

Introduction:

Good Morning!

- The year was 2006. I was watching Tino Wallenda cross a high-wire at a youth event in Saskatchewan.
- With 2500 students I watched as he was walked across the wire that was smaller than my thumb in diameter, and he had NO support wires or safety cables.
- As he walked, he shared his testimony, of how he came to know Jesus, and what it was like following Jesus.
- $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way across the wire, he wobbled and fell. He came down on the wire, right between the legs. We gasped, then laughed as he just continued on sharing his story – just sitting there.
- The Wallenda family is the most famous high walkers of our time. Their most well-known member, Nik Wallenda has crossed **Niagara Falls** on a tightrope, the **Grand Canyon**, windy **Chicago** skyscrapers, a lava filled **volcano** in Nicaragua, and many more and holds **11 Guinness World Records**.
- And when asked how he manages to stay focused: He has to set his focus and not pay attention to the danger around him.
“I've trained all my life to not be distracted by distractions.”

WE:

- We live in a world where attention is the most valuable commodity on earth
- Companies, social media, politicians, advertisers, streaming services fight for it

- Whoever gets your attention eventually gets your direction
- Attention is the steering wheel of your life. And where your attention is is likely where you're headed.

(today we're looking at one of my favorite passages in the Bible, Peter walking on water, which is less about the incredible miracle of walking on water and it's more about attention)

GOD:

Turn to Matthew chapter 14:25. As your turning there, the context here is that Jesus has just finished feeding the 5000. He tells his disciples to get on the boat and head to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus dismisses the crowd then goes and finds a place to pray. Time passes and it starts to get late into the night. The boat on the water starts to struggle to get across the lake because a storm started.

-It turns out the Sea of Galilee is about as wide as Pigeon Lake is. The Sea of Galilee is almost twice as long, but where they would have been crossing, would have taken around 2 hours.

However.

Even today the Sea of Galilee is notorious for no warning when a storm is coming.

- So what should have been a two-hour boat ride across turned into an eight-hour struggle.

- If you've ever been canoeing in a boat that has a flat bottom, you'll know how hard it is to keep those boats straight.

- Their boat was probably about 30 feet long, would have had a flat bottom and short sides, so once they're in the middle of that lake and that storm hits, they are fighting for their lives, just trying to keep that boat from capsizing.

Just stuck out there!

And that's where our story picks up in Matthew chapter 14, starting in verse 25.

Matthew Chapter 14:25-33

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

27 But 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. 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."

YOU:

- I love this story and as we come together this morning to celebrate our graduates, my heart kept coming back to this passage.
- At first glance it looks like a story about walking on water and courage and faith.
- It is all those things, but underneath I think it's a story about attention.

- Because Peter was doing the impossible while his eyes were fixed on Jesus
- The moment he shifted, he began to sink
- That's why I think this story has something important to teach all of us today because the greatest challenge to following Jesus isn't usually opposition
- It's distraction
- And the question isn't whether something's going to capture your attention. The question is what
- If you want God to do amazing things in your life, then you have to put your faith in Him. You have to trust Him with your whole heart, mind, soul, and strength
- When Peter stepped out of that boat, he didn't do it because the storm stopped. He didn't do it because the circumstances improved and it was safe. He didn't have all of the answers. He did it because Jesus called him.
- And because he truly trusted Jesus, he took a step out of that boat
- And as a result, we have this beautiful analogy for taking a step of faith.
- This is a great illustration of stepping out of your comfort zone to follow and do the things that God has called you to do. Graduating, you're kind of stepping out of the boat because a familiar boat is parents and school and routine and your childhood.
- Now all of that becomes uncertainty as those things change with whatever phase of graduation you're going through
- You don't need all the answers to obey Jesus. You just need enough faith to take the next step
- And God really gives us the whole map. He just usually gives us the next step
- And graduates, as you look at the next part of your journey ahead, here's the reality of following Jesus in that:
- *we don't spend our lives pursuing comfort because*
- *Following Jesus is amazing, and God can call you to do some incredible things. But if you want to walk on water, then you have to get out of the boat.*

