

## Jesus Walking on Water

Second in a Series of Three sermons, “Jesus the Miracle Worker”

August 12 and 13, 2023

11th Saturday and Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 14:22-33

### *Jesus Walks on the Water*

*<sup>22</sup>Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. <sup>23</sup>And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat by this time was a long way<sup>2</sup> from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. <sup>25</sup>And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. <sup>26</sup>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. <sup>27</sup>But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, <sup>28</sup>“Take heart; it is I. <sup>29</sup>Do not be afraid.”*

*<sup>28</sup>And Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” <sup>29</sup>He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. <sup>30</sup>But when he saw the wind,<sup>3</sup> he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, <sup>31</sup>“Lord, save me.” <sup>32</sup>Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, <sup>33</sup>“O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” <sup>34</sup>And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. <sup>35</sup>And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, <sup>36</sup>“Truly you are the Son of God.”*

Dear Friends in Christ

I’m told that a certain Indian tribe had a custom that before their boys could be initiated into his full rights as a man, he would need to kill at least one bear. One such boy, at age 12, was absolutely terrified of this task. Nevertheless, he dutifully took his bow and arrow and set out to find a bear. As luck would have it, he hadn’t gone far when a big black bear lumbered across his path. There he was, just him and the bear, or so he thought. In fact, his father was standing nearby, hiding behind a bush. In fact, this boy had a powerful helper at his side, even though he didn’t realize it.

A similar story was told years ago about an elderly midwestern couple that was living in absolute poverty. Their sewage system was unsafe, their electricity had been turned off, they were in dire need of basic dental and medical care. Officials who investigated the incident discovered that the conditions under which they were living were unnecessary. In fact, they were eligible for generous Social Security and Medicare benefits which would have covered their basic needs and more.

In the first story, the dad standing nearby was the perfect solution to the boy's main problem - he was afraid. In the second story, an easily accessible government program was the simple solution to this couple's financial crisis. In today's Gospel, Jesus walking on the water in miraculous fashion is the amazing solution to His disciples struggling to make it through a storm that was testing both their patience and their faith.

Last week, we began a series of three sermons under the theme, Jesus, the Miracle Worker. We listed four purposes of our Lord's miracles as follows: 1) to relieve human need, 2) to signal that the kingdom of God was present, 3) to strengthen our faith, and 4) to serve as a judgment against unbelief.

Two lessons we learned from last Sunday's miracle of Jesus multiplying a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish into a feast that satisfied thousands - 1) to be grateful for our Lord's compassion and 2) to be amazed at His Divine power. Next weekend, we will explore lessons to be learned from Jesus healing a demon possessed daughter of a Canaanite woman. Today, we explore three of the difficult choices the early disciples had to make as they tried to make it through a particular storm that Jesus chose for them to face.

- *Rowing against the wind vs. giving up*
- *Getting out of the boat vs. staying safe*
- *Fixing our eyes on Jesus or sinking*

***Choice #1 for the disciples was to keep on rowing or give up.***

The context of this story is that the multitudes who had witnessed the miracle feeding of the 5000 men plus women and children were so enamored with Jesus that they wanted to kidnap him. You heard me correctly. They wanted to carry Him into Jerusalem as King at the time of the Passover which was close at hand.

John records that Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take him by force and make him king and therefore withdrew again by himself. When evening came, He compelled them to get into the boat and go before him to the other side. Mark and John identify the other side as towards Bethsaida and Capernaum.

When the disciples started out, the weather was fine, the sea was calm, and a pleasant voyage could be anticipated. The Sea of Galilee was known for its sudden storms, and this was one of those nights. Matthew writes that the boat was distressed, or to be literal - was put to the test by torture. John records that they were still over three miles from their destination, and their rowing was getting them nowhere.

Their choice was to keep on rowing towards their destination or give up and just drift to wherever the sea might take them. Which is the same choice all of us have faced one or more times over the years, right? We all have experienced the winds and waves and storms of life that have taken us way past exhaustion into being overwhelmed. Right?

There can be no doubt that not too far away from here are all kinds of folks rowing against the winds of drug addiction or alcohol abuse. Not too far away from them are marriages going sour, and one or more spouses wanting to call it quits. And not too far away from them are single moms absolutely exhausted from raising children and dealing with bill collectors / Not too far away are folks losing battles with ugly forms of cancer / not too far away elderly who are sinking into the wave of loneliness and dementia / folks in all the seasons of life rowing without success / one step forward and two steps backward / experienced and competent and faith filled people of God in danger of going down, throwing in the towel, giving up on their goals in life and just drifting to wherever.

