



# Into the Light

July-August 2006

Matthew 19.26

## Walk on Water?

By Bob Van Domelen

*Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. <sup>30</sup>But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" (Matthew 14.29-30)*

I think it would be reasonably safe bet that at least one reader of this newsletter looked at the title and asked, "What has walking on water got to do with sex offenders?" Actually, that's a pretty good question.

The gospel tells us that while Jesus was on the mountainside praying, the disciples had been fighting rough water in an attempt to get to the other side of the lake. Between three and six in the morning, Jesus came to them, walking on the water. The disciples thought they were seeing a ghost and cried out with fear until Jesus said, "Take courage, it is I."

Peter took it upon himself to respond, "Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water." And Jesus said, "Come."

In that very moment, I believe Peter knew beyond a doubt that the object of his heart's desire had just called to him with the simple invitation "Come." In that very moment, his fear was set aside as he climbed out of the boat and started walking toward Jesus.

As he walked, however, he felt the strong wind and saw around him the rough water that had threatened to capsize their boat. And Peter, being like most of us, began to panic. He also began to sink. Yet despite all that was happening to him, Peter knew enough to cry out, "Lord, save me."

No man or woman arrested for child molestation stands arrogant or proud when confronted with the truth of those charges. The denial that often comes in the form of "All I did was" or "It only happened once," or even "He (she) wanted me to do it" is only a flimsy wall of self-protection. It is a barrier that keeps offenders from seeing the real damage done to victims, and it is a barrier that they think makes it possible for them to live with themselves.

One series of thoughts that emerged following my own arrest was a belief that the nightmare was over, that help would be available, and with time and help I could change. It is hard for me to describe what I actually felt at that moment, but I will share that I felt a freedom I had not known for years—or ever for that matter.

For the first time since childhood God seemed to be taking an active part in my life. He was meeting me in the midst of the filth I had created with a love that would both remind me of His forgiveness and encourage me in the restoration He planned for me. And perhaps just like Peter I heard the simple invitation to "Come."

I had no boat to climb out of but I did have a mind filled with control issues, insecurities, and distorted needs. My mind was a place of intense contradiction in that I knew right from wrong but often made wrong *seem* right because in my neediness, my choices *felt* right to me. My boat was not a place of safety in a storm; it was the storm.

One reason I know that my belief in God's love during this time was not merely another form of denial was that things actually got more difficult, not easier, once I surrendered to Him.

Daily life didn't turn into a sea of smiling faces; people did not rush to forgive me; and the Church did not extend the hand of encouragement that I thought would be coming. I think in many ways my very presence challenged the faith community and brought them conflict they would have preferred not to have. Despite the tension (real or imagined), I still heard the invitation to "Come."

### **Rough Winds, Rough Waters**

Over the past 21 years, I am often reminded of that sense of freedom I felt after my arrest. It was only a moment or two in actual time, but it was a moment completely free of conflict, fear, anxiety, or anything negative. It was also, however, truth. I knew God would bring me to that place of healing. My response at the time was a simple, "Yes." I climbed out of the boat.

In a perfect world, we could all face our demons, decide that life would be infinitely better without them, and find supportive people to help us break chains that connect us to those demons. In a perfect world, everyone knowing us would hold the vision of who we were becoming and not where we came from. And in a perfect world, we would have broken the chains, expelled the demons, and never heard from them again. But that's in a perfect world.

For most readers, I am not sharing anything new; I am confirming what you already experience. But there are non-offenders reading this newsletter, so a list of some of the rough winds and waters offenders face might help bring about some understanding.

There are also those, by the way, who think they are the only ones going through these rough winds and rough waters. For them, my list will be incomplete but that's okay. You'll all get the idea. What I ask is that you try to see Christ's invitation to "Come" against issues that could cause you to feel as if you are sinking. There is no order or level of priority with the list I am offering, just what pops into my head at the moment.

- Churches rejecting both the sin and the sinner.
- Divorce papers served someone in prison

- No visitors, no letters, no one who seems to believe in you
- Enduring names like baby-raper or tree-jumper
- Being threatened with violence or sexual assault by other inmates (or actually having those things done)
- Being a victim of the same crime as a child but unable to find healing or restoration for that
- Temptations continuing despite efforts to keep thoughts free of age-inappropriate attractions
- Trying to establish a release plan when no job, housing, or church affiliation is available
- The ever-increasing list of restrictions offenders face outside of prison
- Believing God is absent or uncaring
- And on and on

It is all too easy to think that healing and change is based on the absence of the above issues or at best a successful resolution to those issues. It is also too easy to believe that God cannot/will not love us until these issues are eliminated—at least the ones over which we have some control.

