

The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14)
St. Matthew 14:22-33

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Jesus made the disciples get into a boat to go to the other side of the lake while He would go on the mountain by Himself to pray. As it happened, the wind and waves came upon the boat, a long way off from shore, and the disciples were terrified. Now, remember, almost half of these men were seasoned sailors...and they were afraid; even they were afraid.

What is it about a little storm on the sea that would cause even hardened sailors to be afraid. They were over the deep waters. Deep waters represented death and the grave; represented Sheol, that deep, dark, mysterious underworld that swallowed up the dead. Deep waters also housed the sea monsters, like Leviathan, referenced not only in Job, but the Psalmist also says the deep is Leviathan's playground (cf. Psalm 104:26), who would gobble you up in a single gulp.

Picture, also, the beginning. Genesis 1:1-2:

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep.

And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

I don't know how best to attempt a description of the formless void and deep waters, but I imagine a storm-tossed sea elicits some image of the first day of the Cosmos' existence.

That's where the disciples were that early morning: in the middle of a storm-tossed sea, barely floating over Sheol, the playground of mighty Leviathan. Even the hardened sailors would be afraid of that.

Onto that, the Son of Man steps foot.

Now, I'm not sure any of them would have expected Jesus to go for a stroll on a storm-tossed body of water. He had never done it before, so they'd never seen it before. With that in mind, I think the disciples can be owed a little compassion and understanding seeing what they thought was a ghost walking toward them on the sea—that same sea I've been describing to this point—and being terrified by it all.

So, the gracious God who is taking a stroll on His creation spoke a word of comfort to His disciples on the storm-rocked boat: "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." Wait a minute, wait a minute. I know this isn't John's Gospel, as I referenced a lot last week, but let me give you a more wooden translation of what Jesus told them: "Be of good cheer, I am, do not fear." That's right! Right there in the middle of St. Matthew's Gospel, Jesus says, "Ego eimi"..."I AM."

What comfort! Jesus made Himself known to His disciples and told them not to be afraid. They didn't have to fear because He was there. And He is God, I AM. He is God, the Creator of the Cosmos and it's Redeemer, their Redeemer, your Redeemer. The deep, Sheol, the chaos, the monsters are all things under His feet. That means He has dominion over them all! (cf. Psalm 8)

Then there's Peter...oh, that Peter. Often referred to as the disciples' spokesman, as it is supposed that he said what they were thinking, I like to call him every believer's spokesman, because he says and does everything that the ordinary believer would say and do when confronted with the things Jesus said and did. "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." "If it is you..." Was this a simple request for proof?

Now, as I said, Peter is every believer's spokesman. His, "If it is you..." is echoed in every doubt you've ever had, which is itself an echo of the doubt the serpent placed in Eve's mind: "Did God really

say...?" Do the words of the pastor really forgive my sins in your stead and by your command? Do you really save and give faith in the waters of Holy Baptism? Is that really you, your body and blood, in, with, and under the bread and wine? Or how about something more mundane: am I really not supposed to worry or fear about what tomorrow will bring, what the results of the medical test will be, what's going to be on the quiz or exam in class, how my boss will evaluate me tomorrow, etc., etc., etc.? Jesus, are you really with me always...if it is you?

How long-suffering and compassionate Jesus is. He answered Peter, "Come," inviting, no commanding, him to join Him out on the water, to put all of that mess and chaos under his own two feet. At Jesus' word, Peter stepped out of the boat and joined his God-in-the-flesh for a stroll out on the deep water. How was Peter able to do that? By the power of God's Word, water is not just mere water, but a lavish washing away of sins. By the power of God's Word, He gives authority to your pastor and fellow Christians to forgive your sins in the name of Jesus. By the power of God's Word, Jesus gives His body to eat with bread and His blood to drink with wine. By the power of God's Word, "Come," Peter walked on the water, putting all of that chaos and the deep in subjugation under his feet. You might want to say that by the Word of God, Peter is more than a conqueror of the rest of the Cosmos (cf. Romans 8:37), but recall that God gave dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the livestock and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, commanding him to subdue the earth. (cf. Genesis 1:26, 28)

