

Written Copy: Matthew 14:26-33 “Jesus’ Saving Hand”

Proper 14 – 10th Sunday @ Pentecost

Sunday, August 9th, 2020

Text: Matthew 14:26-33

²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear. ²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." ²⁸ And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ²⁹ He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." ³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³² And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³ And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Exegetical Statement

Directly following the miraculous feeding of the 5,000 plus, with the people clamoring to make Jesus their king, He corrals and urges the disciples to climb into the boat and begin heading for the other side. The idea is that He will catch up with them later. Perhaps they are thinking on another boat. It is now evening, and Jesus dismisses the people and heads up on the mountain to pray while the disciples head out onto the Sea of Galilee. During the 4th watch of the night (between 3:00 am and 6:00 am) we find the disciples about 3-4 miles out into the middle of the Sea; perhaps 1/3 to under 1/2 of the way across. They have been making headway, but it has been slow and arduous. The wind is blowing against them and the waves are battering the boat in a torturous manner. They may not be scared of drowning, but they are tired-physically and mentally. Then they see someone coming walking across the top of the water, doing what no human being could ever do. It must be a ghost! So these tired and stressed disciples cried out in fear. But Jesus calls out the comforting words: It is I-not a ghost. Be courageous and stop being afraid. Peter responds by saying "Lord: if it is You command me to come to You" Jesus responds with the command "Come". And just as with His command to be courageous and stop being afraid, this command has performative power. Peter is given the power to walk on the water to Jesus who has come alongside the boat. But he turns his attention from his Master before him to the wind blowing against him. His faith falters and he begins to sink. Peter cries out to his Master, "Lord: save me!" And Jesus shows His great love, compassion, and mercy for all those who doubt in Him by reaching down and seizing Peter and pulling him back up. Jesus, remarking to make a point, but not to demean Peter speaks to him saying, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they both climb back into the boat the wind dies down. The disciples voice the confession, "Truly you are the Son of God!" and they worship Him.

Focus Statement:

Jesus doesn't wait for us to be strong again in our faith. He comes to us as we are, with faith faltering, and even faith nonexistent. He reaches down into our lives and saves us through the means of grace, the Gospel Message, which is right here in our ears and before our eyes. It is the strength we need to be saved from eternal death and be given life with Him now and eternal life to come.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

Even though we confess our faith in the mighty power of God the Creator and sustainer, when trouble hits close to home we falter in our faith. We may even revert to things we used to trust in before Jesus.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Cry out to Jesus just as Peter did when our faith is faltering. Know that we don't have to find Him, He comes to us and is always with us, even when He seems to be distant. He reaches into our lives and holds us tightly. He carries us through the problems of this world until eternal life.

Subject Sentence: Jesus reaches down to save through Means of Grace

Peter Introduces Himself

(Peter walks out of the Sacristy and looks around, smiling, as if he recognizes where he is at)

Well, well, well; it's certainly good to be back among you again! It's Lamb of God; right? Why are your faces all covered up? Do you all have extremely bad breath? Hasn't the Lord given you the gift of teeth brushing yet? I'm glad your Pastor graciously welcomed me back to speak with you. In case you forgot my name is Simon. But you may know me better as the Apostle Peter. I understand you just read my friend and fellow Apostle, Levi's (you call him Matthew); his account of Jesus the Christ walking on the water. And of course, included in that account is an example of me showing myself to be "He of Little Faith!" Now I asked Levi not to include that part of the tale in His account, but he told me that someone who is far greater than both of us insisted he include it. That "far Greater One" being the Spirit of Christ Himself. I once tried to argue with that "Greater One" about what was the best time to go fishing and found myself humbled and on my knees. So, I was not about to challenge His word again.

So, while part of me would like for you to ignore the whole second half of this account, another part of me is glad to be able to come here and share with you my ponderings and meditations concerning this event. Not to defend myself against the charge of being "He of Little Faith", but to share with you what I learned from it, and to challenge you to ponder and meditate on the same. I know that each and every one of you is, at times, not that different from me, each one of you is, at times "He/She of Little Faith".