Just in the nick of time, Jesus comes to them walking on the water. Doing what scientists say nobody can do. Jesus coming to them with a heart full of compassion and I'd like to think - a bit of a smile on his face. In response to the disciples being all upset and shrieking like a bunch of school girls, thinking he was a ghost, Jesus cries out 1) Take heart (literally cheer up). 2) It is I! 3) Don't be afraid. Later on, He may well have explained to them with a twinkle in his eye that the storm was his idea in the first place. He was the one who compelled them to get into the boat. He was the one who insisted on being alone for prayer. He was the one who dismissed the crowds. He was the one who knew a storm was brewing, and He was the one who knew the importance of these disciples getting tested so that they could learn what they need to know.

Today's Old Testament lesson verifies for us that it is the will of God that our faith be tested. The story of Job gives us this remarkable snapshot of Satan asking God for permission to test Job's faith. A request granted by God. Let that sink in. God giving the devil and his demons permission to test us so that we might learn all the lessons God wants us to learn, especially that of patience.

Lesson #1 today is to keep on rowing. Or to say it another way - to keep on putting one foot in front of the other in the direction that God is leading. Know that it's never time to give up on life and that in fact, help is not only on the way. It's already arrived. Christ Himself comes again and again to us, just in the nick of time. He comes to us in the preaching and teaching and remembering of His Word. He comes to us in the eating and drinking of the Sacrament. He comes to us in the words of absolution, again and again declaring, "Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid.

***Choice #2 for the disciples was to get out of the boat or stay safe inside of it.***

All of the disciples were terrified by the sight of what looked like a ghost, but only one had the bright idea to walk on water towards Jesus. All were distressed by being tossed to and fro by the winds and the waves, but only one fixed his eyes on the One who had just identified himself as the Great I AM and asked for permission to get out of the boat.

It turns out that in this case, both choices had a happy ending. Neither option proved to be wrong. Which reminds me of one of the seven habits of Steven Covey, in his book, "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People." Which is the win/win approach to the hard decisions of life. The lose lose approach would say, If I stay in the boat, I'll die. And if I get out of the boat, I'll die. The win/lose approach would say, If I stay in the boat, I'll be safe, and if I get out of the boat I'll die. Peter's approach seemed to be win/win. Either way, as long as Jesus is nearby, I'll be fine.

Paul framed being on death row as a win/win. For me to live is Christ, to die is gain. Pastor and Gina Galligar will do well to frame their big decision in terms of win/win. Whether they choose to remain at Zion in Marengo, Illinois or serve the saints here at Faith, God will be blessing and guiding and leading them. So also, this is our opportunity to fear, love, and trust in God above all things. No matter who serves as your pastor, Jesus Christ will be your cornerstone. Holy Scripture will be your foundation. The Great Commission will be your marching orders. Again and again, whether your life together is smooth sailing or troubled waters, Christ will come your way in the nick of time, again and again declaring. Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid.

***Choice #3 for Peter was to stay focused on His Master or sink.***

The facts of this story are both brutal and beautiful. They are brutal in that like these early disciples, our best efforts are often pathetic, and the best we can do some days is tread water and not lose ground. But the beautiful fact is that Christ has already come into our world / He has already run the perfect race / He has already made it through the storm and lived to tell about it / On our behalf, He was already overwhelmed and exhausted and distressed and tortured and crucified until He was dead and buried / On our behalf, He rose again on the third day, He ascended into heaven on the 40th day, He and His Father sent out His Spirit on the 50th day / On every day, He is sitting at the right hand of His Father and ruling all of heaven and earth on behalf of His people.

One more time today, Jesus would invite us to know that we are His redeemed, forgiven, and precious people. He invites us to fix our eyes on Him as the author and the finisher of our faith and not be distracted. To keep on swimming in our Baptismal waters and not be tossed to and fro by the winds and waves of false teaching. To know that we will have our bad days, our good days, and our really good days.

On our bad days, it will seem as though we are getting nowhere fast.

On our good days, we will make the sign of the cross and remember that Jesus loves us, that He is with us, that He is for us, that He is out in front of us leading, that He is alongside of us befriending, and behind us picking up the pieces.

On our really good days, we will live with such confidence in our God that others will be attracted to Him, to His Church, and to His Word.

On every one of our days, Jesus will be coming to us saying, Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid.