

In honor of Bishop Sullivan, who celebrates his retirement this afternoon at the cathedral, I'd like to tell one of his favorite stories. A not-too-popular pastor once took his associate on a fishing trip. Out on the lake, the pastor said, "If my faith were really strong, I could walk on the water just like St. Peter." Seizing the opportunity to impress the younger priest, he began to step out of the boat. The associate just stared in disbelief while the pastor let go of the boat and plunged, fully clothed, to the bottom of the lake. Leaping to the side, the associate leaned over and hauled the sputtering pastor back on board. The pastor, completely embarrassed, said, "Promise me you won't tell anybody how weak my faith is." The associate said, "All right, as long as you promise not to tell anybody I'm the one who pulled you back into the boat."

Today's gospel story stands out as a most remarkable act of faith. Peter seems so consumed by the presence of Christ, that he believes he can do anything. He's in the zone. He leaps out of the boat onto the water in an unreasonable act of belief. It probably even surprised Jesus.

Some people get the weirdest ideas. And the weirder the idea the more excited they get. If you're married to somebody like that, or in business with them, you can really be in for a ride. Remember when the Coca-cola company changed the recipe for new coke? They said, "This is gonna be great!" They leapt out of the boat to walk on the water, and sank in a sea of criticism. Now they market two cokes instead of one.

We all get crazy ideas at one time or another in life. Sometimes you fall in love with someone and people tell you that's crazy. You jump out of the boat anyway and start walking on the water. Sometimes you sink, along with your heart. And you say, "I'll never do that again. I'll be real careful before I ever fall in love again." We sink a lot in life until we find the formulas that let us float.

Peter's name means Rock, you know. It's hard to get a rock to float. Yet it was this man, this failure, that Jesus chose to bind and loose the sins of the church. Perhaps after Peter failed he gained compassion for the failures of others.

It's OK to get a weird idea; it's OK to fail at it, especially if we get fished up out of the water a lot wiser than when we fell in.