Peter Narrates the Miracle

My story begins right after another miraculous event: when Jesus fed over 5,000 people using only 5 loaves of bread and two fish, and made us, His Disciples, to have a part in it. That in itself was a mind-blowing experience. My good friend the Apostle John recalled in his account what the reaction of that crowd was to this miracle. They wanted to crown Jesus as their king. They wanted to force Him be their king. I remember beginning to think, "Well, heck yeah! Isn't that what the Messiah comes to do? Rule over the newly restored kingdom of Israel? But I didn't get very far with this thought as Jesus was herding us twelve together and compelling us to get into the boat and begin heading toward the other side of the lake. The thought was that He would catch up with us later, like in another boat or something. So we headed out while he turned back to dismiss the crowds. It was evening time and the sun was setting. Normally we would cross the Sea of Galilee in the daytime, but we were used to being out on the Sea at night to fish, so it wasn't that big of a deal.

As we got out into the sea the wind came up, blowing against us. And the waves came up and began banging against the boat violently. Now as an expert fisherman I've been in storms out on the Sea before. This one was bad, but not so bad that I thought we were going to capsize and drown. But bad enough that we were struggling to make headway. It was so difficult that, by about 4:00 AM we were somewhere between 1/3 and 1/2 of the way across, when we should've been all the way to the other side by then. We were straining at the oars, and yet it was all we could do to hold our position, let alone make any headway. We weren't even thinking about Jesus at this point. We later found out that He had stayed behind and went up on the mountain to pray. He was doing that kind of thing all the time.

We were tired and weary. We were getting physically and emotionally exhausted. It was in this frame of mine we saw someone walking toward us on the water. Did you hear what I said? Someone walking on the water! What manner of creature can do such a thing, except a phantom, a spirit, a ghost! We weren't scared of the wind and the wave, but we were frightened at this apparition that was heading right towards us. So we cried out in fear. That's when Jesus called out to us: "**Have courage, take heart! It is I! Stop being afraid!**" I thought to myself, "That's Jesus out there! That's the Master!" Now I don't completely understand it, but when Jesus gives voice to a command, like He just did with us, His Words have the power to make what He commands the reality in us. The fear began to drop away. Courage replaced it. Courage and amazement. This is the Master. And He's doing what no one else could ever do!

Now for my part, I did believe, and yet doubt was still there under the surface. So I yelled to Jesus, "Lord, if it is really you, then command me to come to you on the water." And the Master replied, "**Come**". I don't know how I had the courage to step out of the boat and onto the water except that Jesus provided me the strength of faith to do so. I stepped out, and miracle of miracles, I was doing it! I, Peter, was walking on the water! That's the power Jesus' words have. I'd like to tell you that Jesus and I walked together all the way to the other side, but that would be a lie. In truth I didn't actually take too many steps. Jesus was close alongside the boat by then.

Even though I was doing what no man could possibly do on his own, and even though it was evident that it was Jesus giving me the power and ability to do this, my faith began to falter. I took my eyes off Jesus and focused instead on the wind that was blowing hard against me. I began to doubt. I began to sink. As I was sinking down and going under, I cried out to Jesus, "Lord: save me!" And while I didn't deserve it because of my sinful doubting, He still did it anyway. He reached down with His strong arm and pulled me up, saving me from drowning, and stood me beside him on the water. Then what I deserved was a dressing down from Him. But with the look of love and compassion on His face, and with a gentle voice, He said the words I would ponder for a long while after; "**Oh You of Little Faith, why did you doubt?**"

With Him holding on to me, we climbed back up into the boat. And when we did the wind and the waves ceased their blowing and battering. And together as one we Disciples fell to our knees and gave voice to this confession: “Truly, You are the Son of God” And there in that boat we worshiped Him.

What Peter Took Home and What We Should Too

It is quite a story. It beats all other stories that one might tell around a campfire late at night. And this story is true. It happened just as I told it, and just as Levi and John told it. And I come here today to share it with you not to entertain you. I want it to change your hearts, minds, and life just as it did for me. Just as Jesus did for me. Jesus showed Himself and declared Himself through word and action to be the same God that created the whole universe. The God that not only created it all but through His might and power controls and sustains it. He is the God who spoke to Job and proved to him that He alone knows just how the world took shape, how the sea was moved back, and the land appeared. He alone knows how high the sky stretches out into infinity and how deep the deepest ocean is.

He is the one whom David in the Psalm you recited at the beginning of your worship service called his rock, his fortress, and his deliverer. He is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer. He is the mighty Son of God who came down and became a man just like me. When we were struggling on the sea, we didn't call out to Him, but He came to us. He came to us and with a word gave us strength and courage that replaced our fear. His word gave me the power and ability to walk on water. And how did I respond? I doubted. And yet He saved me. That's because this Jesus who is God Almighty is also the God of love, compassion, forgiveness and grace. He comes to save and rescue those who don't deserve it. He did so for me even after I denied Him three times. He does the same for you too.

