

{Slide: Logo}

Breakingthehabit

Pray.

Today we are starting a two part series called "Rocking the Boat".

And we are going to start by explaining exactly why we gave this series this name.

Picture the scene.

Jesus hears that John the Baptist has been beheaded and He wants to withdraw to a "solitary place", the Bible says, presumably to have some time to Himself.

Understandably so.

Unfortunately the people are not so understanding and they follow Him and being Jesus He put His private grief aside and healed them and in this case fed them, all five thousand of them.

Jesus multiplied the bread and the fish and the disciples distributed the food, to all five thousand.

And afterward they picked up what remained, they cleaned up.

Remember, it was five thousand men, excluding women and children.

This was a busy physical day at the ministry office.

At the end, Jesus dismisses the crowd, sends his disciples ahead in a boat and finally gets some time alone to pray.

And then we get one of the most interesting NT stories in the Bible.

Hollywood would have a field day

It's many hours later, the disciples are far from land, buffeted by the wind.

The sun is about to rise.

It is still dark.

{Slide: Mat 14v25-26}

Matthew 14v25-26

²⁵Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. ²⁶When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, **they were terrified**. "It's a ghost," they said, and **cried out in fear**.

We start off with one group of people,

tired after a days work,

more tired because it's unlikely they had a good nights rest at this point of the morning, probably a fishing boat and not a Bayliner.

Collectively terrified because of the unearthly vision (no ADT to call, no fast car to drive away, no weapons on hand, the perfect movie scenario)

Their minds said that it was a ghost, something from a horror story.

Something out of the ordinary.

Something they were not used to.

They did not know how to handle it.

They reacted predictably with terror and fear.

Let's talk about the group in the boat.

Up to this point, what had the disciples experienced from Mat 1 onwards?

A lot of teaching.

A lot of examples of healing.

A lot of following and watching.

Then came Mat 10, Jesus gives them authority and sends them out to do the same things He has been doing up to this point, drive out spirits and heal the sick. You don't read much about their reaction, remember they have seen all this happen and now have been given the authority to do exactly the same.

It required a step of faith.

It did not require a huge step of faith.

Then some more teaching and following Jesus.

And then after a long day and a long night.

Jesus walks on water.

There we are, followers of Jesus, having settled down into a predictable pattern.

Habit has taken over.

We listen to Him, we follow Him, we obey Him, we come to church every week and listen to the sermon, we attend Bt.

And then He walks on water towards us and we are terrified because everything that we have ever been used to does not fit into this pattern.

Our brains work overtime trying to make sense of the new situation.

We have no reference to try and make it normal in our heads.

And it terrifies us and we are filled with fear.

And so we cower in the boat with the rest of the fearful, trying our best to surround ourselves with what makes sense to us.

Let's step back a little.

I don't know if you are aware of it but we are all creatures of habit.

Let's prove it.

Who of you sit in the same area in church every week?

I do.

If I want to pick on people from the stage I don't have to look for them because they are always sitting in the same area of the hall every week.

Let me explain to you why?

We are lazy or to be more specific, our brains are lazy, or so the research shows.

When we do something for the first time, let's say drive a car, it involves a huge amount of effort because the brain is working in real time trying to process all the inputs that it's getting, making sense of them and still working hard on top of that to make rational decisions to be able to navigate this big new machine in a way that won't hurt people.

It's exhausting because your brain has to work at full speed and even then it does not do a great job, it doesn't like doing things for the first time, it's awkward.

Look in the mirrors, all of them, keep the car on the road by steering intelligently, coordinate the gear change process by working the clutch and the gear lever and the petrol simultaneously, keeping in mind what the engine is doing so that you know whether to go up or down and on and on in real time.

No time to take a break and think about it.

I taught both my daughters to drive, it is a harrowing experience.

Fortunately we only mowed down one small tree in a parking lot.

My parents were not so lucky, I took out a gate post and a section of fence as I missed the driveway after the first lesson.

However, after the tenth time the same process becomes a lot easier.

