

Sometime back, a parishioner invited me to come along for a hot-air balloon ride. (We were joined by a number of other folks). It was both exhilarating and peaceful. However, another pastor did not have the same experience. He was with his wife and another couple in a much smaller balloon. After introducing one another and exchanging what each did for a living and the like, the pilot began the balloon's ascent.

Unlike my balloon, where the basket wall was fairly high up, their balloon basket only went waist high and thus created a bit more fearful outcome.

The pastor decided he would like to get to know something about the guy who was flying this balloon, as they had placed their destinies in his hands; their lives rested on the competence and character of the man piloting the balloon.

So, he inched over towards him and asked, "What do you do for a living? How did you get started flying balloons?" He had hoped he would say something like that he started flying hot-air balloons because he used to be an astronaut and he missed flying.

He knew they were in trouble when his response began with, "Well, it's like this, dude." He didn't actually have a job, he said; mostly he surfed. He said he began flying hot-air balloons after he was driving his pickup truck and had gotten into a rather bad accident, injured his brother. He said his brother was no longer able to get around too well, so he started flying balloons to give his brother something to watch.

The other couple had not spoken a word during the whole flight. The wife then speaks for the only time during the journey. She said to the minister, "You're a pastor. Do something religious!" So he offered to take up a collection.

MP: The question is, "Are person's competence and character such that I can, with confidence, place my destiny in his hands?" That requires faith. And faith is intimately connected to risk — there can be no faith without risk. And risk is intimately connected to fear and sometimes failure. I'm speaking of Jesus, who pilots our lives.

That brings us to the story of Peter in the boat. Imagine the fear of stepping off the boat when the waves are crashing about and the night is black. Peter gets out, and he falls. He doesn't make it. Is it a complete story of failure?

Have you ever failed in something after going out on a limb? Have you ever been cut from a team after trying out? You decide to ask this girl and she says she is busy even though you had not told her the time? Think of some of those types of failures. All of us are "would-be water walkers." And God did not intend for human beings, made in His image, to go through life in a desperate attempt to avoid failure.

Yes, the boat is safe, and the boat is secure, and the boat is comfortable. The water is high, the waves are rough, the wind is strong, and the night is dark. A storm is out there, and if you get out of your boat, you may sink.

But if you don't get out of your boat, you will never walk, because if you want to walk on the water, you have to get out of the boat. There is something, someone inside us that tells us our lives are about something more than sitting in the boat, something that calls us to leave the routine of comfortable existence and do more with our faith.

Peter does so and for the first time in the history of the human race, a mortal man is walking on the water. And for just a moment, it's just Peter and Jesus. Then, all of a sudden, Peter realizes what he is doing; he sees the waves; he feels the sting of the water. And his faith gives way; he is afraid again, and he sinks. He missed Jesus for the waves. A failure?

Failure is not so much an event – it is the way we judge or interpret the event.

+Somebody asked Winston Churchill, "What most prepared you to lead Great Britain through World War II?" For a period of time, Great Britain stood virtually alone against Nazi Germany as it dominated the Western World.

This was Churchill's response: "It was the time I repeated a class in grade school." The questioner said, "You mean you flunked a grade?" Churchill said, "I never flunked in my life. I was given a second opportunity to get it right."

Yes, it is true Peter's faith gave way. He could not stay locked in to Jesus. He sank. He failed. But there were eleven bigger failures in the boat. Their failure was safe, unnoticed, and uncriticized.

Only Peter experienced the shame of public failure. But only Peter knew the glory of walking on the water. And only Peter knew, in a way that the others never would, that when he sank, Jesus would be there. Peter had a shared moment, a connection that nobody else could have. They could not have had it because they never got out of the boat.

The eleven other disciples were "boat potatoes." They did not want to run the risk. They did not want to experience the fear. We might refer to them as "pew potatoes," people whose religious faith amounts to little more than spiritual padding that will add comfort to their lives.

At least we can say that Peter did know that Jesus would save him. But the point is not that Jesus will instantly, always bail people out. It is that he is always ready to respond. There is no failure that can place you beyond the loving care of the hand of God.

When people get out of the boat, amazing things happen. What if everybody here were to say, "I want to get out of the boat. Jesus, command me. I'm yours." Can you imagine the kind of power of God that would be released in this community and this nation?

Would something like what happened in Charlottesville have even taken place if all stepped out for God's peace? Stepped out for God's love of all people, regardless of race? Deacon Chris shared with me that the former president had tweeted a quote from Mandela that read something like this: "Hatred is taught (not always from the family) and love is taught. Love is much easier to teach than hatred."

Jesus is still looking for people to get out of the boat, to do more with our faith. If you go, you will face problems. A storm is out there. Your faith will not be perfect, and you may sink.

But I know two other things. I know that when you fail—and you will fail—Jesus will be there. He will pick you up. He will not leave you alone. And I know that every once in a while, you're going to walk on the water