

“O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” Matthew 14:22-33

The Gospel of Mark tells this same story about the panic of the disciples during a storm at sea well before Matthew’s Gospel picked it up. Mark’s version includes the same incident of Jesus’s scaring but ultimately calming the fear of the disciples by approaching them walking upon the surface of the turbulent water – after which they immediately reached the safety of the shore.

But Matthew, in compiling his Gospel later than Mark, inserts the part about Peter’s wanting to try walking on water himself. And Jesus says, *Come on*. After a few steps Peter’s nerves give out, he starts to sink and cries out to Jesus, *Lord, save me!* And you know the rest.

Some scholars think that Matthew, in retelling the account of Jesus walking on a stormy sea, decided to include the Peter part to alert us to Peter’s chickening out again at a later date, namely after Jesus is arrested and a servant girl recognizes Peter sitting by a fire with other observers and says *You, too, were with Jesus the Galilean . . . even your speech gives you away*. Peter is so shaken by her suspicion that it says, *He began to curse and swear, I do not know the man*. [Often guilt drives one to deny one’s guilt more loudly and violently – out of fear of the disgrace.]

And may we not say that, here on the night of Jesus’ arrest and the abuse he will soon experience, we have a situation that can be described as “stormy”? And has not Peter begun to sink?

It seems strange that Matthew’s Gospel would so embarrass Peter. After all, it’s Matthew who emphasizes the leadership of Peter among the early disciples as in Jesus’ famous remark: *You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*. Yet maybe Matthew wants to show not only Peter’s authority but also his grave weaknesses – as he grows to greater maturity and courage – to become a Rock.

Leaders need to remember that. They need to think of themselves as walking not on solid ground all the time but on fluid situations, which, if they do not reach out to Jesus and the grace of Jesus for help, could swallow them up and many a boatful of believers with them.

But isn’t it wonderful how in *Luke’s* Gospel version of Peter’s denial, his losing his footing at a frightening moment, Luke adds: *The Lord turned and looked at Peter; and Peter remembered the word he had said to him, “Before the cock crows today, you will deny my three times.” And he went out and began to weep bitterly*. He drowned in tears – which can be a very honest and beautiful way of becoming human.