

August 23/24, 2008

## **Talent by His Design**

**Matthew 14:22-33**

Pastor Mark Kremer

This is just an incredible, exciting time of year I think for many of us as we get back into Fall and anticipate everything that's going on in life, kind of like getting a fresh new start at this time of year. And it's a very important time of year for us as a church. We take these four weeks, which we started last week, to just kind of evaluate ourselves and to align our hearts with God's heart, so that we can be on mission together as a church in the coming year. So it's a very exciting time of year for us. And I think there's just this sense of anticipation you have, kind of like you anticipate at the beginning of the football season, and everything that goes along with that. I think we all have a sense of that as a church, as well as what God is going to do, as we move forward in days to come.

We started this series of getting ready leading up to our State of the Church two weekends from now. Last weekend we talked about the big picture of what God's desires are for us. What are the two great purposes that God desires each and every one of us to have as a priority in our lives? It all revolved around relationships. God said the priority of life is relationships: relationship with Himself and relationship with others. It's summed up in the two great commandments that we looked at in Luke 10 last week: *to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves.* We went on last week to talk about the gifts that God has given us in order to live out that purpose. He's given us time and talent and treasure in order to pour those three gifts that He's given each and every one of us, into that big purpose that's so much bigger than us: to love God and to love those around us.

And we talked specifically about time. If you were not here last week, I would really encourage you to stop and pick up the transcript. We attached to the back of it the little evaluation form that we gave out to everybody last week, to just look through your life and to think about where your time goes. Completing it helps you look for the low-value activities, in terms of God's eternal purposes, so you can eliminate those things in order to invest your time, this incredible gift that God gives us, in those things that will last forever, those things that matter the most.

For some of us you know, time is something that seems like an enemy. We talked about that last week. But really it is an incredible gift. And I think there are a couple of things that really struck me, even this week as I was processing that in my life. One is the incredible gift of the consistency of time. There is a rhythm that God brings to us in our life because every 24 hours is the same. You get 24 fresh hours every day. You kind of know what's coming. You know in a sense the sun sets; the sun rises. We are able to give our life some balance; and we have time for all of those things because there's a rhythm to life.

I know there are some people who would say, "*You know, I just don't have enough time. I don't have enough time to serve. I don't have enough time to get involved in other people's lives.*" I just want you to really seriously consider what that must sound like to many other

people who are investing their lives in other people, and they are finding the time to do the important things. That has to be very difficult for them to hear when you say, "*I just don't have time.*"

You know what I find in my life? I have time for everything that is important. I have six children and a granddaughter. I have time to spend with them every week. I have time to work 50 hours a week. I have time to exercise. I have time to read. I have time to spend with my wife. I have time to spend with God. You know what? There *is* time. It's really about how we invest that time, how we use that time, whether we're selfish with it, or whether we make it available to God. So there is time, and there is a rhythm that God wants us to have in our life, and we talked about that a little bit last week.

The second thing I thought about, that related to time this week, was really that clock "moving on", this constant reminder of the urgency we have to be about the mission, because we can't go back, and time doesn't stop. It keeps pressing on. And as we get older and have birthdays and all these milestones, they're just reminders that there is a sense of urgency about what we're doing in this life, because it won't go on forever. So I want you to think about those things as we continue to process where our time should be invested for God's purposes.

Today we want to move on and talk about our talents. And I think in order for us to do that, we first have to define what we mean by talent. I think all of us understand that there are certain innate abilities and personality that God has given to us from birth. They're hard-wired into our genetics. You know it's interesting that, as a father of six that have all come from the same genetic pool, they are very, very different. And every one of them has their own unique personality. They have their own unique strengths and giftedness, and that would certainly be true of each of us.

But I'd like us today to think just a little bit broader than just about innate ability and personality. I'd like us to think of "talent" as being *everything* that makes up the unique person that you are today. I think that includes not only those abilities and personality, but also your experiences—the things that have shaped and molded your life, the things that you've gone through that give you the passion you have about certain things, the struggles, the trials—all of those things that have happened in your life, that God has orchestrated, that make you the kind of person, the way you think, the way you are today.