Be warned, though. Jesus did not invite you to walk on the waters. Even if you like swimming, don't take a boat out to what may be left of the Reuter-Hess or Cherry Creek reservoirs and step out of the boat. That doesn't mean that God isn't long-suffering and compassionate with you, though. In your doubts, Jesus does invite you to, "Come." Come to church, come to His Word, review His promises made to you and to all in the Scriptures; remember your confession of faith and recite it again in the Creeds. Hear the Word of God, for by it He creates faith, for "[F]aith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." (Romans 10:17) So, while Jesus doesn't invite you to walk on the water, if He can command Peter to do so by His Word, He can do what He promises to do for you by the same Word: forgive your sins, give you life, bring you to salvation. Remember, it was the same Word which commanded a dead Lazarus to walk out of his grave. (cf. John 11:43)

Is there anything the Word of God cannot do? Well, when the Word of God came to a virgin in Nazareth to announce that she would bear the Savior of the world, and she asked that question, the angel gave her a very pointed response: "For nothing will be impossible with God." (Luke 1:37) With a word, God created everything. With a word, God healed the sick, cast out demons, raised the dead. Nothing is impossible to the Word of God.

All the same, fear and doubts always afflict the sinful flesh, even and especially of sinner-saints, such as yourselves. Peter, commanded to take a step out of the boat and onto the water, took His eyes off Jesus and began to sink. The mire and muck of the devil, the world, and your sinful flesh are always at work to make you take your eyes off of Jesus so that you, too, will sink into them. They will drag you down. They will use those mundane things, and things like them, to cause you to doubt: cares and concerns about tomorrow, the medical test, the quizzes and tests, the performance evaluation, etc., etc., etc. Like Peter, you start looking at those whitecaps, so to speak, and begin to sink. "Lord, save me."

Faith cries out in the midst of doubt. And Jesus, like He did with Peter, reaches down and rescues you. He pulls you out of the muck and mire with His nail-pierced hand and restores you to Himself. He uses His Word to do so, by making you recall your Baptism, having the words of Holy Absolution spoken to you, and inviting you to eat and drink His body and blood as bread and wine. And He reminds you that He is with you always; He will never leave you nor forsake you. (cf. Hebrews 13:5) So, you can also answer, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" (Hebrews 13:6)

"I will not fear." Those were the first words out of Jesus' mouth from the lake to the disciples in the boat. "Be of good cheer, I AM, do not fear." You are disciples of Jesus gathered in the boat of His Church, and He speaks the same words to you, even as the tempests of the devil, the world, and your sinful flesh rage around you and Her. All of these things are under Jesus' feet. He has placed them there under yours as well, so, in essence, in Him you are more than conquerors, too.

After Jesus and Peter climbed into the boat, the winds died down. It was calm; there was peace. Acknowledging all that Jesus had done, those in the boat worshiped Him saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

That's how the faithful respond to the work that Jesus had done. Interestingly, they are the same words spoken by the centurion and those with him at the cross of Jesus: "Truly this was the Son of God." (cf. Matthew 27:54) Dear baptized, that's a picture of you this morning. You are one who has been rescued and placed into the Holy Ark of Christendom. You receive your God who comes to you in His means—His Word and Sacraments—even as you sit beneath an icon of that same cross at which the centurion spoke. And every word you speak and sing in this place echoes theirs in one way or another: Truly, Jesus is the Son of God, who was and is and is to come, my Creator and the Creator of the Cosmos, my Savior and Redeemer, who purchased me with His own precious blood and innocent suffering and death, the Lord who has everything under His feet.

All admiration is of Him. All confession is of Him. Truly, He is the Son of God who holds on to you with those nail-pierced hands, by which He has won and given to you the forgiveness of all of your sins.

In the name of the + Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.