

Keep your eyes on Jesus

(Interactive sermon with children)

I'd like to invite the kids to come up front to help me with this sermon. [To ushers: Can we have the lights off, please? This Gospel story took place when it was dark.] [To kids.] Ever been in a boat? [I then look at the rest of the congregation, raise my hand and other hands go up, too.] Ever been in a row boat, rowing into the wind – the wind is blowing that way but you have to get to where the wind is coming from? It's hard work, even for grown-ups, even for experienced, buff, full-time fishermen like Peter and his friends. But they had to get across the lake, even doing it at night.

Let's sit down and imagine that we're rowing along with Peter. [We all sit and start "rowing."] Now let's imagine that the wind is really blowing [the whole congregation is invited to make wind noises], and the waves are slowing us down, and we're going up and down and side to side [which we all do]. Now let's imagine that we've been doing this for *hours*, and it's way, way past all of our bedtimes, but we're in the middle of the lake so we can't stop. And – did they have motors for boats in those days? (The kids shake their heads.)

Suddenly, we see something, or someone, but it's so dark we can't see clearly. We're in the middle of the lake and it looks like we see a person, but we don't see any boat! What or who do you think we're seeing? ("Jesus.") Well, how could we find out for sure? ("Go to him.") Do you know any kid in your class who is always the first to raise his or her hand *even if he or she doesn't know the answer?* (The kids all nod.) Grown-ups – ever know a kid like that? (People nod.) Maybe some of you were that kid!

Well, Peter was that kind of guy – always the first to raise his hand, or the first to talk in class without raising his hand. Who wants to play Peter? [I pick one of the volunteers.] O.K. Look at the sculpture on the wall of Jesus on Easter morning – newly risen from the dead. If he can conquer death, is there anything Jesus can't do to help you? (The kids shake their heads.) Now, "Peter", Jesus says to you, "Don't be afraid, it's me." You say to him – repeat after me, phrase by phrase, "If it's really you, Jesus, tell me to walk to you on the water." Jesus nods – now "Peter", get out of the boat, climb over the side [I pantomime climbing over the side too], take a couple of steps and stop. Now everybody else, make lots of wind and wave noises – grown-ups too – and sway side to side. O.K., "Peter", look at Jesus, now – look down at the water and the waves!

O.K., we can stop making wind and water noises and motions now, because Jesus caught Peter and they both climbed into the boat. We can have the house lights up, too, please, ushers. *That's* when Peter lost it – when he stopped concentrating on Jesus and paid attention to the wind and the waves. When he was focused on Jesus, Peter was able to walk on water! When he was focused *only* on his problems, he started to sink.

Sometimes in life, whatever age we are, we may feel like we've been working very hard and not getting anywhere, just like Peter and the other disciples were. And sometimes things can seem pretty dark for us – just as it did for them, at night a couple of hours before dawn. And sometimes when God sends us help we may not recognize it as help from God at first – just like the disciples didn't recognize Jesus walking to them on the water at first. But if we recognize God's help, whatever form it takes, and *keep focused on Jesus not **just** on our problems*, God can help us do wonderful things.

*That's called “**thinking outside the boat.**”*

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