As we talk about talent, that's what I'm talking about—the unique person that you are. Every single one of us here is very unique and different, and I think God really takes great pleasure in that. I think that gives Him great joy, just as you look at the diversity in nature and say, "Wow, God takes pleasure in all of that." So I think that we have to think about, "*Well, what am I supposed to do with this unique self that I am, this person that I am? What am I supposed to do with that? What does God want for that?*"

I think there are a couple of wrong responses that many people have. One is to devalue who they are. They struggle to see any real value in who they are. And it's what I would call the "worm mentality"—you know, just this sense of *I'm not really any good; I don't really have anything significant to contribute; I'm just nothing and nobody, and it doesn't really matter what I do, because I'm just not that important.*

But I want you to understand that scripture says, "God has fearfully and wonderfully made you, that He's fashioned you, and He formed you". And so when you think that way, and when you say those words, whether to yourself or to someone else, you're really slapping God in the face and saying, "God, I don't believe You, that You made me someone unique and special." That is not what God wants for us—to have a "worm mentality".

On the other hand, there's another wrong response, that is, I think many people try to live off their talents. In other words, they know who they are and they see what they're capable of. And they're just living, and taking, and using it for their own benefit. They're kind of strutting around and showing off, and making sure everybody understands and knows how great they really are. I call it the "peacock mentality" as opposed to the "worm mentality".

When I was growing up, my uncle and aunt had peacocks, some of the most obnoxious animals that you'll ever want to be around. They're messy, dirty, loud; they're always showing off their feathers and strutting around and making noise. They want to make a show of themselves. And there are people who are like that too, who really are trying to draw attention back to themselves and to their talent and ability, and they're kind of "front-and-center" in the whole story. I don't think that's what God wants with our talents either. Those are the extremes. So what is it that we should do with our talents? What's the right response to what God has given us and how it is to be used?

Well, we're going to let Peter speak to that this morning. So if you have your Bible, turn with me to Matthew 14, as we answer the question: "What does God want to do with the ability, the talent, the unique self that He has made me to be?" We're going to begin in verse 22 of Matthew 14.

Now, what has transpired just prior to the text we're going to look at this morning is Jesus has just fed the five thousand with a few loaves and fishes. And, as has been happening in the months preceding the account today, the disciples have been watching Jesus work, and they've been observing and seeing what kind of person He is, His incredible ability to do miracles, and how people respond to Him. They've been a witness to all of those things and they've seen what He can do. And this particular account takes place immediately following that miracle of feeding the five thousand.

Verse 22:

**Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat, and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the crowds away. After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone.** (\*NASB, Matthew 14:22-23)

First of all, you need to notice that Jesus sent these twelve disciples into a boat to go across the Sea of Galilee to the next place where He wanted them to go. Now you have to understand that at least four of the disciples were fishermen prior to their following Jesus. I mean this was their home territory. This was their lake. No doubt Peter and his brother and the sons of Zebedee had grown up on this lake, and all of the disciples had come from the area around Galilee and had been on this lake many, many times. They probably knew this lake like the back of their hand and had been in every situation this lake could throw at them.

And so Jesus sends them on a boat to row to the other side while He stayed to dismiss the crowd. I don't know if they thought, *I wonder how He's going to get to where we're going*, but they just obediently went off to do what God had told them to do. Jesus meanwhile stayed back, sent the crowd away, and then went off to the mountain alone to pray.

I want to just remind us again of what we talked about last week. Here Jesus models for us the very thing we were talking about with Mary last week—that it's very important for us to spend time sitting at the feet of God and listening to Him, and worshiping Him, and spending time with Him. And Jesus, consistently, in spite of all of the problems and situations in the world, in spite of the sin of the world and the mission that He was on, He always took time to spend time with His Father in prayer alone. And if Jesus modeled that for us, as the Son of God, certainly it's as important for us to have that kind of relationship going with our Heavenly Father. So Jesus was there alone.

Verse 24:

**But the boat was already a long distance from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary.**

While the men are out in the boat, they encounter some very strong winds that are blowing against them as they are trying to make their way from east to west across the Sea of Galilee. And evidently the winds were very strong, and they labored and they struggled to row that boat in the direction they were trying to go; and it was a long, long night of struggle out on the lake.

Now maybe you've never been out on a lake and struggled with the wind or storm. But I think the picture that we ought to have here is the fact that in our lives, in the routine of our lives and the things we've been called to do and told to do, that there are times where it's just a struggle. And we struggle, and we strain, and we work, and the winds seem contrary sometimes to where we're trying to go and what we're trying to accomplish. And it can be long and arduous, discouraging and trying at times, to just live life and do the things that we know we're supposed to be doing. I think that's exactly the picture here that we have of these disciples out on the lake. The wind is contrary and there are waves, and they're working hard.

Verse 25:

**And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea.**

Now there are a couple of things we need to note here. One is that it says He came to them "**in the fourth watch of the night.**" That was the time between 3:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m. so that gives you a little bit of a picture of how long they'd been out rowing the boat.

