do something? How often do we fail because we listen more to our fears than to the small voice within us -God-- telling us we can do it?

God knows what we are capable of. God has given us amazing talents—talents we sometimes haven't even tried to access, because we are too focused on what scares us.

But God has faith in us. Jesus had faith in Peter. My father had faith in me.

Just because we've never done something before, doesn't mean we can never do it.

Grassy lakebeds only scare me a little now, but I realize that they can't hurt me, and if I don't like how they feel, I can swim over them.

What else is possible when we just take that first step in faith? If we take our eyes off what we fear, look into the eyes of Jesus, we can sometimes hear the voice of Jesus, who has been encouraging us all along: "Oh my gosh, you're doing it, you can do it, come on--- I KNOW YOU CAN DO IT!" You can do what I have done. And more.

Amen.