Why?

Because your brain has converted some of the actions into habits.

Habits don't need brain power because they are automatic.

The brain still processes what it sees and hears and feels, it just does not have to think about it too much.

The part of the brain where habits are stored is called the basal ganglia.

Why does this happen?

Because the brain cannot keep processing at full speed all the time and so it's quick to shove repetitive stuff into the habit box.

A habit normally takes the form of a cycle.

(Cue - Action - Reward)

My cue in the morning is the alarm, the second one, I force myself up and into the kitchen to make my coffee, my reward is a cup of coffee.

That starts the next cue, my Qt, I read my Bible, my reward is I check the mental box.

That cues the next action, my 4 km walk, my reward, happy little endorphins coursing through my body.

That cues the next action, run the bath, my reward, warm bath and feeling clean.

That cues the next action, make breakfast, my reward, happy tummy.

That cues the next action, wash the dishes, my reward, clean kitchen.

And so the habit day goes round and round, not much thought involved there.

Does it depend how I feel, no.

If you start looking at your day more critically you will see it is almost completed based on habits.

From the moment you get up to the moment you get back to bed.

A lot of the same stuff happens, most of which you don't have to think about.

To prove the point, try brushing your teeth with your other hand tonight, it's quite tiring.

When something outside of our habit loops occurs, we have to start thinking, which takes effort, so we more readily stick to what we know.

We go to the same doctors and dentists.

We drive the same routes.

We stick to the same friends.

We sit at the same places at the table.

We get good habits and bad habits.
Good habits can become bad habits.

For example, a Qt.

Having a Qt is a good habit, a great habit, one no Christian should be without.
But this good habit, can become a bad one if the Qt you had when you first became a Christian is the same one you are still having 10 or 20 years down the line.
The morning cue is the same, you open the Bible, that's the same but the reward you got when you first read the Bible was a sense of awe at what you were learning and as you changed you felt that God was smiling at you as the many things you learned, you also implemented.
Then time marched on and the reward changed, it became a check box, God was not involved anymore and whether He was pleased or not stopped entering our consciousness.

What about the **sermon on a Sunday**. I remember messages from Mike Taliaferro from the early days in Jhb at Standard Bank arena that took my breath away. The challenge of being a Christian in my early days was an exhilarating journey.
The Sunday morning cue and the sitting in the sermon action are still the same.
What have I replaced my reward of exhilaration and excitement ?
A 'check box' of been to church.

As we get older as Christians we do the rest of our Christian lives in the same way.
Those who come come early regularly, it's your habit
Those who come late, come late regularly, it's your habit.
All of us will more likely go the way of habit, rather than change the habit.

To grow spiritually we have to break the habits that are so familiar to us.
It's time to stand up and do something uncomfortable because it requires us to think differently.

Let's get back to the boat.
Things are getting worse.

{Slide: Mat 14v27-29}

Matthew 14v27-29

²⁷But Jesus immediately said to them: "**Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.**"

²⁸"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

²⁹"**Come,**" he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

The apparition speaks and says, "**Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid**".
The ghost, now interacts with us in a way that we are supposed to understand.
And somehow it implies we have no courage and are afraid, really?
I hear the words but what do they mean?
Jesus is entering our rational world and yet is asking us to do the irrational.

Luckily as a group though we stand firm together in our terrified fear.
I look around me, everyone is like me, we are all cowering together, I feel safe.

And then.

Oh no, one misguided soul stands up and breaks the unspoken vow of the brotherhood and we all think, "Don't do it".

And then we hear those fateful words, **"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water"**.

What!!!

Church is supposed to be safe and predictable as we listen to what Jesus is teaching us and demonstrating to us.

This is crazy.

And finally, as if to confirm how wrong our collective thinking actually was, Jesus says, **"Come"** and Peter gets up and you know what happens when someone starts moving around a boat, especially when he heads towards the edge, the boat starts rocking.

It reminds of the first day John suggested we go share our faith at a shopping centre.