Now I went out on Lake Estes this summer and rowed the boat around for an hour and I felt that in my muscles (the wimp that I am). And I'm thinking, these guys were out for 8, 9, 10 hours, from the time before it was dark, all the way until 3:00 in the morning, and they're rowing and working and straining out in the middle of the lake. And in that hour, Jesus comes walking to them on the sea. Now that's an amazing thing in and of itself that here, out in the middle of this lake, they're seeing someone come walking across the waves towards them.

Verse 26:

**When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear.**

Never before in their being on a lake, had they *ever* witnessed anyone walking across the top of the waves towards them, and it freaked them out! They were scared to death! And big, tough, strong guys that they were, they cried out in fear because they'd never seen anything like that before.

I think one of the things we need to think about, as we read through this story, is the fact that oftentimes it is in our storm, in our struggle, that pathway is often the one God uses to come to us. It's not when the lake is calm and smooth. It's in the middle of the storm that Jesus comes to us and grabs our attention. And, frankly, sometimes in the day-to-day difficulties of life and the challenges of just living in this world, Jesus shows up and we're maybe just a little freaked out because we maybe never thought Jesus would show up in these day-to-day struggles of life. And we may not quite know what to do with it, when Jesus shows up and He wants to say something to us. He wants to initiate something with us, but we may just be like those disciples, a little bit scared.

But that's what happened, and they cried out in fear as they see Him. Actually, John and Mark record the same story, and they said Jesus intended to walk right on by, and so no doubt they were thinking, *it is a ghost*. It's some kind of apparition out there, and we're not sure what it is, but it's walking right by us in the middle of the lake!

Verse 27:

**But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid."**

Those are always God's words to us when He comes to us as his followers: "Don't be afraid. I'm here. Take courage. It's me." God offers Himself to us in our storm and in our struggle.

Now this is where the story gets very interesting. Verse 28:

**Peter said to Him, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water."**

Now that's a very interesting thing for Peter to say, isn't it? I mean I think Peter is one of those disciples we see throughout the gospel that always wanted to be where Jesus was. Peter wanted to be right there beside Jesus. I mean Peter was passionate about Jesus. He was brazen; he was bold. He sometimes acted before he thought. Peter had this brash sort of personality. But wherever Jesus was, he wanted to be there. Peter was the kind of guy that was always following so close to Jesus that when Jesus would stop, he'd bump into him. I mean that's how close Peter wanted to be to Jesus. And I think that in this moment of terror, in the middle of this lake that was Peter's home territory, (Peter had grown up, lived on this lake, and seen many storms before), when Peter saw Jesus, he wanted to be with Jesus. He wanted to join Jesus wherever Jesus was. And so he said, "Lord, if that's you (really it's saying *since that's you*), bid me to come to you; tell me to come," not even thinking about what he was really saying and what the implication was.

Verse 29:

**And He said, "Come!" And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus.**

Now I love that. I just love that about Peter. Peter says, "Lord, if that's you, bid me to come to you," and Jesus said, "Come." And Peter, without a moment's hesitation, without stopping to really think and analyze that this maybe was a little outside the realm of what he'd experienced before, he just simply got out of the boat and started walking toward Jesus. And lo and behold, he's walking on top of the water, just like Jesus. Wow! That is crazy right there!

I love that simple faith of Peter who just got out of the boat and walked toward Jesus and found himself in an amazing realm that he'd never experienced before. He's experiencing the supernatural power of God in his life, not because he was seeking some sign or seeking some power or fame for himself, just because he wanted to join Jesus where Jesus was. And he got out of the boat and started walking towards Jesus on top of the water—just like Jesus!

Well, how long did that last? Verse 30:

**But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!"**

All of a sudden Peter finds himself out on the water, and he's looking at Jesus, and then he looks around and thinks, *oh my goodness, what have I just done? There are waves, I'm on the water! Water does not support a human being! You sink!* And he starts to look around and he takes his eyes off of Jesus, and immediately he does what all human beings do when they're on water—they sink. And Peter, in that moment, cried out to Jesus and said, "**Lord, save me!**" And again, Jesus responded to that need. Verse 31:

**Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"**

I love that, because when Peter began to look around and take note of where he really was, and began to sink, he cried out for help, Jesus immediately just reached out and took hold. It wasn't a time for a lesson. It wasn't time for some good advice. It was just time for Jesus to take hold of Peter. And He took hold of him. And as Peter was in Jesus' hands, then Jesus said, "Why did you doubt Me? You know who I am. You know what I'm capable of. You know the power that I have. Why did you doubt that I could make this possible for you?"

