

-Whenever you are on a college campus in the spring, summer, or fall, you will most likely see these crazy “rope things” tied between two trees and someone walking across it. These are called “slack-lines” and they just started to become really popular when I was going to college 10 years ago. I remember the first time I tried it....it wasn't pretty... You see the rope is usually about 3.5 ft off the ground and you have to get one foot on the rope and then jump up and catch your balance. I remember the first time I jumped onto a slack line I jumped with such gusto and that I almost went face first into a branch of the tree that the line was tied to. My friend who was showing me the technique of getting on and staying on this thing was very patient. “The secret trick of slacklining”, they said to me (don't tell anyone I told you now OK?) is that you pick an object to focus on (a branch, rock, a piece of bark, a window, etc.) and when you jump you don't take your eyes off of it.” This object becomes your horizon and focusing on it allows the slackliner to keep their balance. If any of you have seen these highwire tightrope walkers at a circus or something, they use a similar technique.

-Sure enough, now I have to be honest, it still took a few tries, but it did work. Amazingly well, actually, once you get it. I was able to cover most of the rope before falling off.

-Last week with this gospel story I was thinking about Peter's courageous and bold move of getting out of the boat despite fear and going to Jesus. This week, as I have been meditating on this story, I have found myself drawn to the final half where Peter is on the water and starts to sink (actually the Greek indicates a more desperate “drowning” of Peter, not just sinking) and Jesus reaching out his hand to catch him and saying: “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”

- I find this question a little perplexing: you of little faith, why do you doubt? Doubt what? Doubt God? Did Peter doubt himself? Is this an angry, chastising type of question from Jesus or is it a more reflective one?

-“Doubt” is such a strong word, I think, in our time and place. How many times have you said to someone “why did you doubt?” Probably not very often. That's because doubting is either seen as weakness or resistance. As an example of weakness: one doubting the existence of God for many churches is a non-starter for relationship. Can't they see and accept God in their life? They must be weak to not even acknowledge God, so maybe they deserve to go to hell. A lot of people, including Christians, unfortunately I believe have this mindset of weakness.

-Or as an example of resistance: Climate Change is a deliberate attempt to infringe on my freedoms, so I will doubt the credibility of any scientist putting out studies that show our earth is warming. I will resist and doubt any information that goes against my worldview.

- Weakness or resistance. Either way, doubt is a shocking word which I think makes this question from Jesus so shocking to Peter.

-But in Jesus' time, doubt didn't simply mean you are weak or trying to resist. The very breakdown of the Greek word itself might lend a clue to how Jesus may have meant it: *Distadzo*. *Dis* meaning literally "double" or "two". *Tadzo* coming from *stasis* which means "to stand, or stance". In other words, the word put together literally means: "two stances" or "two ways of standing". An ancient phrase stemming from this word that you might have heard of is: "having a foot in both (or two) camps".

-In other words, Jesus understood *distadzo* as a "wavering, distracted" type of state and less as a litmus test or sign of being a rebel.

-Peter didn't just go out on the water and start to drown because he was weak or said to himself: "You know, I doubt that this Jesus guy really is who he says he is." That's silly. But I betcha he was looking all over the place, feeling the wind and waves beat on him, look back at the boat, feel the rain and maybe not even look at.....Jesus. Maybe Jesus' question is just simply: "why did you take your eyes off of me?"

-When do you have two feet in two camps? When have you been distracted and taken your eye off the horizon point? When has this caused you to fall off the slackline? I know it has happened to all of us. Whether it be tripping on a rock you didn't notice on the trail or hitting your head on something you didn't see, or failing to notice someone's sickness or emotional state, distractedness happens to all of us. Spiritually we can be distracted too, wouldn't you agree?

-I always tell people that beginning in college, I was a borderline agnostic in my own faith. I loved church music and liturgy, but I really felt I had fallen off the spiritual slackline. It wasn't really until I was able to have deeper discussions with religion professors and the St. Olaf campus pastor, have experiences like volunteering and living in London England, which really became a new spiritual horizon line for me to focus on. In many ways I was able to focus again on Christ, but maybe in a new way that gave me more balance.

-Maybe you have had or are going through a similar experience of being distracted and doubting. That's OK! Because here is the reassuring thing: what did Jesus do despite Peter not being able to focus and start to sink? He caught him. That's the goodnews, I believe, of this story is that Jesus will no matter who you are or how distracted you have becomes, Jesus will be there to catch you. God will be with you as you get back on the slackline. Maybe your horizon marker won't be what it used to be, or maybe what you thought was solid wasn't really after all. Distraction and doubt will continue to happen. It's a part of life. But, thank God Jesus will continue to be there, catching up, and being our markers to focus on in every step we take. Amen.