

Saint Peter gives two examples regarding movement and water. We know that Peter walked on water toward Jesus and that he also swam in the water toward Jesus. The account of Jesus walking on the sea is found in Matthew 14:22-33. Jesus comes walking on the water towards his disciples who are in a boat. By the way, there is some sort of storm going on in which the disciples are “beaten by the waves; for the wind was against them” (Matthew 14:24). Jesus tells his disciples not to fear “And Peter answers him, ‘Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water’” (Matthew 14:28). Jesus tells Peter to “come,” and Peter comes, walking on water! And when Peter doubts, he begins to sink. But, of course, Jesus catches Peter by the hand to save his dear apostle and friend.

Now, for the second example. In John’s account of Jesus appearing to his disciples by the sea, Peter and the disciples are once again in a boat. Jesus is standing on the beach, but the disciples do not realize it is him. That is, until Jesus tells the fishermen to try casting on the right side of the boat, they follow his instructions and there is a miraculous catch of fish. The beloved disciple, realizing a miracle took place, says, “It is the Lord!” Peter, upon hearing this, “put on his clothes, for he was stripped for work, and sprang into the sea” (John 21:7). In other words, Peter jumped in the water and swam toward Jesus.

How do these two accounts relate to our spiritual lives? In both accounts, Peter goes toward Jesus, though one is by walking and the other is swimming. I think that sometimes the Lord bids us to him with miraculous means, like walking on water. I know in my personal life, there are times when there is a storm of doubt and even despair around me. In those moments, I have to ignore the raging sea around me and step on the water, trusting that Jesus will not let me sink. Even more than not sinking, he lets me even walk over my troubles. I step one foot at a time, not focusing on my sufferings or my problems or my fears, and I just go straight to Jesus, by his power and might.

Then, there are moments when I am on a boat in the water and Jesus is not there. When I finally do see Jesus on the shore, I jump in the water and have to work hard to swim to my Lord. I may need someone like the beloved disciple to cry out to me that “It is the Lord” (John 21:7)! As Peter jumps in the water with his clothes on, Jesus may also call me to jump in the water with my clothes on. It may be wet and cold, and I may be swimming through the thickness of doubt and pain, but I am swimming toward Jesus.

Either way, I am walking with faith as I go toward Jesus, or I am swimming with faith as I go toward Jesus.

The miraculous walk on the sea occurs only occasionally in our spiritual lives. More often, we feel the human work of swimming through the sea that comes in our spiritual lives. Still, both end with meeting Jesus.

In my own life, when I am on retreat or listen to an inspirational speaker, life feels easy and it feels like I am just walking on water toward Jesus. However, when I am at work or have the pain and suffering of illness, life feels like I am swimming with all of my might toward Jesus, even with the weight of my wet clothes pulling me downward. Focused on my dear Savior, I still make it to shore to meet him. I have faith that Jesus will let me walk on water and I have faith that Jesus will let me swim in the water—both without sinking!

Where are you in your spiritual life? Are you walking or swimming? Both are realities that we must go through. We need not fear either way, for, in both instances, we are going toward Jesus.