Peter walked on the water if only for a short distance, sank, and called out for Jesus to save him. Jesus did. Later Peter would deny the very one he loved and the one to whom he had pledged his allegiance. That could have been the end of Peter's association with Jesus, but it wasn't.

In time Peter would suffer much as a follower of Christ and he would eventually die for proclaiming the freedom all are called to receive—even sex offenders. None of that sounds like the success formula some preach in the name of God.

We are all at different points on life's journey. We all have had joy and we have had hard times—even extremely hard times. But in every kind of moment, joy or difficulty, there is evidence of an invitation to "Come." If you find yourself questioning the realness of that invitation, remember what Peter also said when Jesus asked if he would leave just as others had. "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. <sup>69</sup>We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." (John 6.68-69)

To the person who does everything in his or her power to break the bondage that brought so much pain, I tell you that such is the stuff of which saints are made. Be a saint because that's what God calls you to be.

In closing, when I write to you always remember the victims you and I have created. Let us pray for their healing and ask God to bless them beyond their imagination. We cannot make all the winds or seas calm, but we can say "Yes." □

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*All things are possible with God!*

## *Our Prayer Corner*



**Prayer is an incredible gift we can give one another, for there is no better thing than to lift our lives, hopes, and dreams to the altar of the Lord.**

### *Let us pray . . .*

- First and always foremost, for our victims, that each day for them is a new day, a day without fear, and a day of healing.
- For those who minister to victims, that their witness of love and support helps to bring healing for those so desperately needing it.
- For those preparing to be released from prison, that housing and employment be available to them.
- For those in treatment, that they will know in their hearts that God is with them and will bless them in their efforts to understand their offenses and learn how to avoid them.
- For those states considering further restrictions on sex offenders, that they take the time to look at examples of former offenders who have been living in their communities for long periods without reoffending before choosing to penalize them more.
- For those struggling with authority, that they are able to recognize the authority of this world without losing the peace that comes from God's authority.
- For support ministries dealing with sex offenders, that they find encouragement to continue their efforts.
- For Bob, that he continues to listen for the voice of the Lord in all things; that his life be filled with healthy balance and accountability; and that he has the time needed to do everything.
- (As always) For those who are still abusing, that they will come to understand the devastation they bring on their victims and that they seek help for themselves—whatever the cost.

## **Recent Blessings**

On May 8 and 9, I had the opportunity to appear on the *Life Today with James Robison*, a program with a very large audience base in this country and in other countries as well.

James Robison and his wife Betty were both gracious and encouraging in the conversations we had about child molestation and sex offenders in particular. Rather than simply condemn me and other offenders, they asked for understanding. They really wanted to know how molestation could even happen and also what could be done to help offenders make changes in their lives. This attitude, by the way, is not likely to be seen or heard in much of the secular media.

The week of May 21, I attended the National Convocation of Jail and Prison Ministry in Myrtle Beach, SC, where I met some of the most wonderful people in the world. Many I spoke with one-on-one were already supportive of ministry to offenders, but they were also hungry for ways in which to improve that support. Please keep the Robisons and these ministers in your prayers.

## Bits & Pieces

From a recently released offender: "The transition house I was living in closed its doors, so I am having to find a new place to live. At this point, I am living in a person's back yard, looking and praying for a more permanent place to lay my head. But let me tell you, God is great, and He blesses me daily.

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*From Gates Unbarred Fellowship Newsletter: "We have to demand that our leaders have the strength to stand up and be willing to fight for all individual rights, sex offender's [rights] included. The time of saying, "They are only sex offenders, who cares" is over. The time of not putting your support to sex offender issues for fear of being [seen as] weak on crime is over." (Myths & Facts by Bill Paul)*

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From "Prison Legal News" (January 2006): "The United States District Court for the Northern District of New York ruled that New York's program for treating convicted state sex offenders violates the Fifth Amendment's guarantee against compulsory self-incrimination and issued a preliminary injunction. The Second Circuit has issued a stay pending appeal.