- And for those of you that are here who haven't trusted in Jesus, imagine who you are in this story right now.
- You're certainly not experiencing this amazing miracle like Peter is. You're not even witnessing it as somebody in the boat
- You're one of the people who came out to hear Jesus speak and then went home after. Maybe you're looking to Jesus for your next meal. Because there's something to this Jesus, which is what brings you here - but instead of listening to what he's saying to you and how he's calling you, you just want the benefits.
- And to our graduates this morning, just because you've grown up in a church doesn't make you a Christian. What makes you a Christian is when you put your trust in Jesus and you believe that He lived, died, and rose again for the forgiveness of your sins. You trust Him as your Lord and Savior every single day with your heart, mind, soul, and strength. You strive to love Jesus.
- And it's not too late. In the quietness of your own heart, all it takes is for you just to say, "Jesus, I love you. I'm sorry for living in a way that is against you and your ways. Forgive me of my sins. I believe that you lived, died, and rose again. I trust you as my Lord and Savior with my whole heart, mind, soul, and strength." And I surrender my life to you.
- And then this morning if you find yourself, you look at your life and you say, "I really believe that," then the next step is to get baptized -taking part in the death burial and resurrection with Christ through the act of baptism.
- Because once you trust in Jesus then you have the opportunity to really step out of the boat and let God do some amazing things in and through your life
- And if you are interested in taking the next step in your faith, come talk to me after. Come meet with one of us at the front so that we can encourage you and pray with you and help you take that next step in your faith journey

- There are no expectations and no judgment. We just want to love you and help you walk through this journey of faith.
- Now here's where the story takes a turn because stepping out of the boat wasn't actually Peter's biggest challenge
Keeping his eyes on Jesus was
- And I think that's where many people struggle
- [30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"](#)
- So Peter is doing the impossible, walking on water but what changed? His attention.
- Many people who start off going to church don't abandon Jesus because they hate him. They simply get distracted
- And not even by bad things, sometimes good things like career and relationships, but money, success, sports, entertainment, social media.
- But discipleship is not an event; it's a direction.
Discipleship is not an event; it's a direction.
- We all remember Peter walking on water, but we don't talk about the thousands of ordinary moments that prepared him to trust Jesus enough to get out of the boat
- We love the dramatic moments: youth camp and retreats and mission trips and youth conferences and baptisms and graduations but discipleship is in the ordinary Tuesdays
- These little moments of choosing to follow Jesus, praying with him on a bus ride, spending time in his Word, reading and learning who God really is, helping the people around you who need either some encouragement, some care, or some attention
- Because nobody accidentally becomes a disciple. It's always easier to do the wrong thing than it is to do the right thing
- There is a verse in Hebrews that says: ["let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith."](#)

- Fixing our eyes on Jesus, not once but continually, intentionally, daily
- Discipleship is not an event; it's daily faithfulness that God uses to form you.
- So, if attention shapes our direction, then here's the obvious question: how do we keep our attention fixed on Jesus when most of life doesn't seem spiritual?
- How do we do that? Practically?
- There is always so much going on that doesn't seem to have anything to do with Jesus. **How are you supposed to be thinking about Jesus when** you are: sitting in socials class, doing your homework, at your job, eating dinner, watching a movie, scrolling on your phone...
- Let's be honest most of life doesn't feel spiritual
- And the answer is not that you're literally supposed to spend every second consciously just thinking about Jesus. That's not realistic
- **The answer is that you build habits that continually redirect your attention back to Him.**
- Think about things that are rhythms and habits in your life:
- Think about brushing your teeth
- None of us are excited about dental hygiene. We brush because we've built a habit. It's become part of the rhythm of our lives.
- When you're a child, you're taught the reasons why it's important because your teeth will rot and fall out and your breath will stink.
- But as a child you don't really care about all the reasons because you know that on days you forget to brush your teeth or don't brush your teeth, nothing seems to change
- However, with some accountability, remembering to do it every day, keeping the end goal in mind of having healthy teeth, you build that into a habit, and it becomes part of the rhythm of your day
- Following Jesus works in a similar way
- You know what will happen if you are a serious disciple of Jesus compared to if you are not.