My reaction was also, "What!!!".

The Bible studies and reading about Jesus were mind blowing enough never mind actually expecting me to obey Him.

And we went and my heart was ready to break through my chest with fear.

Me, a bookworm, nerd, introvert, shy and whatever other anti-social words you could think of.

Surely not.

In many ways I feel that in my early days I was a Peter, surrounded by Peter's watching this figure of Jesus approaching me on the water saying, **"Come"** and then stepping out of the boat and walking on water.

Now I often feel like I'm stuck in the boat cowering with the crowd, afraid.

Too many of us have made our faith become a bad habit when it was once a good habit, we want **Jesus to be predictable in a way that works for us. We don't want Him to do the seemingly impossible and call us to do the same!!.**

We would rather cower comfortably with the group making scared noises.

But Jesus did expect it.

He did expect us to act in faith, to step out of the known, away from the crowd and towards Him and walk on water.

He does expect us to be terrified and fearful and get up anyway.

He expects us to break the habits we so naturally fall into, **because habits don't make your heart beat faster.**

He expects the introvert to speak.

He expects the shy to reach out.

He expects His people, **through Him**, to do the unexpected.

He expects us, by clinging to the vine and keeping our eyes on Him, to walk on water, Be the Church, lead a Bible discussion, lead a FG group, reach out to those in our neighborhoods.

The norm for Jesus is not in the boat.

What does that mean to me?

What does that mean for you?

Imagine this hall is the boat.

We are all tired and sleepy and something walks towards us on the water, and we are all scared and we cry out in fear and the apparition speaks and says, ***“Take courage! It is I.***

Don’t be afraid.”

And we realise it’s Jesus.

The vine.

The head of the church.

The Son of God.

And He should scare you and yet, you feel excited, you’re heart starts pumping and you look at the group around you and you think, “what’s wrong with these guys?”. ...

You feel the need to get up and you walk towards Jesus and you say, ***“Lord, if it’s you, tell me to ...”***

What do you think Jesus would tell you to do?

What is your water, your impossible situation?

- Come to church on time ...
- Start worshiping reverently
- Help me connect with someone because I’m drowning in this world
- If you’re a teen and trying to make sense of this world, maybe walking on water is just getting with someone, open up about your life
- If your marriage feels broken get counseling
- If you’re a disciple of Jesus, comfortable with the way things are, what is your water, maybe you should lead a FG, study with a friend
- If you are a FGL maybe walking on water is to start treating your group like a church planting, meet more often, lead that mission team in the suburbs

“Come,” he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

What an inspiring example.

It’s time to re-look at the habits we have fallen into, that we call being a Christian.

How do I change my Qt?

Read less and read more deeply. What is God telling you. Is it making your heart beat faster.

Does it look impossible?

Yip, He is saying, ***“Come”***.

How do I change my Sunday sermon habit?

Come early, come reverently, come ready to worship, come ready to fellowship, bring a notebook, bring a Bible, deeply consider the message, apply it in your life by getting help from others. God expects obedience.

Jesus is saying, ***“Come”***.

And so Peter steps out of the boat.
If only it ended there it would be like a happy-ever-after story.

{Slide: Mat 14v30-33}

Matthew 14v30-33

³⁰*But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"*

³¹*Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"*

³²*And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down.* ³³*Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."*

But it doesn't end there and Peter is distracted and sinks and cries out and who is there for him, Jesus.

Jesus is there, to pick us up.

And He says, ***"You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"***.

He measures Peter faith and says it was, ***"little"***.

I'm consoled by the fact that He didn't say it was nothing.

The point is that when we walk on water Jesus is with us, watching us, ready to catch us.

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It bothers me that He had nothing to say to the rest of the crowd.

I want to hear, "well tried, thanks for coming, appreciate the support".

He says nothing because there was nothing faith worthy to speak about to those in the boat.

When we do church out of habit, it does not need faith.

So examine your habits.

Break that cycle

Take a step towards Jesus.

It's time to rock the boat.