Now, I'm not saying you can see His mighty outstretched arm reaching down from above and taking hold of you. You can't see that with these eyes. But He is reaching down to you through His Gospel Message; through the message of what He has done for all men when he went to the cross. He went and gave up His life to save you and me from an eternity apart from Him. He saved you from a fate worse than drowning. He saved you from an eternity of experiencing the pain and suffering of death everyday forever, without it ever actually ending. And His words have the power to make what He says the reality in Your life.

He has declared in His Word that you are no longer a sinner whose doubting makes you unworthy of a life with Him. He declares you to be right with Him, and with the Father. This is not a righteousness that you have earned. By yourself you could never do enough to be in right standing with the Holy God. But Jesus declares that you are and makes it your reality by giving you the standing He earned with His perfect life. It comes from Him as His free gift, as He reached down into your life with His strong yet gentle hand in Baptism. The hand that poured the water three times over your head becomes His means of reaching out to you. And that water is infused with His Holy Spirit who marks you as one saved from eternal death and given eternal life. In that moment, He declared as the absolute truth that you are now in right standing with Him. You are His precious child. And through His Gospel Message He not only reminds you of that reality but keeps you living in that reality. Just as Jesus lovingly pointed out to me that there was no reason for my doubting, He does so with you through His gentle yet powerful word. Yet He not only points out your faithlessness, He forgives you for it. And He encourages and enlivens your faith to make it stronger than ever.

Stop and consider; what are some of the things going on in your life right now that are making you doubt? What are things that make you wonder where Jesus is and why He has not come to help you? Perhaps its worry over some disease or illness. Perhaps its loneliness and living apart from friends and loved ones. Perhaps its grief over the death of a loved one. Perhaps its things or situations in your life you'd like to change but you are unable to; things you wish would be different, yet never are. You are expecting Jesus to come make it all of it better. You are expecting Him to say the word so that you can walk on water all by yourself. Remember that even when I was doing that, I wasn't doing it alone. He was the one who gave me the power. And it ended up with me sinking. But He allowed that to happen so He would come and pull me up. So I would see Him come and save me. So you would see Him save me.

But there came a day when that hand didn't pull me up and save me from my suffering. It was the day I was arrested by the Romans, tried of crimes against the Emperor because I preached Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The day that ended with my execution. His hand did not prevent that. But His hand was there with me throughout that whole ordeal. His hand keeping me in faith. And it was His loving hand that when my life expired in this world, welcomed me home. His hand is here right now with you through whatever you are going through. Sometimes you can see it as it takes the form of the loving and comforting hand of your fellow Christian sharing faith and fellowship with you. It is always found in the comforting words of Christ that are shared with you. And it is there with the power of the Holy Spirit who will never leave or forsake you. And He will be there with you, His hand of faith steady on your mind and your heart, to guide you through all the storms in this life. So that on the Last Day, that loving hand and those strong arms will welcome you into the eternal life He died and rose again to bring to you and to me.

Conclusion: Peter Says Goodbye

That's some of what I took from my reflections on this miraculous event. I pray that same Spirit that was with me helps you by giving you the strength and comfort of faith. I pray He moves you to meditate on how that strong hand of Christ is working even now in your life. That hand that is the Spirit's presence and strength in you as you go forward and deal with all that the future will bring. I'm not sure what these masks are really all about. I have a feeling that its more than bad oral hygiene. I pray that whatever fear is associated with it is countered by Jesus' command to you through His Word: "**Have courage my dear children! Stop being afraid.**"

Your Pastor told me that Christians in your day expect the message to last 15 minutes. I believe I've probably exceeded that. He said it's because you expect the worship service to be wrapped up in an hour's time. Thank God you weren't around in the days of my good friend the Apostle Paul. Once when he preached, it lasted so long that a man fell asleep and fell out the window! I leave you with the blessings of faith in Christ. Remember that He is the Creator God who comes to save all men: those whose faith is floundering as well as those who have no faith at all. He comes and through His mighty word He creates and sustains faith. He did so in my life. I pray He does so in your life too. Until the next time, may His peace be with you always. Shalom!

(Peter exists through the Sacristy doors)