

## **CDT Piece For Saturday, September 1**

### **Christopher Uhl**

#### **Walking on Water**

I have been wondering lately if it might be possible to literally “walk on water.” This feat, according to the Bible, was accomplished by Jesus. So far as I know, no one else has done it. If we accept this Biblical claim, then, how the heck did Jesus do it? Was it because he had supernatural powers that we, mere mortals, cannot access or might it actually be possible for a human being, such as you or me, to exercise “mind over matter” to this extent. It’s an open question, no?

I explore this question with the students I teach by giving them the assignment to “Walk on Water.” When they receive the assignment, their first response is invariably “That’s impossible.” That’s my point: I am asking my students to identify something that they think is impossible and then, by golly, to go out and do it. I want them to commit some miracles. As a prompt, to get started, I tell them to complete the following open-ended sentences:

-If only I had the guts, I would\_\_\_\_\_

-If I didn’t care what people thought, I would\_\_\_\_\_

-If I weren’t worried about the future, I would\_\_\_\_\_

Their responses to these questions point them toward how they could “walk on water,” provided they can muster the courage.

I reserve the final class meeting of the semester as a time for my students to tell each other their “walking on water” stories. And what do they say?

Stephanie begins saying that she had never told her Mom and Dad that she loves them nor did she recall, ever hearing these words spoken by them. Her plan was to speak “I love you” to her parents during a planned weekend visit. She described how she fretted and agonized during their first meal together on Friday night. The words, “I love you” trapped in her throat. On Saturday, she waited for the “right” moment; it never came. Then, suddenly, it was Sunday afternoon and her mother and father were getting into their car to drive home. It was then that Stephanie realized that there is no “right moment,” only “this” moment—the present—for her to do what heretofore had seemed impossible to do. And so, first to her mother and then to her father she declared “I love you.” Hearing her words they were cracked open and these parents hugged, really hugged their daughter.

Stephanie’s story was a coming out—a saying ‘yes’ to love and the possibilities—the miracles—that unfold when we have the courage to do the seemingly impossible.

After Stephanie, others stepped forward with their stories: Sally described ending a relationship with a boyfriend who was abusive; Max told about reaching out to a relative who had been ostracized from the family; Sarah, whose Israeli cousin was killed in the Middle East, described how she had befriended an Arab student; Josh, who was freaked out by the sight of

blood, walked on water by volunteering to donate blood; Sam declared to his parents—both doctors—that he was switching majors from medicine to music. All examples of little, yet significant, miracles.

I was so inspired by my students that I decided to “walk on water.” After much deliberation I resolved that I would sing Happy Birthday to my Mom on her ninetieth birthday. On the surface, this might not sound like a big deal but for me it was monumental and utterly impossible. You see in my family, growing up, I was labeled “Johnny-One-Note.” As a result, I grew up convinced that I couldn’t sing. That is until my neighbor, Heidi, a music teacher, pointed out that virtually everyone has the capacity to sing. Hearing this, I was intrigued by the prospect that I might actually be able to sing after all. So it was that I enlisted my dear friend Dana to give me some voice coaching. Soon, I was actually beginning to nail some of the “Happy Birthday” notes.

When the night of my Mom’s birthday celebration arrived, I was filled with trepidation and excitement. My entire extended family was in attendance. As the evening was winding down, I, like Stephanie above, realized that there is no *right* moment, only *this* moment, and so I stood and toasted my Mom. Then, I crossed the room and told her that I was going to sing Happy Birthday to her. She laughed and, almost as if on cue, said, “Impossible, Johnny-One-Note is going to sing!” I smiled in return and said, “Yes, in our family’s Catholic tradition this is like “walking on water.” The, I took her hand in mine and holding her teary gaze in my teary gaze, I sang—really SANG!—Happy Birthday to her.