That's a good question, and it's one that all of us need to wrestle with when we step out, and then begin to get fearful and afraid. And then God takes hold of us and we realize, "*Oh, we really are safe in His hands.*" We really have to ask ourselves the question: "Why do I doubt God's goodness? Why do I doubt that He's invited me into his purposes and mission?"

I love verse 32:

**When they got into the boat, the wind stopped.**

You know: lesson learned; miracle done; wind stops. Jesus didn't have to command it, rebuke it,

say anything, do anything. He got in the boat and the wind stopped. And what was the response of the other disciples in the boat? Verse 33:

**And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, "You are certainly God's Son!"**

I love that, because in the middle of this miracle, this amazing thing they just witnessed, even with Peter getting out of the boat and walking on the water, when Peter got in the boat they didn't say, "*Wow, Peter, did you see what you just did? My goodness, that's so awesome!*" They didn't focus their attention on Peter. They immediately worshipped Jesus, and He received all the glory and all the praise of what had just happened. **"You are certainly God's Son!"**

There's this ongoing progression through the gospels of the disciples more and more getting a picture of who Jesus really is. It's becoming clearer and clearer, and the declarations of His divinity and His holiness and His being the Savior are becoming more and more bold, because more and more they're getting a picture of who Jesus is. And I love how God orchestrates in our lives these ongoing lessons for us, so that we get a better and better picture in this process of doing life with Christ, of who He is. And our declarations become bolder and bolder, and we become more and more in love with Jesus, and we get stronger in our witness and our faith.

You may say, "*Now, what in the world does that story have to do with talent and who I uniquely am?*" Well, I think it relates back to Peter and who he was. Peter was this incredible, passionate, brazen person that had this personality that, you know, every time you see him, his personality sort of jumps out at you. I mean Peter was a very unique person. And Peter was very comfortable on that lake. He knew how to row. He'd seen many storms. But he saw Jesus in a place where he had never been before, and Peter wanted to join Jesus in that new place. And Peter's unique self, including his ability to climb out of a boat and to walk, caused him to step out of the realm that he was familiar with and knew, and walk toward Jesus onto a place he had never been before, into the realm of the supernatural, where God was doing something that was so much bigger than anything he'd experienced before. God took who Peter was, and Peter's unique self responded to a unique call from God, to join Him in a realm that he had never experienced before.

I think that is the application of this story to your life and to my life. Each one of us has been wired in a unique way. We have unique gifts. We have unique talents. We have a unique personality. And you can take that and just use it for yourself **or** you can listen when God says to you, "Come and join Me where you've never been before; join Me in the bigger mission that I have in life; join Me in making a kingdom impact, an eternal impact with your life, you can get out of the boat, where you're comfortable and it's safe, and join Me in doing something with your abilities, your talents, that you've never done before, and watch what I can do with you."

I think God delights in that. He knows who we are. We can sit in the boat and row and do all the things we're capable of doing. But when He calls you to join Him in this bigger picture of building the kingdom, of transforming other people's lives, of being involved with your talents in this great purpose of loving Him and loving others, then the question is: are we willing to get out of the boat and join Him in what He wants to do, and experience that amazing ability of God to take our humble talents and use them for His glory in a way we've never thought possible before?

I believe the scripture is full of accounts of people who did just like Peter did. I go back and think

of Esther in the Old Testament. Esther was one of the slave girls from Israel who had been brought into the kingdom. She was in this group of women, one who was to be selected to be the next queen. And Esther had these amazing things God had given her. It says she was beautiful in form and face. She had wisdom. She had beauty. She had grace. And God took that talent and that ability and put her into a place where she could never have imagined being before. It was for her, *like walking on water*, to be the queen of the greatest most powerful man on the earth. And then in that place she took a huge risk to *step out of the boat*, when the moment came, or her people would be killed. She took the risky step of faith, stepping out of the boat and offering herself, all that she was, to God. And in that moment, God used her to save her entire people.

I think of Joseph in the Old Testament who was this young, brash kind of a guy, but obviously the guy who could organize and run anything. So he's sold into slavery and purchased by this man, and before long is running the man's whole household. Unjustly he ends up in prison, and before long he's running everything in the prison. I mean the guy had **talent** to run and manage things. And people trusted him because he was so good at it. And lo and behold, God says, "The king has a dream; I want you to interpret for Me." And he takes this huge risk of *stepping out of the boat* into this uncharted territory, to interpret the dreams of the king, which led to God putting him in charge of an entire country, of saving his family and of saving the people of Israel. He would never have imagined that his talents could be used in such a tremendous, unbelievable way.

