



# 51A ONLINE BIBLE STUDY - PENTECOST 10A

Testing the water

## Abstract

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## 51A online Bible Study - Pentecost 10A

### Testing the water

SUNDAY, AUGUST 9, 2020 | PENTECOST 10A | PROPER 14 | YEAR A

Old Testament & Psalm, Option I

Old Testament Genesis 37:1–4, 12–28

Psalm Psalm 105:1–6, 16–22, 45b

or

Old Testament & Psalm, Option II

Old Testament 1 Kings 19:9–18

Psalm Psalm 85:8–13

New Testament Romans 10:5–15

Gospel Matthew 14:22–33

Jesus reveals a little more of his identity in dramatic fashion by walking on the water to where the twelve are battling a storm. Peter thinks he can do it too; but he needs to be rescued and learns a crucial lesson in trust.

**This week's resources explore:** grappling with faith and doubt; taking the risk.  
Revised Common Lectionary. (2009). Bellingham, WA: Faithlife.

## Welcome and opening prayer

### A prayer of approach

As we approach you today, Lord,  
we probably feel pretty much like Peter –  
full of bravado to begin with,  
but then just not quite so certain of ourselves.  
We come to you, Jesus,  
trusting that even if we feel ourselves  
beginning to sink under the pressures that we face,  
we know you are still there holding us up.  
Please reassure us that you won't let go,  
no matter how we feel.  
Thank you, Lord.  
**Amen.**

### Introduction

Superficially, our text for today is about Peter trying—and ultimately failing—to walk on water. But it's about so much more than that.

The most important thing to notice in this morning's Bible passage isn't that Jesus walked on water or that Peter took at least a few baby steps on the Sea of Galilee.

**The important thing to notice is that Peter got out of the boat in the first place.**

## Reading

*Matthew 14:22–33*

<sup>22</sup> Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. <sup>23</sup> After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, <sup>24</sup> and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

<sup>25</sup> Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. <sup>26</sup> When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear.

<sup>27</sup> But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

<sup>28</sup> “Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.”

<sup>29</sup> “Come,” he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. <sup>30</sup> But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”

<sup>31</sup> Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?”

<sup>32</sup> And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. <sup>33</sup> Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”<sup>1</sup>

*respond*

For the word of the Lord

**Thanks be to God**

### Monologue: Bridge over troubled water

An application of the story of Jesus walking on the water to a person experiencing suffering and trials.

#### A sufferer

I've known suffering. Sometimes I dream I'm in that boat. Tried, tossed about by troubles, wondering where Jesus is. Jesus, where are you in all this, come, come walking to me over these waters, let me see you ... where are you, you're late, so late, where are you? I'm waiting. Why this silence? I'm going to capsize, I'm peeping into the abyss. What good will it do to be swallowed up by the sea?

Then, as I think of this story in the middle of the night, unexpectedly I think I see your shadow come, walking on those waves which disturb me so, the liquid surface holding up your feet like a rock. I dare think if you command your creation, you can command my circumstances. Rescue me or help me to endure.

I feel my heart begin to stir. Where you go I might follow. Keep my head above water. But for you to walk on the sea is one thing, to expect a poor weak disciple like me ... Yet I hear a voice. I want to try.

I walk boldly a little way. Yes, I do, a little way. You actually help me walk a few steps. In my childish mind I'm celebrating, telling everybody about it, what a story! Now I'm closer to you than when I was in the boat, it should get easier. Then I feel the boisterous wind, and the waves so mesmerising. I forget my first steps, past proofs of your goodness and power. I'm swept away by waves of emotions and thoughts and fears. I give way to the substantial presence of pain. Like Peter I take fright, stop looking at you and begin to sink. I've failed, you've abandoned me and I'm back looking into the depths.

But in the story you deal with Peter so gently, not like the violence of the elements. At once you stretch out your hand to save him, with a motherly reproof. Doubting doesn't prove I have no faith, only that my faith is small. But I'm touched by your mildness and I learn not healing or composure but an unexpected truth. Tomorrow I'll remember your gentleness with my failure.

Just a story. But it has meaning. I ponder it in the watches of the night.

## Exegesis

The quick dismissal of the disciples and then the crowd is probably because Jesus wanted to avoid being set at the head of a militia ready to march on Jerusalem. Instead he wanted to pray. Perhaps we should hear an echo of the temptation narrative: Jesus is seeking strength to stick to his guns in the face of the temptation to take a different route. The twelve spend the whole night battling the elements out on the lake. As dawn breaks, they are confronted with the sight of Jesus striding out across the water. And they are terrified. But Jesus speaks comfort. Far from being a ghost, he says, 'It is I.' This is a strong suggestion that there is something in Jesus' identity that is beyond human. God in the Old Testament spoke as the 'I am', so Jesus possibly does the same here. There is also a strong echo of the instances when God is pictured in the Old Testament as walking on or through the sea (Job 9.8; Psalm 77.19; Isaiah 43.16).

We are then treated to one of the great entertainments of the Synoptic Gospels: Peter inviting Jesus to tell him to get out of the boat, doing so and almost immediately sinking and crying out for rescue. Back in the boat, Jesus gently chides his lack of faith and the disciples worship him as 'Son of God'. Is there something beyond seeing Jesus as the king of Israel here?

Some have seen this story as a resurrection narrative that is out of place, perhaps one that exists in the same narrative world as that in John 21. There is little evidence for this, although Matthew would agree that the resurrected Jesus was the Jesus who lived with his disciples prior to the first Easter. Rather, this seems to be a story that is more centred on Peter and his faith than on Jesus and his identity. It is a story that encourages ordinary Jesus-followers as it confirms that 'the twelve', despite their proximity to Jesus for three years, still struggled with their faith. And perhaps Jesus (v.31) is not so much chiding Peter as recognising the frail material he has to work with. Here is someone who, along with the others, has seen Jesus conjure a meal for 5,000 out of a packed lunch and yet seems to find faith a struggle.

## Picture pointers

- Does this image speak more of faith or doubt?
- What step/leap of faith have you taken recently?
- Are we too risk-averse in living the gospel?



## Live your faith

Encourage everyone to take a risk this week. For example, they might say 'Hello' to someone they see regularly but have never spoken to; or visit a place they would not normally dream of going to; or make an apology that is overdue.

## We are sent out

### A sending out prayer

Peter only knew life as a fisherman.  
 But he got out of the boat and followed you, Lord.  
 Help us to hear your voice,  
 get out of our boats and follow you.  
 In the week ahead,  
 may the world and its problems decrease  
 as you increase in our lives.  
 Keep us focused on your way,  
 looking ahead and trusting you.  
**Amen.**



<sup>i</sup> [Revised Common Lectionary](#). (2009). Bellingham, WA: Faithlife.