

Barking Pigs and Determined Disciples

Matthew 14: 22-33.

Robert Fulghum tells a wonderful story about a kindergarten class that decided to perform the story of **"Cinderella"**. There are lots of roles in **"Cinderella"**, but still casting was a chore. All the girls, of course, wanted to be Cinderella. Finally all the children were assigned roles except one--a small tubby kid named Norman.

The teacher asked, **"Norman, what are you going to be?"**

"Well," said Norman, **"I think I will be the pig"**.

The teacher said, **"Norman, there is no pig in the story of Cinderella"**.

And Norman said, **"Well, there is now"**.

The teacher could tell it would be senseless to argue, so she left it to Norman to decide what role a pig played in the Cinderella story. As it turned out, the pig went everywhere that Cinderella went and did whatever Cinderella did. Norman had nothing to say, but Norman's face reflected the action of the drama. When things were serious, he was serious. When things looked worrisome, he looked worried. When things were in doubt, he looked anxious. He began to fill the stage with his presence of response by simply sitting there. And at the end of the performance when the princess was carried off to live happily ever after, Norman stood on his hind legs and barked.

In rehearsal this had been troublesome because the teacher said, **"Look, Norman, even if there is a pig in the story, pigs do not bark."**

And Norman said, **"Well, this one does."**

You can imagine what happened the night of the performance. There was a standing ovation at the end for the pig. Norman, the barking pig, who was, as it turns out, the Cinderella in the story after all.

Word gets around, and people called up the teacher and said, **"We hear you have this dynamite Cinderella thing. What is so special about it?"**

She said, **"Well, there is a pig in it--actually, a barking pig"**.

And the person on the other end of the telephone would say, **"But there is no barking pig in Cinderella"**.

And the teacher would say with great conviction, **"Well, there is now"**.

I think Jesus would like Norman and his barking pig. Norman was a little fellow who wouldn't let other people restrict his imagination. He was going to be what he was going to be--no matter how foolish he might seem to others.

Jesus' disciple Simon Peter was somewhat like that. It's only natural that when Simon Peter saw Jesus walking out to them on the water, he would jump overboard and try to walk out to meet Jesus. This was consistent with Simon Peter's character. He was enthusiastic, impulsive. He often spoke without thinking and acted without contemplating the consequences. You've known people like this: They're more apt to think with their heart than with their brain; more apt to be out front than linger behind where it is safer. If we can help people like that refine their enthusiasm and channel their impulsiveness and they become dynamic leaders.

I. Jesus loved Simon Peter.

With all his impulsiveness, all his bravado, all his unbridled enthusiasm, Jesus loved Simon Peter. Even though he kept his foot lodged firmly in his mouth, and even though he nearly drowned on this occasion, Jesus loved him. He saw beyond Simon Peter's impulsive nature to the leader he could be. It's obvious that Jesus would rather tone down a fanatic than try to resurrect a corpse. Peter was the exact opposite of a man I once read about.

This man was profiled in the book **Ripley's--Believe It or Not! Encyclopedia of the Bizarre**. This book lists some of the strangest achievements, hobbies, stunts, and customs from around the world.

- If you want to know who has traveled the farthest distance around the world on a pogo stick, you can find it in this book.
- If you want to see pictures of giant vegetables the size of a VW Beetle, this is the place to look.
- But one entry in the book has to be the most unusual by far. It is the listing for a man named Roy Robert Smith of

Denver, Colorado, and it is a list of all the things Mr. Smith has never achieved, at least at the writing of this book.

Here is a sampling of the things that thirty-six-year-old Roy Robert Smith had never tried:

- never tasted an ice cream soda or a Coca-Cola or a ginger ale;
- never gone hunting, swimming, fishing, hiking, or ice-skating;
- never driven a car, or ridden a motorcycle, or a horse, or a bicycle;
- never had a surgical operation;
- never joined a church, club, lodge, or organization; never studied a foreign language;
- never been outside the United States; and he had

- never kissed a girl. Thirty-six years' old.

Is Mr. Smith's life all that remarkable? Why would a book dedicated to the strangest achievements on earth include an entry of one life without any noticeable achievements? I can promise you one thing; unless he gets on the ball Roy Robert Smith will never be listed in another book. There are many unhealthy things that a person should not do, but if your only claim to fame is that you didn't do anything, you're in trouble.

I believe Jesus prefers people who are doers. People like Norman the talking pig and Simon Peter floundering there in the water, about to drown because he impulsively jumped into the water to meet his Lord. Jesus has do-nothing followers all over the globe.