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*Comment on a photo in "The Washington Post" showing Arlington police putting on bullet-proof vests with POLICE in bold letters on the back before making a drop-in visit to the home of a sex offender: "Unannounced visits by police to the homes of a sex offender on probation or parole can be seen as understandable given community concerns over the issue of sex offenders in their neighborhood. The accompanying article, however, stated that the police arrive in an unmarked car, park some distance out of sight, and then put on the jackets for their visit. As Kent Willis of the Virginia ACLU commented in the article, the practice seems 'related more to public relations than protecting public safety.' It's hard not to disagree with that given the procedure police use in making the visits."*

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From *The Boston Globe*: Committed [Massachusetts] sex offenders are entitled to have a judge review their cases annually to decide if they still pose a threat warranting continued confinement. Even so, release is unlikely. Since the law was enacted in 1999, not one person has been freed, according to the state's public defender agency, the Committee for Public Counsel Services."

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*From MI-CURE NEWS (May 2006): "In January, the Iowa County Attorneys Association issued a statement that included the following. '(We believe) that the 2000 foot residency restriction for persons who have been convicted of sex offenses involving minors does not provide the protection that was originally intended and that the cost of enforcing that requirement and the unintended effects on families of offenders warrant replacing the restriction with more effective protective measures.'"*

[Note: I mentioned this position in the last *Bits & Pieces* column but did not have the complete quote. Thanks to MI-CURE for including it in their newsletter.]

*All things are possible with God!*

## The Right Direction

I received several letters thanking me for "Change for the Right Reason" (May-June). The anger I expressed in that article certainly was directed at conditions I feel are morally and ethically wrong but I apologize if some readers concluded that it was about time I showed anger in what I share. My intent was not anger for the sake of anger, but anger at the inability of people (especially those who call themselves Christian) to look for more ways to deal with the issue of child molesters than just offering more punishment or restrictions.

Our society seems stuck in its inability to see that the protection of children is not simply a legislative matter but one of personal involvement in the lives of children. It sees all molesters as heinous without considering redemptive or restorative qualities, all the while ignoring that a significant percentage of molesters were themselves molested.

I don't ever want to forget the harm I brought my victims. At the same time, I also recognize the need for continued healing in the lives of those who molested (myself included) and all of God's children deserve healing, not just those who are deemed worthy by others to receive it.

A letter I received from a man recently released from prison touched me deeply because although this ministry offered him help, he was able to see God as the source of his healing and well-being. I will share a portion of that letter here.

*Last month I became very discouraged and depressed as I began reading news items and hearing TV news stories about stricter sex offender laws, registries, living restrictions, etc. It seemed like the whole world was against me and others who were trying to recover, heal, and assimilate again into the community. I obsessed night and day on this, and it began to affect my relationship with God and my wife. I even had slight thoughts of suicide. Satan was working me over. At wit's end, I visited your website.*

*I cannot tell you how God used your latest "Into the Light" newsletter. I read the account of Daniel's friends again, and began to weep as you voiced some of my frustrations as well. God almost instantly turned my mind around to put my trust and hope only in Him, no matter what. It was incredible how He began to pull me out of the depression and hide me in His wings. My wife and I watched your interview with James Robison and wept and cheered as you both spoke truth and hope on that show. I cannot thank you enough for your help and encouragement.*

As I look back on the past eighteen years since my own release, I can see all sorts of things that worked right for me and my family. I could name all sorts of people who reached out during times when help or encouragement was needed—many still do—yet I know by faith that these blessings were no accident. It IS God who cares for us, loves us, and desires us to be as we were created to be.

Our job is to pray for those who cannot see God in our lives, cannot see us as people worth knowing, and cannot understand how we could be their neighbors. The anger I expressed in the article was misplaced if it did not clearly include our responsibility to society—to pray for it. If we do not, who will?

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***A Little Humor*** (Sent in by someone trying to improve my choice of jokes)

A woman called her boyfriend and in an urgent voice said, "Please come over here and help me. I have a killer jigsaw puzzle, and I can't figure out how to get it started." Her boyfriend asked, "What is it supposed to be when it's finished?" The woman responded, "According to the picture on the box, it's a tiger." The boyfriend decided to go over and help with the puzzle. The woman let him in and showed him where she had the puzzle spread all over the table. He studied the pieces for a moment, looked at the box, and then turned to her saying, "First of all, no matter what we do, we're not going to be able to assemble these pieces into anything resembling a tiger." He then took her hand and said, "Second, I want you to relax. Let's have a nice cup of tea, and then let's put all these Frosted Flakes back into the box."