- And so, you start building small habits and daily practices and consistent rhythms
- Those might be: going to church, reading your Bible, praying, serving, being generous with your money, building community, worship etc.
- None of these things are flashy and most of them don't create dramatic stories
- But over time these small practices shape who you're becoming. A five-minute prayer on the bus doesn't seem like much or reading one chapter of scripture before you go to bed or when you wake up in the morning or on a break doesn't feel like much. Getting to church early so you can spend time when nobody notices doesn't seem like much.
- But God uses thousands of seemingly ordinary choices to shape you and mold you into the likeness of Jesus
- The Christian life is not built in dramatic moments but it's these ordinary moments repeated faithfully
- And also, it's important to be clear that these habits don't earn God's love and you're not saved because you've read your Bible or prayed enough
- Jesus already accomplished everything necessary for your salvation, so these habits don't make God love you more, but they keep your attention fixed on the one who already loves you
- They are not a way of earning grace; they are a way of staying connected to the source of grace
- Because the reality is you're not going to drift towards Jesus by accident. You'll drift away from him. Nobody wakes up 10 years later deeply committed to Jesus by accident
- Show me where your focus is and I'll show you the direction of your life
- Now graduates, as you get older, something starts to happen. You become an adult.
- Just like when you were a child your parents had to remind you and keep you accountable for brushing your teeth but as you grow older there's a certain point where nobody makes you brush your teeth. There's a point where nobody is making you go to church. Nobody's checking to see if you read your Bible. Nobody's asking if you're praying

- But your journey with Jesus is just between you and Jesus. Your discipleship is between you and him. And Jesus is calling you out of the boat of comfort.
- *Because the real challenge isn't starting. It's continuing.*
- But there's another part of this story that I found quite strange for a long time.
- Because of course as soon as Peter takes his eyes off Jesus and he begins to sink. He focuses on the circumstances and the situation around him instead of on Jesus.
- And I don't see a lot of difference here compared to what happens with teenagers
- You start off learning about Jesus and being passionate about him, saying you're going to follow him and then life is happening around you and you get distracted
- Eventually you leave home. There's no accountability to show up to church events or be part of a community or to read your Bible. Then real trial and tribulations come.
- And your attention and your eyes get fixed on the wind and waves around you, and you begin to sink, consumed by the wind and the waves.
- But then in the story Jesus reminds us that he's not left Peter. He rescues him
- A reminder of his continued faithfulness even when we're not faithful
- However, then Jesus says this thing to Peter. He says in verse 31, "[Oh you of little faith, why did you doubt?](#)"
- And for a long time, I felt like that it was weird that Jesus scolds Peter for having little faith
- Because Peter seemed to have the most faith, he is the one that actually got out of the boat. The other eleven were just sitting there watching
- And Jesus tells it elsewhere that faith the size of a mustard seed is enough to move mountains
- Peter's faith wasn't small, so what was Jesus really saying?
- Well, the answer is in the definition of the word "little"
- Little can mean small in size, but it can also mean a short distance or duration
- And that is what Jesus is talking about here - how long Peter's faith lasted
- The issue wasn't that Peter didn't have faith

- The issue was that he stopped believing and trusting Jesus
- His faith was short-lived in that moment
- The challenge of discipleship isn't just simply starting as a disciple; it's continuing as a disciple
- Anybody can be passionate for a moment. Disciples learn to be faithful for a lifetime
- The goal isn't to have a flashy faith that burns bright for a season. It's to have a faith that endures
- But don't miss that beautiful part. When Peter sank, Jesus didn't lecture him first; he grabbed him first. That's the gospel

We can never do it on our own. Our attention wanders, your habits fail you, your faith weakens, you sink but Jesus reaches out and grabs you over and over.

And our hope is that Jesus never lets us go.

WE:

- So graduates, the world will spend the rest of your life competing for your attention.
- And whatever captures your attention will shape your direction
- Give your attention to Jesus.
- Fix your eyes on him when life is exciting, when life is disappointing, in the dramatic moments, in the ordinary moments
- Because the goal is to finish well
- And church, this isn't a message just for the graduates. Every one of us is becoming someone. We are all moving in a direction.
- The question isn't whether something has your attention. The question is whether Jesus has your attention.

Let's pray.

We confess that our attention so easily drifts, and our faith so often feels short-lived.

Help these graduates to fix their eyes on You in every season ahead, when life is exciting and when it is hard.

Form us all in our daily rhythms that keep our eyes fixed on you Jesus. When we stumble or sink, remind us that Your hand is reaching for us and has a firm hold on us. Give us courage when you call us to step out of the boat, to step in faith, and we look forward to the amazing things you have ahead for us as we walk in faith.

We trust You with our future.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Benediction

Colossians 3:1-4

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is your^[a] life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.