And you can go right on through the scriptures, person after person after person, where God had gifted them, God had given them talent, God had given them ability. But He also then called them, at some point, to join Him in doing the unthinkable, the extraordinary, the supernatural, to be a part of His eternal purposes as they're being lived out on this earth, of building His kingdom and transforming our world. And every time when people would step out in faith to join Jesus in what He was doing, He did amazing things, and glory was given to God.

Many of us are sitting in this room this morning because somebody took their talent, their ability, and they got out of the boat, following Jesus when He called them to come to do something they'd never done before. You know, there are a lot of people, even today in our church, that I think live this out. By no means would I suggest that we are way behind on this. I see all over the place, people who have the talent and ability, and they've offered it to God and they've made themselves available to God. And when God says "Come" to something they've never done before, that they just couldn't imagine, they get out of the boat and they follow Jesus, and He does extraordinary things through them.

I've been so impressed on the two trips I've taken with Jeff to India, with the leadership of Campus Crusade. These are some of the most talented and gifted men, who *could be* making millions of dollars in this country that's exploding economically. I mean, they are just an incredibly talented group of people. But they have offered that talent to Jesus to see their country transformed for Christ and it is unbelievable! I've never been around a group of more contagious, exciting men who just never stopping thinking about how God might want to use them to change their country. It's amazing!

I think of people here who have this amazing ability to connect with other people. And they *could* use that personality and be a personality magnet and throw parties and just have a good old time with lots of friends. But they use that talent and personality to get alongside people and to pour the life of Christ into them, and love people towards Jesus. And many, many people are being changed

and transformed, because they take their talents and they've offered them to Christ. As I look around the room, I see people that I think model and demonstrate that very thing.

But the question for each of us to consider is: Am I willing to offer to Jesus who I am when He calls me to get out of my comfort zone, out of what is normal, out of the routine? Not necessarily to leave your job and become a missionary--but maybe? Not necessarily to retire early and go off to do something in a world where you've never done something before, start some endeavor for God--but maybe?

But when He calls you to take what He's given you and join Him in His eternal purposes, you will begin to see the supernatural. You will step into a realm you've never stepped into before. And if you want to really see God at work, if you really want to know that God's alive and He's working today and how powerful He is, then *get out of the boat* and join Him in what He's doing and offer Him yourself. Then you will get the chance to participate in something absolutely unbelievable. I would want that for every single one of us in this room.

So many of us think that we have to try to do something for God. But God says, "Give me what you are. Just give me yourself. And when I call you and say 'Come' (and you're listening, hopefully), join Me in what I want to do over here. Join Me in the neighborhood where I want to do something; join Me at school where I want to reach these kids; join Me over here in the workplace because I want to use you here." Then we simply, out of obedience and love for Christ, get out of the boat and follow Him into the realm of the supernatural and begin to experience the life-changing power of God. He can use me, and He can use you to change the world.

Don't sell yourself short. Again, everything that you are, He's created; He's made you. Nothing has been wasted in shaping and forming you into the person you are today. The question is: Do you have the faith enough to get out of the boat and follow Him into the kingdom-building work that He's doing, and experience the unbelievable privilege of walking with Jesus on the water? The end result of that would be glory and praise and honor to Jesus Christ, not you, but to Jesus.

And so the question for us this morning is: What is it that God wants to do with my unique self to bring glory to Himself? What is God calling you to do with your unique self that will bring glory and honor to Him? And what will that require of you? I cannot answer the first question: what unique thing He wants to call you to. Place of service here? A different perspective of how He can use you in your work? A whole new attitude about working with your family and pouring into them and helping them become mission-oriented?

I can't tell you exactly what God wants you to do with your unique self for His glory. But I think I can answer the second question: What will it require? It requires a simple step of faith. Get out of the boat and join Him. Just get out of the boat of safety and security, and join Him in what He's doing.

Peter's faith grew in an incredible amount that day because he experienced the incredible supernatural power of God. The other disciples who sat in the boat could only watch. They would have to learn that lesson another day. They missed that particular opportunity to see their ability to walk and to climb out of the boat in a supernatural way.

What is it that God is asking you to do, with who He's made you to be, so that you can make an

incredible kingdom impact as you join Him in what He's doing in this world?

Please bow your heads with me:

*Father, I thank you for so many people in this body who model the faith of Peter, who have gotten out of the boat and are walking in places that maybe are even a little scary. But they are also seeing You doing amazing things. I pray that every single one of us in this room would offer You today and everyday all that we are and by faith, get out of our "comfort zone" and join You where You call us to go, that Your name and Your fame might go to the very ends of the earth. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE  
Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1987, 1988,  
The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission  
Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512  
Copyright 2008 – Mark Kremer. All rights reserved.