

That first winter I survived up here, there were countless folks sitting on Lake Moraine staring at holes in the ice. Turns out they were ice fishing. Now, I'm told fish caught in cold water are particularly sweet. I've never had ice fishing fish. I've never even gone ice fishing! Fishing to me involves muddy banks, hot sun, and a steady risk that whatever lands on the other end of your line is venomous. Ice fishing is as foreign to me as a Speedie sandwich. I'm told that ice fishing is much like not-ice fishing, where the goal's only sorta catching fish. There's typically a cooler full up with beverages of an adult sort. Sometimes there're tents and rugs and tvs and even space heaters! Intellectually speaking, I understand that the ice is so thick it's not a danger. I understand that cold air plus cold water plus already frozen ice makes for a safe spot for a space heater. I understand that. It still makes me nervous. Anyway, I'm told ice fishing is less about catching fish and more about hanging out, sipping something tasty, and generally getting away from it all. Like camping on top of a melting time bomb.

If you can't tell, I'm a little bit of a scaredy cat when it comes to walking on ice. Even if there's snowmobiles and pickup trucks out there, I just...I can't. When it comes to massive frozen bodies of water, I'm well aware of my southern bones. I know, it's no good thinking about wintery things in the middle of our annual cold weather respite. Ya know, I just saw a tree with orange leaves. It's shameful. Far too early. Nature should know better. Yesterday, I even heard geese making their way down south! Nanny berries'll come in soon, and with 'em Fr. Steve'll complain about how cold his slippers get. But I'm jumping ahead, thank God. I still love winter, but it is a whole thing. And while that lake will freeze over in a few months, it's not frozen yet. And you know what? While I do see oodles of fisherfolk lining the causeway or floating in dinghies, ya know what I don't see? I don't see a single one of 'em out there fishing in a tent on the middle of the lake. Not a single one walks to their prized spot, plops down, drills a hole, and lowers their line in the middle of summer. 'Cause you can't walk on wet water. You can walk on frozen water, and no one -- well, no one from around here -- no one bats an eye.

All that to say, the miracle isn't just walking on water. Every one of us walks on water every winter. Snow and ice are water, solid water but water nonetheless. No surprise there. No miracle there. (Well, maybe it *is* a miracle that I don't slip every time I step outside.) The real miracle is that the water is liquid. Jesus walks on water and all are amazed 'cause you're not supposed to be able to do that. And then Peter does, too, at least for a bit. And everyone cheers, and then they move on. And I'm actually curious about that last part. Yes, there's a miracle. Wet water ain't walkable but Jesus does the impossible, Peter follows suit, "Truly you are the son of God," yadda yadda yadda. But what happens next? After the physical laws of the universe break in front of their very eyes, they go on to the next town like nothing happened. The unsatisfied deep roils behind them just as stunned by the scene as the disciples, and the world spins on. I guess I'm taken by how mundane the scene is while a miracle unfolds. The other disciples watch, and they're overtaken by wonder, briefly. And then they go on with their discipling duties.

It makes me wonder: are they that quick to lose interest? Maybe they've seen so many miracles by now that it's kinda like "toss it on the pile with all the rest?" If they're quick to lose interest, I get it. My brain darts from wonder to joy to sadness and back again like a minnow at a potato chip. And if Jesus' miracles are blasé to them, then this is just another day. Frightened by something, Jesus comes along and fixes it for 'em, and Peter makes a fool out of his faithful self. Just another day. But my brain keeps going back to those ice fishers. I remember getting really excited to tell one of y'all I'd seen them. I'd heard of ice fishing but never witnessed it, and now I could confirm it's really real! And whoever I told was unimpressed. Like, "uh yeah, they do it every

year.” I wonder how many of disciples, after Peter and Jesus got in the boat, after they’d said their praise and floated on, once they finally stepped onto shore, I wonder how many of them tried to catch someone’s eye. “Did you see that? For that matter, did I see that?” Of course, no one not in the boat saw, and those that didn’t see would be real tough to convince. That normal-looking guy right over there walked on water, *liquid* water. Sure, buddy, have another. I guess it all makes me wonder when miracles happen, what happens next? I’ve been around enough to see some mighty strange happenings. I know some of y’all have, too. Do I call them miracles? Well, truth is, it depends on the crowd. Some digest miracles easier than others while some want nothing to do with that superstitious nonsense.

If I’m honest, I wish I could be Peter, but I can’t even trust myself not to sink on a frozen lake. I’d love to be a disciple watching, but I’m not sure I’d’ve been in the boat in the first place. If I’m honest, I’m probably on the dock in the next town, and my knee-jerk would be to discount the story, blame mass-hallucination, or search for a reasonable explanation. If I’m honest, I kinda distrust miracles. And I know, that’s not great. I want to come off as a reasonable person, and it’s real tough to pull that off while believing unreasonable things. But, as Paschal said, “the heart has reason for which reason knows nothing.” The love of God, the faith we carry, it’s not the most reasonable thing. And it’s nigh impossible to explain in reasoned terms. But reason isn’t the be-all, end-all. Reason’s a piece of existence, but it doesn’t get the only claim. And for me it’s so easy to forget that. Y’all know this by now: if I could make my faith into a solely reason-based thing, I would, and a whole lot’d be easier, but I suspect a lot more’d be rather dull. There’s a joy to the wonder of our faith. When that lake freezes over, we’re a mighty long way from Galilee, but there’s a wonder in watching confident steps on thick ice. There’s joy in those little daily details. It’s a trick to train yourself to notice them. And it’s even trickier to convey that wonder to someone else. So many of us are see-it-to-believe-it types. I am.

But think about that for a second. We’re inside a church. You are. I am. We’re the ones filling up pews, and still many of us have a hard time believing these things. How much harder must it be for folks on the shore? We’ve got to figure out ways to communicate what we’re about, knowing all along that some folks just aren’t gonna get it. Or might want a little proof. Or a little more reason. Or a little less magic to their realism. And some of that we can help with. But some we just can’t. Proof isn’t something religions have in abundance. We have faith, but we don’t have undeniable proof. We do have water and story and wonder and God.

When it comes to telling that story, it’s gotta come back, over and over, to the places *you* find wonder. Use language you’re comfortable with, call ‘em what you want, but tell people. Much as I love getting out in the community, much as I love trying to get folks here on Sundays, I can’t do it on my own. And neither can you. It takes a boatload. You’ve heard that line, “it takes a village to raise a child,” well, it takes a village to raise a church, too. Every single one of us helping out, every single one of us telling the story, every single one of us trying our hand, or foot, at stepping out of the boat. I can’t promise the waves’ll be solid as ice, but I can promise you’ll get a story out of it. Some might roll their eyes, but some’ll catch the wonder, feel the waves of their souls calmed, maybe even find their way from the shore to our boat, our sanctuary in their storm.

You know, maybe it’s a pitfall of the job, but I’ve been invited to other churches more than I’ve been invited ice fishing. Don’t get me wrong, I like other churches. And the prospect of going ice fishing still makes me nervous. So if I’m gonna go, there’s a few things I’m gonna need: a good coat, hat, scarf, ya know - the works; one of those space heaters; a cooler; and more than anything, a boatload of wonder. Mostly, I’m gonna need the same things I find here: wonder, joy, and a sanctuary in the storm.