The Good Samaritan didn't become good by playing it safe and never doing anything impulsive. He won Jesus' praise by taking the risk of stopping to help a man who had been attacked by robbers. He could have offered up all kinds of rationalizations why it would be more prudent to pass this man by on the other side, but he saw a need and he plunged right in. Simon Peter could have stayed safely in the boat. But if he had we wouldn't be reading about him today.

II. There is a place for caution in the Christian life.

You surely understand that. By praising Simon Peter I am not endorsing letting go of common sense and embracing reckless, foolish behavior.

Cowboy writer Curt Brummett likes to tell how proud he felt the day his father gave him his first real rope. All young cowboys dream of owning their own rope, which they can use to rope steer. As his father tied the rope into a lasso, he gave Curt one important piece of advice, "Never . . . put it on anything you can't get it off of".

That evening, company came by for coffee. Curt and his little sister were playing in another room. He was trying to rope her feet as she ran by. She retaliated by tying a knot in his rope. He decided that next time she came through the room; he would catch her for sure. A few minutes later, the kitchen door opened. Curt, hiding behind the door, swung out his lasso. It landed firmly around a single female foot. He gave the rope a tug. The next thing he heard was a tremendous crash. Curt peeked around the door to see that he had just roped his mother by the foot. She had been carrying a tray loaded with coffee cups and coffee. That evening, Curt's mother cut up his brand-new rope into little, tiny pieces. And his father's only words of comfort were, "I told you not to put that rope on anything you couldn't get it off of."

That's good advice. There is a place for caution in the Christian life. There are risks we should not take.

Anything that endangers:

- our relationship with God,
 - our relationship with those we love,
 - our emotional, physical and spiritual health
- must be handled with greatest care.

However, that is NOT THE PROBLEM for most followers of Christ TODAY. Most of us are like those other disciples with Peter that night--we're content to stay in the safety of the boat.

Writer Dale Galloway tells about the two giant retailers in America right after World War II that made two very different decisions affecting their separate destinies. One was Sears Roebuck and Company while the other was Montgomery Ward. The leadership of Ward's expected that after the war an economic depression would come, so they refused to take any risk in expanding. Meanwhile, the leadership of Sears determined that there was going to be economic growth such as America had never seen before. So they went out and expanded into new markets all over the world. As a result, Sears soared ahead while Ward's fell far behind. Sears risked failure, and thus gained greater success. Of course, new challengers to the throne come along and now even Sears struggles against the likes of Wal-Mart and Target.

III. What's true in business is true in all of life: There comes a time when you must step out of the boat.

As author Kent Crockett has said, "God places many of His blessings outside of our comfort zones, then asks us to come get them. If we ever want to receive some things we've never had before, we've got to do some things we've never done before."

There is a character in the classic work *Don Quixote* named *Sancho Panza*. *Sancho Panza* hangs in fear from the ledge of a window all night long, too frightened to let go. When morning dawns he discovers his toes are only an inch off the ground. It's amusing to think of Simon Peter climbing out of the boat trying to imitate his Lord by walking on the water. Then, like a cartoon character, he makes the mistake of looking around. "What in the world am I doing?" he asked himself and suddenly he begins to sink.

How often that happens in life. People are charting a successful course in their business, in their marriage, in their walk with Christ, and then they begin to listen to their fears. "What if I fail? What if the market fails? What if my faith is misplaced?" and they begin slowly to sink.

It is then that our Lord reaches out to us. *"Immediately,"* says our lesson for the day, *"Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. 'You of little faith,' he said, 'why did you doubt?'"*

Doubt is our enemy. Fear our greatest adversary. Jesus loves believers. Jesus loves people who dream great dreams, who still believe that all things are possible to those who believe in him, who are willing to step out in faith to do great things for him.

This church was built by doers. It was built by people who knew in their hearts that God could do great things through them. Wouldn't it be a shame if our only contribution was to hold on to the boat?

Has God planted a dream in your heart? Some great thing you could do for God and for our community? Do you have a dream for our church and what we could yet be?

Let the faint of heart cry out for a safe shore. It's time for barking pigs. It's time for people who believe to step out of the boat and do great things for God. Will you do that? IF YOU ARE WILLING TO STEP OUT OF THE SAFETY OF THE BOAT AND HELP THIS CHURCH GROW – I WANT YOU TO STAND UP RIGHT NOW!

PRAISE THE LORD! I KNEW I COULD COUNT ON YOU.

Pastor Larry Smith 8-10-08